

# H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIII-2

**Samuel Zipp.** *The Idealist: Wendell Willkie's Wartime Quest to Build One World.* Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020. ISBN: 9780674737518 (hardcover, \$35.00/£28.95/€31.50).

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## Contents

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Introduction by David Milne, University of East Anglia .....	2
Review by Mary Bridges, Yale University.....	5
Review by Justus D. Doenecke, New College of Florida, Emeritus .....	8
Review by Andrew Johnstone, University of Leicester .....	12
Review by Adriane Lentz-Smith, Duke University.....	16
Review by Sarah Miller-Davenport, University of Sheffield.....	19
Review by Dara Orenstein, George Washington University .....	22
Review by John A. Thompson, University of Cambridge .....	27
Response by Samuel Zipp, Brown University .....	31

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INTRODUCTION BY DAVID MILNE, UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA

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Samuel Zipp's *The Idealist* deftly uses a life – Wendell Willkie's – and a journey – his seven-week, 31,000-mile journey around the world in 1942 – to engage with large, important questions regarding nationalism, anticolonialism, internationalism, and the tantalising alternative possibilities for what have might followed the Allied victory in the Second World War. As Adriane Lentz-Smith aptly puts it, "It takes moxie to tackle to a book with this kind of sweep, and skill to pull it off." Zipp has scholarly range and insight in abundance.

*The Idealist* has generated the substantive, contentious, illuminating H-Diplo roundtable it deserves. It is a good reminder, indeed, of why H-Diplo is so important to our field. The reviews and author's response that follows below makes the *London* and *New York Review of Books* appear thin in comparison.

Zipp has a keen eye for metaphor, and one occurred to me as I read the reviews. To me (in part at least) they resemble a chunk of sedimentary rock, with each layer revealing the scholarly concerns ascendant in different decades. How fascinating that Justus Doenecke identified Zipp's appraisal as laudably "balanced" (a virtue not necessarily recognized as such in the contemporary academy) while Dara Orenstein queries the very notion of writing a biography of a "big white guy" who was incapable of overcoming the "antinomies of liberalism." Orenstein concludes that Willkie would have done better to "lose himself in the crowd rather than deliver speeches to it." Commissioning reviews from scholars across different generations has produced a review forum that is, well, balanced.

In different ways, and to varying degrees, each of the reviewers applauds the book's myriad qualities. John Thompson praises a "detailed, historically sensitive and illuminating reconstruction of a man and a moment." Doenecke writes that "Zipp has produced a beautifully written, well documented, deeply reflective account that shows mature reflection on its subject." Orenstein sets a high bar for "this biography to justify its existence" but writes that Zipp "succeeds brilliantly" due to "his attentiveness to Willkie's formation as a Midwesterner." Lentz-Smith writes "This is a book filled with grand ideas and even grander plans—interdependence, freedom, development, and modernization." Andrew Johnstone hails "a fascinating, well-written book that – just like Willkie – asks difficult questions about the place of America in the world."

Points of criticism are also raised on various grounds. Many of the reviewers (situated near the top layer of sediment) seem wary of biography, though there is general agreement that Zipp is able to transcend the "exceptionalizing" (as Sarah Miller-Davenport puts it) deficiencies of the form. Mary Bridges observes that "Zipp so convincingly analyzes the flaws with Willkie's project, however, that the 'blazing moment' loses some of its luster of possibility." Orenstein notes that "What is missing from this impressive work is a thoroughgoing engagement with political economy. Aside from the subject of free trade, *The Idealist* divorces the political from the economic." Thompson and Johnstone express doubt that Willkie's vision of a post-war "One World" was practically realizable. They hold Willkie to what Disney Plus's new Marvel spin-off, *Loki*, would describe as the "sacred timeline."

Zipp's reply is a bravura performance and speaks for itself. But permit me to quote from one section: "...I did not come to put Willkie in checkmate, but rather to see how the pieces on the board were arranged, how the state of play unfolded around him as possible moves opened up and closed down, how he moved in response to the other players, and to chart the unfolding possibilities of the game in which Willkie found himself." Zipp's chess analogy contains real wisdom, as does his wonderful book.

