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Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, eds., *The Cambridge History of America and the World. Volume 2: 1820-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781108419239 (hardcover £120).]

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Let me be clear from the start: this is a wonderful collection. While reference works might often prompt a sinking feeling in the stomach, not this volume. These are not dry historiographical surveys. The fluidity of interpretation, conceptual precision, clarity of the exposition, and efficiency of the analysis is excellent. The chapters work well as entry-points to important and discrete topics but speak well to each other (and often to others across the series) and read in partnerships tease out themes across the *longue durée* and across vast geographic breadth. This is testament to the investment of the contributors to the project as a whole and to the skill of the volume editors, Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, in pulling together such a range of scholars from a variety of sub-fields in the shared aim of addressing the impact of the world on the United States and vice versa. Seasoned specialists may not always be surprised by the contents of individual essays but will nevertheless find themselves reflecting on the shape of their own work, and, as I often did, refreshing their teaching materials, lecture notes, and bibliographies. It is a stimulating and engaging volume, full of interest, insight, and impressive synthesis. Individual essays might easily be partnered with selected reading to form the basis of graduate reading classes in US history topics; they might also be partnered with some of the recent doorstoppers on global history to contextualize the United States place on global history courses. At 784 pages, this apparently imposing volume offers both a refreshing take on the evolving US imperial formation in the nineteenth century and a vivid snapshot of a dynamic subfield.

The publication of *The Cambridge History of America and the World. Volume 2: 1820-1900* is timely. Twenty years after the appearance of Thomas Bender's edited collection, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, which is now recognized as the standard introduction to the approach, it is appropriate to take stock of how the field has developed by bringing together the vanguard of the transnational turn's second generation of scholars.¹ In *Rethinking* Bender wrote eloquently of the value of the twin aim of "thickening" the United States' national past and the decentering of the nation, "making it both more complex and truer to lived experience and the historical record."² As Bender framed it, the "task before such a new history is to notice the evidence of transnationalisms previously overlooked or filtered out by historians."³ Rereading Bender's introduction the apparent modesty of these aims are striking given the fundamental challenges the assembled essays posed to the field, especially around the spatial and temporal organization of US national history, and its narrow range of agents and historiographical reach. The transnational turn has received powerful institutional support from the field's leading academic networks and journals, produced a stream of new book series, waves of edited

¹ Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

² Bender, *Rethinking American History*, 10.

³ Bender, *Rethinking American History*, 12.

collections, and a tide of new monographs.⁴ Since *Rethinking* there have also been periodic review essays seeking to accelerate the field's gathering momentum, to clarify its method and motives, and to bring precision to its analytical vocabulary – but this is the first effort to assemble the work of the second wave of transnational scholarship in one place.⁵

So, what do we learn from this reassessment of the field? If we are to judge by the essays in this volume of *CHAW* alone, historians have been working furiously and imaginatively to ‘thicken’ the history of the United States’ relationship with the world by mapping and following the border-crossing connections and networks, and to understand the power relations that have affected them. The United States is not the only polity shaping North American relations with the world, either. Indigenous perspectives are fully incorporated here, where in *Rethinking* and the early attempts to reframe US history they were conspicuously peripheral actors. Stepping back still further, though it is unquestionably an unfinished project, the volume evidences that we now understand the impact of the first age of globalization on the United States and its peoples, and vice versa, in greater empirical detail, geographic reach, and human diversity; and there are more scholars engaged in this task than ever before.

All this does not do justice to the complexity of the volume, whose sum is greater than the pieces. Collectively, the essays demonstrate an ecumenicalism among historians in their approach to understanding “America and the World” – many contributions are driven clearly by transnational and transimperial methodologies, some by the leitmotifs of the global turn, and others are more typically comparative, but these methods are more often blended or taken as complementary approaches. As Hoganson and Sexton write in their assured introduction, “there is no single perspective or narrative that can fully capture the history of the United States in the world” (9).⁶ There is no single method either. If anything then, *Rethinking* might be the touchstone in the professional development of this field, but it is clear that the transnational methodology it proposed has been subsumed by the more capacious toolkit of “America and the World.” It is great credit to all the authors that the volume wears its methodology and historiography lightly (though the bibliographic essays that close each chapter provide excellent entry points into the subfields in question), but the volume’s structure is an indication of the new methodologies, scales of analysis, and spatialities that have reshaped the field.