### Participants:

**Samuel Zipp** is a writer and historian, author of *The Idealist: Wendell Willkie's Wartime Quest to Build One World* (Belknap, 2020), and other works on twentieth-century culture, ideas, politics, and urbanism, including *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (Oxford University Press, 2010) and the co-edited volume *Vital*

*Little Plans: The Short Works of Jane Jacobs* Random House, 2016). He is Associate Professor of American Studies and Urban Studies at Brown University. For more, see [samuelzipp.com](http://samuelzipp.com).

**David Milne** is Professor of Modern History at the University of East Anglia. He is currently writing a biography of the *Chicago Tribune* journalist, Sigrid Schultz, and is rather fond of biography as a form.

**Mary Bridges** is a postdoctoral fellow at Yale University's Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy and International Security Studies. Her current book project focuses on the international expansion of US banks in the early twentieth century and the infrastructures of U.S. financial power around the world.

**Justus D. Doenecke** is emeritus professor of history at New College of Florida. Among works most relevant to this review are *Not to the Swift: The Old Isolationists in the Cold War Era* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1979); *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940-1941 as Revealed in the Papers of the America First Committee* (Stanford, Ca.: Hoover Institution, 1990); *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); and *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies* (with Mark A. Stoler, University Press of Kentucky, 2005). Since retirement he has turned his attention to Great War. In 2011 his *Nothing Less Than War: A New History of American Entry into World War I* (University Press of Kentucky, 2011). He has just completed a manuscript on full-scale U.S. participation in the war itself, which is currently under contract.

**Andrew Johnstone** is an Associate Professor of American History at the University of Leicester. He is the author of *Against Immediate Evil: American Internationalists and the Four Freedoms on the Eve of World War II* (Cornell University Press, 2014), *Dilemmas of Internationalism The American Association for the United Nations and US Foreign Policy, 1941-1948* (Ashgate, 2009), and co-editor of *US Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Campaigns, Candidates and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (University Press of Kentucky, 2017). His articles have appeared in *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of Contemporary History*, and the *Journal of American Studies*. His current book project examines the relationship between the rise of the American public relations industry and the rise of the United States as a world power.

**Adriane Lentz-Smith** is Associate Professor of History and African & African-American Studies at Duke University. The author of *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Harvard, 2009), she studies histories of the United States & the World and the black freedom struggle in the long twentieth century. Her essay, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Grand Strategy," appears in the book *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* edited by Christopher Nichols, Andrew Preston, and Elizabeth Borgwardt (Oxford, 2021).

**Sarah Miller-Davenport** is Senior Lecturer in U.S. History at the University of Sheffield, where she has taught since receiving her PhD from the University of Chicago. She is the author of *Capital of the World: Hawai'i and the Cultural Transformation of U.S. Empire* (Princeton, 2019). Her current project explores the reinvention of New York as a "global city" in the wake of its 1975 fiscal crisis.

**Dara Orenstein** is an associate professor in the Department of American Studies at George Washington University, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on political economy, cultural and social theory, and modern U.S. history. Her first book, *Out of Stock: The Warehouse in the History of Capitalism*, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2019. Her articles have appeared in *Pacific Historical Review*, *Radical History Review*, and *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. She is in the initial stages of a new project that examines the spatial form of the world trade center, primarily but not exclusively in New York City, and that investigates the impact of 9/11 on a generation of humanities scholars.

**John A. Thompson** is an Emeritus Reader in American History and an Emeritus Fellow of St Catharine's College at the University of Cambridge. His principal research interests have been American liberalism and U.S. foreign policy. His

publications include *Progressivism* (Durham, 1979), *Reformers and War: American Progressive Publicists and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), *Woodrow Wilson* (London: Longman, 2002), *A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's Global Role* (Cornell University Press, 2015) and numerous articles and book chapters.