Here, 30 essays are structured in four interlocking parts: “Building and Resisting US Empire”; “Imperial Structures”; “Americans and the World”; and “Americans in the World.” “Building and Resisting” tracks the piecemeal, contingent, and impulsive imperial expansion of the United States, revealing the complexity of the United States’ imperial formation as it stretched from Muskogee territory to Pacific Guano Islands, from the heart of the Cotton Kingdom to Luzon and Mindanao. Beginning with the War of 1812 and the republic’s first major war against a Pan-Indian resistance movement and ending with the War of 1898 and the empire’s bloodiest organized insurrection, it is no disservice to note that this section offers an architecture for the volume as a whole, offering a geopolitical framework into which later thematic essays build. The US Empire

⁴ On the importance of institutional networks early on see, Ian Tyrrell, “Reflections on the Transnational Turn in United States History: Theory and Practice,” *Journal of Global History* 4, no.3 (2009): 453-474. The most prominent book series have been the Cornell University Press series “United States in the World” and the series by Princeton University Press on “America in the World.”

⁵ Without entering a comprehensive list here, notable examples that cover the period of the volume include: Edward P. Pompeian, “Mind the Global U-Turn: Reorienting Early American History in a Global and Commercial Context,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 36, no.4 (2016): 715-752; Konstantin Dierks, “Americans Overseas in the Early Republic,” *Diplomatic History* 42, no.1 (2018): 17-35; and Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116, no.5 (2011): 1348-1391.

⁶ Jay Sexton and Kristin Hoganson, “Introduction to Volume II,” in Hoganson and Sexton, eds, *The Cambridge History of America and the World. Volume II, 1820-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 8-35 (hereafter *CHAW II*).

project was vast decentralized, and flexible; its spread accelerated through surges of explosive settler-led colonialism and the accompanying dispossession of indigenous polities and extirpation of indigenous peoples, consolidated in the war of pro-slavery separatism, and revived in a fierce late-century flurry of annexation that was driven by the partnership between industrial capitalism and racialized imperialism. For all that the US Empire was fractured and unstable, “Building and Resisting” also speaks to a major continuity: though forged in the fires of anti-colonial struggle the union was born imperial. “The wars that rang out the century were not so much a new departure as they were an extension of circumference,” write the editors (16).

“Imperial Structures” examines the underlying legal systems, political movements, publics, diasporic networks, religious and military institutions, bureaucratic structures, racist ideologies, and transportation and communications infrastructures that “channeled” (16) the development of US empire. The essays here collectively demonstrate that new technologies collapsed the perception of space and time and transformed the reach of commercial and capital markets, but also raised challenging questions about national sovereignty. Eileen Scully’s terrific essay, “The United States and International Law,” examines the “distinctly American construction of international law” (249-250) through iterative diplomacy and tentative forays into multilateral agreements (usually to harness the structures that underpinned Victorian globalization: postal rates, tariff schedules, submarine cables, and intellectual property).⁷ Christina Heatherton, meanwhile, shows that the movements that struggled against slavery, colonialism, and capitalism were linked through the transit of insurrectionary knowledge via the very systems of counterinsurgency that surveilled them.⁸ At the heart of this section is not so much a structure as a relationship: between private capital and the state. In excellent essays Max Edling, Dael Norwood, Peter Shulman, and Andrew Isenberg offer detailed examinations of the collaborative arrangements between on-the-ground agents of US capital and Federal power that structured the geographic reach and infrastructural capacity of the US empire.⁹

“Americans and the World” reflects, for the most part, the connected and entangled approaches favored by transnational historians. Foregrounding the role of non-state actors, “the nation’s eyes and ears as well as arms and sinews as they labored on behalf of US national and imperial interests” (25), the section captures the capaciousness of what scholars now deem ‘foreign relations’ from cultures of diplomacy and diplomatic ritual, to the range of representative Americans who might act as the United States public ‘face’ overseas be they sailors or tourists, missionaries or antislavery and antiracist activists, guano rushers or indigenous performers. “There was no helmsman directing the United States in the nineteenth century; rather, competing interests jostled to turn the wheel of this motley ship of state in directions of their choosing,” write Hoganson and Sexton (27). Just as there was no single direction, there was no single vision of ‘the world’ among the motley crew members pressing their claims on Americans statesmen and public. This is a capacious, multi-textured section. In each essay the authors painstakingly trace the mobilities of border-crossing Americans, and the processes of racialization that underpinned the US encounter with the world. Intelligence and expertise on global affairs were powered by a voluminous print culture of travel narratives, journals, and scientific literatures created by a multiracial, non-state community of travelers, experts, activists, policymakers, and workers. For some of those groups, internationalism granted legitimacy and power, for others it was the key to undermining the imperial pretensions of American power.

Complementing this section, the essays in “Americans in the World” grapple with the most challenging aspect of the transnational and global turns: the making of space and scale. Part IV begins from the premise that

⁷ Eileen P. Scully, “The United States and International Law: From the Transcontinental Treaty to the League of Nations Covenant, 1819-1919,” *CHAW II*, 246-267.

⁸ Christina Heatherton, “Making the First International: Nineteenth-Century Regimes of Surveillance Accumulation, Resistance and Abolition,” *CHAW II*, 295-316.

⁹ Max M. Edling, “The US Fiscal-Military State and the Conquest of a Continent, 1783-1900,” *CHAW II*, 221-245; Dael A. Norwood, “The United States and Global Capitalism,” *CHAW II*, 267-294; Peter A. Shulman, “Technology and US Foreign Relations in the Nineteenth Century,” *CHAW II*, 337-360; and Andrew C. Isenberg, “The Environment, the United States, and the World in the Nineteenth Century,” *CHAW II*, 361-386.

“the world, was, in sum, not an undifferentiated tapestry, but one with set routes, established links, and well-trodden paths, all located within fields of imperial power,” (30) and aims to drill down into the making of those pathways. To do so demands its authors scale down from the abstraction of ‘the world’ to the local spaces and sites of encounter where connection was made. If Part III is the ‘who,’ Part IV is the ‘how’ of transnational connection. Indeed, these two sections are best read as a connected pair that meditate on how American actors imagined, reordered, and racialized space and place on and beyond the Continent (and frequently how their plans to do so were confounded), and how historians themselves might think across borders, and between empires. To do so, the essays here take up thematic and regional approaches. Donna Gabaccia and Samuel Truett examine the geographics of mobility and border crossing from the perspectives of international migration and indigenous politics respectively, showing that in both cases these histories do not orbit national and imperial stories but coproduced them.¹⁰ The remaining essays break down US interests by spheres of major geo-strategic interest: the Greater Caribbean, the North Atlantic, Africa, the Islamic World, and the Island Empire of the Pacific and Caribbean. Finally, Ian Tyrrell ends the section, and with it the volume, with a reflection on the US empire’s capacity to turn the intense patterns of imperial globalization to its own advantage.¹¹

This is not a book you would ordinarily read cover to cover. But I recommend it. Doing so is enriching and one of the best ways to approach the volume (and indeed the series, where even dipping in and out of the essays in Volume 3, for example, further advances the tracks laid down here); one of its greatest pleasures is the opportunity it affords for plotting one’s own route across a century of dizzying, accelerated change, and a multitudinous cast of non-state protagonists who have shaped the United States in ways momentous and striking. In what follows I do not pretend to be comprehensive – there are too many compelling themes and subplots to give them all justice here – but I do try to draw out some of the recurrent themes and questions the volume raised to me across its many chapters (doubtless informed by my own current preoccupations).

First, it is worth repeating the point forcefully made by the editors “that there is no single perspective or narrative that can fully capture the history of the United States in the world,” making the “history of US imperialism appear more contested and thus less inevitable than celebrants have made it out to be” (9). The de-exceptionalising effect achieved here is powerful. Rival empires loom large, and the limits of US power are palpable. Indian confederacies shaped the limits and possibilities of US expansion, Britain is both chief model, rival, and collaborator, and time and again the United States is merely the chief beneficiary of the collapsing Spanish empire. To put it another way, we have now moved from a nation among nations to an empire among empires. But Ian Tyrrell makes the striking observation that “historians have regarded the US empire as an atypical and relatively minor enterprise in comparison to the archetypal European empires of the time. Such arguments assume European imperialism as a fixed type, which no European empire was” (718). Tyrrell is surely on the money once again, and comparison can only continue to advance the work taken up here. Recently published work on the points of connection and comparison between the German and US Empires widens the frame still further.

If one of the volume’s contributions, as the editors rightly assert, is to undermine the abstraction ‘America’ in the title, it is also clear that the essays collectively undermine the abstraction of ‘the world’ too. The centrality of knowledge-making to empire leaps out from these pages. Essays by Dirk Bönker, Shulman, Emily Conroy-Krutz, Brian Rouleau, Daniel Bender, and Leslie Butler partner well in this regard.¹² Reading across the

¹⁰ Donna R. Gabaccia, “The Changing Geography of Mobility, 1820-1940,” *CHAW II*, 547-568; Samuel Truett, “Borderlands and Border Crossings,” *CHAW II*, 594-616.

¹¹ Ian Tyrrell, “Inter-Imperial Entanglements in the Age of Imperial Globalization,” *CHAW II*, 716-737.