## REVIEW BY MARY BRIDGES, YALE UNIVERSITY

During the upheaval of World War II, the nature of U.S. global power was up for grabs. Would the country become a proponent of international engagement and, if so, what would the U.S.-style global order look like? According to isolationists like Charles Lindbergh and boosters of the America First Committee, international relations should offer, at most, a venue for advancing domestic self-interest. In another, the United States would become a leader in eradicating imperialism and supporting the self-determination of people around the world. Wendell Willkie, the protagonist of Samuel Zipp's *The Idealist*, became the poster child of the latter vision. In the middle of World War II, Willkie launched an international tour to evangelize his ideas, drum up the support of U.S. allies, and raise domestic awareness about the nation's dependence on international partners.

*The Idealist* follows Willkie on his globe-hopping mission to knit Allied powers more closely together. It argues that Willkie's trip provides an entry point for understanding the mid-century transformation of U.S. global power. The argument plays out on two levels: on one, the book follows Willkie as he refined his version of globalism and published his best-selling book, *One World*.<sup>1</sup> On the other, the book focuses on the way in which Willkie's ideas and celebrity interacted with U.S. public opinion about international engagement. In both cases, Willkie's work provides a vehicle for understanding the inconsistencies and promises attached to U.S. internationalism.

The storyline tracks Willkie's global tour—through Cairo, Ankara, Jerusalem, Tehran, Moscow, Chongqing, and more. It draws on Willkie's papers as well as both official records and personal correspondence of friends and contacts. The structure keeps the book moving briskly as we see global leaders in action. We accompany Willkie as he took the Shah of Iran on his first ever airplane ride—a half-hour “joyride” over Tehran and the Caucasus Mountains (126). We sit with Willkie through a vodka-fueled state dinner with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. We are privy to rumors of Willkie's alleged affair with Mayling Soong, wife of Chinese leader Chiang Kai-Shek. At times, Willkie embodied the Midwestern buffoon. He allegedly took off his shoes while meeting with the Iranian Prime Minister and scratched his toes, in addition to freeing “himself noisily, of superfluous bodily gasses” (132). At other times, Willkie shifted nimbly to become a cultural operator, charming New York intellectuals as easily as Siberian bureaucrats.

The scenes are colorful, but, as Zipp demonstrates on numerous occasions, Willkie's ideas lacked the depth to offer a realizable vision of international engagement. Take, for example, Willkie's meeting with Zionist and Arab leaders in Jerusalem. The two sides were at loggerheads about Jewish immigration quotas to Palestine, and the conflict brought two conflicting nationalisms to an impasse. A central pillar of Willkie's *One World* vision involved denouncing nationalism. However, this simple denunciation provided little insight about how the international community should respond. Willkie could have tackled the nuances of foreign policy or offered a more detailed conception for achieving his globalism. Instead, he boarded a plane for his next stop in Baghdad, rather than “linger[ing] over the quandary of Palestine” (112). *The Idealist* likewise hops to Baghdad and joins Willkie to touch down amid a new set of international problems.

Despite the gaps in his worldview, Willkie became a public figure and his book a bestseller. It is in analyzing this phenomenon—Willkie's celebrity—where *The Idealist* offers its most compelling insights. Indeed, the book is strongest when the tight zoom on Willkie is released to open a broader landscape of opinions and perspectives, which provides context for his short-lived fame. In particular, a chapter late in the book focuses on the publication and critical reception of Willkie's book. This widened frame allows the chapter to take on weighty themes such as economic nationalism, civil rights, and “free enterprise”—topics that are teased early in the book but recede amid the tumult of Willkie's international travels.

<sup>1</sup> Wendell L. Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943).

One compelling topic is Willkie's antipathy toward the Tennessee Valley Authority. Here again, Zipp drills down to an inconsistency in Willkie's thinking: his private-sector, pre-war career involved challenging the TVA as governmental overreach in markets. However, in his wartime role as an unofficial U.S. spokesperson, Willkie fell in line with U.S. foreign policy elites seeking to export TVA-style development as a model of modernization. While highlighting this inconsistency is useful, expanding it beyond the perimeter of Willkie's beliefs could have helped the reader gain a new understanding of a larger field of historiography about U.S.-led modernization.<sup>2</sup>