¹² Dirk Bönker, “The Military and US Engagements with the World, 1865-1900,” *CHAW II*, 316-336; Emily Conroy-Krutz, “American Missionaries in the World,” *CHAW II*, 452-473; Brian Rouleau, “Mobilities, Travel, Expatriation, and Tourism,” *CHAW II*, 474-497; Daniel Bender, “Flowers for Washington: Cultural Production, Consumption, and the United States in the World,” *CHAW II*, 521-546; and Leslie Butler, “The Liberal North Atlantic,” *CHAW II*, 617-641.

different essays the connections to be drawn between the Continental survey work of Lewis and Clark and the US Geological Survey and the overseas work of the Hydrographical Survey and naval cruising of the Wilkes Exploring Expedition and others that collectively created empire's working memory are more visibly evident.¹³ There is more to be gained from historians of science in this regard, especially in the encounter with their own models of the diffusion, transfer, and coproduction of expertise. Maps and mapping – both of the detailed cartographic kind and the persuasive – feature in several essays too, emphasizing the diversity of “imagined geographies” with which the world was conceived, but cartographers and geographers rarely featured as protagonists themselves and might be a fruitful area for future research.¹⁴ Several digital humanities projects are now trying to map the extent and nature of US overseas connections, which perhaps exposes the limitations of a written volume in capturing the methodological and conceptual innovations of scholars in the field, but it does make one wonder about the possibilities for using this software for the presentation of our research.¹⁵

Whether as borderland outposts, imperial “inposts,” or colonial entrepôts, the US empire is often entered through cities, which offer both methodological and scalar advantages.¹⁶ Through cities, big and small, domestic and foreign, scholars have grappled with probably the most challenging methodological questions facing the transnational and global turns: how does the global manifest itself in local spaces? From the vantage of dockside, trackside, or the plush armchairs of multinational mercantile or financial operations historians can examine the hard work of making connection, historicize the cultures of trust that underpinned long-distance exchanges of all sorts, and examine the financial and knowledge networks that made connectivity work. The extraterritorial United States was itself often an urban phenomena, especially in the professional enclaves of merchants and financiers who dotted the globe from European capitals to Asian Treaty ports.¹⁷ The United States' multiple entrepôts also offer an opportunity for considering the communities of expatriate and sojourning non-Americans that populated US cities from the Portuguese slavers in New York so ably portrayed by John Harris, to exiled Cuban revolutionaries such as Jose Martí (more on this below) who used the city as one hub in a wider transnational network of Cuban nationalist insurgents in exile.¹⁸ We might also think more carefully about the other types of imperial ‘inposts,’ or to use the globalists favored term ‘nodes,’ through which the global was imagined and manifested: the knowledge creating and curating spaces like the Smithsonian, New York Natural History Museum, Bronx Zoo, Philadelphia Commercial Museum, and missionary society headquarters, or the dynamic commercial and financial services of merchant houses, banks, and insurance industries and the wider built environment as a representation of imperial power, and projected control of space.¹⁹ Grounding our work in these spaces and the human decision-making that took place in them, we move decisively away from the borderline presumption of a solid aggregate of connections to the active process of making and breaking them.

¹³ Here through the accident of timing Michael A. Verney's recent *A Great Nation Rising: Naval Exploration and Global Empire in the Early US Republic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022) misses the cut.

¹⁴ Susan Schulten, *The Geographical Imagination in America, 1880-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Outside of U.S. scholarship one thinks of the excellent work by the historical geographer Felix Driver, see: *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

¹⁵ See for example: <https://africafromamerica.unl.edu/> which would be a useful accompaniment to Jeannette Eileen Jones's chapter; and the University of Indiana's <http://globalization1789-1861.indiana.edu/exhibit/>; <https://blog.uvm.edu/nphelps/maps-visualizations/>.

¹⁶ Kristin Hoganson, “Inposts of Empire,” *Diplomatic History* 45, no.1 (2021): 1-22.

¹⁷ Nancy Shoemaker, “The Extraterritorial United States to 1860,” *Diplomatic History* 42, no.1 (2018): 36-54; Brooke Blower, “Nation of Outposts: Forts, Factories, Bases, and the Making of American Power,” *Diplomatic History* 41, no.3 (2017): 439-459.

¹⁸ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

¹⁹ Rebecca Tinio McKenna, *Imperial Pastoral: the Architecture of US Colonialism in the Philippines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

It is striking that Reconstruction remains a challenge for historians of American foreign relations. The essays by David Sim, Norwood, and Butler all offer profitable pathways for positioning the period on a different axial.²⁰ There are works afoot and recently published that have begun to probe this problem – and what better place to show the powerful distancing effects of transnational methods where, as one recent forum surmised, “Historians have known for a long time that 1877 was a fictional period divide.”²¹ One solution has been to re-place the United States amidst the global ‘problem of emancipation’ and to examine further the worldwide question of managing the transition from slave labor to commercial agriculture in both the United States and Africa. Another route is to consider the broader modernization of politics that took place in this period, be it Canadian Confederation in 1867 or the Meiji Restoration. Another might be to reexamine the labor histories that undergird those of the rise of capital through the post-war era. There are clear overlaps with the arguments across this volume with the agenda of the “Greater Reconstruction,” too, which arise profitably by again reading across rather than selecting among essays.²²

A more substantive area to address is an expanded incorporation of anticolonial activism. Though individual chapters are given to the moral cordon of antislavery created by Black American activists and the later anti-Lynching campaign of Ida Wells (Heatherton and Richard Blackett), and while Indian confederacies and resistance are especially well integrated throughout the volume we hear comparatively little from anti-colonial activists outside of the Continental Empire (excepting the excellent essay by Joanna Pobleto on colonial duress across the U.S. Island Empire).²³ Despite the considerable research obstacles to assembling a generalized history of anticolonialism in Central America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, some time spent sketching its intellectual and networked trajectories would be of immense value to this volume and the series. It is surprising that while the volume powerfully demonstrates the multi-dimensionality of the United States imperial formation, the multivocal response to empire are muted. As the editors write, “the category ‘American’ has not always been self-evident” (22), and this was true for empire’s opponents too. The United States often acted as a foil for alternative hemispheric imaginings whether that be in Jose Marti’s simultaneous admiration for US democratic political culture and abhorrence at its inequalities of wealth and avaricious glances at Cuban annexation; the Mexican Jose Vasconcelos’s challenge to US racial determinism; Argentine Minister to Washington Louis María Drago’s assertion of the illegality of foreign debt collection in 1902; the Modernismo of Rubén Darío and Jose Enrique Rodó, poets and essayists from Nicaragua and Uruguay respectively, who looked askance at US materialism; or reformist inspiration for the likes of the Uruguayan intellectual Jose Pedro Varela.

The volume’s end point perhaps works against itself here. In the case of anticolonial trajectories, the year 1900 seems somewhat arbitrary. Individual essays do of course move beyond this date, but it does perhaps have the unintended consequence of collapsing the space for analysis of the activism of the racialized and radicalized subjects of the US Empire after emancipation. In fairness, perhaps too there is a larger question of the division of labor between volumes that might afflict any project of this size. These themes are picked up in Rebecca Herman’s essay in Volume III (which pairs well with Pobleto’s essay) where these are told as the beginnings of US superpower status, but as a nineteenth-century historian one cannot help but feel they

²⁰ David Sim, “The United States in an Age of Global Integration, 1865—1897,” *CHAW II*, 172-194.

²¹ Luke E. Harlow, “Forum: The Future of Reconstruction Studies,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, URL: https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/forum-the-future-of-reconstruction-studies/#_edn4

²² Stacey Smith, “Beyond North and South: Putting the West in the Civil War and Reconstruction,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6, no.4 (2016): 566-591; Elliott West, “Reconstructing Race,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Spring, 2003): 7-25.

²³ Heatherton, “Making the First International,” *CHAW II*, 295-315; R.J.M. Blackett, “The Antislavery International,” *CHAW II*, 433-451; Joanna Pobleto, “The American Island Empire: US Expansionism in the Pacific and the Caribbean,” *CHAW II*, 693-715.

might be seen as another act in the century-long process of grappling with declining Spanish Empire in the region rather than evidence of an upward US trajectory.²⁴

If I could make one final plea it would be to Cambridge University Press: can the price be dropped, or a more accessibly priced paperback be produced to give these volumes the attention and impact they deserve? At £120 per volume, £480 for the set, many libraries would think twice before making that purchase – it's certainly beyond the reach of most individuals. Perhaps the press imagines a digital future for these volumes, if so, it's a shame; the intellectual payoff for reading the whole volume cannot be priced, especially given the evident care of the editors to produce such a well grooved collection.

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But let's not end in minor key. The successful capturing of the multi-dimensional US Empire Project in the nineteenth century, with its limits, incapacities, and contestations and its imperializing and globalizing dimensions, leaves one to wonder what the third generation of transnational scholarship will bring.

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²⁴ Rachel Herman, "Latin America and US Global Governance," in Brooke L. Blower and Andrew Preston, eds, *The Cambridge History of America and the World. Volume III, 1900-1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021): 153-173.