Another contribution involves the book's exploration of the technologies of celebrity-making on a global scale. Zipp's descriptions of Willkie's press tours, for example, bring together an unexpected mash-up of media and technologies, such as commercial airline travel, mass radio, Hollywood movie culture, and public opinion polling. One intriguing instance that captured the new technologies of global celebrity involved Willkie's critique of British imperialism in India. Willkie drew mainstream media attention to this critique—which itself grew out of the global anticolonial movement aligned with civil rights activism in the United States—in a radio address heard by 36 million people. The address generated pushback across the British empire, and reactions appeared on the pages of *Life* magazine, as well as editorials in newspapers around the country. The incident demonstrates that a radio address by a Midwestern lawyer—who held no official political office—could reverberate in media and policy circles around the world, and this possibility suggests a new and international landscape for political decision-making. Willkie's brand of globalism seems to have been well suited to the global mass media milieu into which it was born, and it raises questions about the entanglement of Willkie's ideas and the construction of globalized public opinion.

More frequently, *The Idealist* engages with existing narratives of midcentury internationalism and U.S. imperial power.<sup>3</sup> The book reveals that debates about the role of the United States in the world were more varied and resonant outside foreign policy circles than many traditional accounts have acknowledged. It interprets Willkie's stardom as revealing of a moment of possibility between the summer of 1942 through 1944—"a brief, blazing moment"—when Willkie "promised to reshape the country's fundamental understanding of the planet it would soon come to dominate" (5-6).

Zipp so convincingly analyzes the flaws with Willkie's project, however, that the "blazing moment" loses some of its luster of possibility. Instead, we see a talking head offering more words than action about ending imperialism at home and abroad. Zipp successfully uses Willkie's shortcomings to identify problems with U.S. globalism. For example, the book argues that Willkie's understanding of foreign engagement hinged on notions of U.S. exceptionalism and that Willkie's frame of reference depended on seeing foreigners as variants of U.S. archetypes. Willkie likened foreign populations to "proto-Americans," such as pioneers and yeomen farmers. And he explained global affairs in terms of a "familiar westering, settler narrative" that his U.S. public could rally behind (258). Zipp's analysis of this logic not only challenges Willkie's worldview,

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Amy C. Offner, *Sorting out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton University Press, 2019). David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). A recent take on these themes includes: Stefan Link and Noam Maggor, "The United States as a Developing Nation: Revisiting the Peculiarities of American History," *Past & Present* 246:1 (2020): 269–306.

<sup>3</sup> This vast literature, for example: Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U. S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020); Or Rosenboim, *The Emergence of Globalism: Visions of World Order in Britain and the United States, 1939-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020); Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013). Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *The American Historical Review* 116:5 (December 2011): 1348-1391; Andrew Collison Baker, *Constructing a Post-War Order: The Rise of US Hegemony and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

but it also undercuts the internal logic of *The Idealist* itself—namely that it is unclear how much contingency was associated with the “blazing moment” of Willkie’s stardom if that stardom never reflected a realizable, reflective vision for global engagement. And the more time the reader spends with Willkie’s ideas, the less they seem to have reshaped U.S. ideas as to project existing beliefs within the new, globalizing media.

Nonetheless, the book is an engaging read and a useful portal into a moment of profound global change. It would be a compelling addition to an undergraduate or graduate syllabus on U.S. foreign relations and global affairs.

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REVIEW BY JUSTUS D. DOENECKE, NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA, EMERITUS

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It is hard to believe that Wendell Willkie was once a household word. Not only was he the most prominent Republican in the United States; for a brief moment in history, he symbolized a global consciousness that made strong inroads into middle-class America. Yet within two years after his death in October 1944, he had been all but forgotten. Seldom has a figure risen in the public eye so meteorically or vanished so quickly.

Samuel Zipp ably captures the nature of Willkie's brand of internationalism, giving full play to both its strengths and limitations. Zipp's writing style would do credit to a superior journalist, indeed to a first-rate columnist. He is particularly strong in narrating Willkie's famous flight around the world in a converted bomber, the *Gulliver*, which began in August 1942, well within a year after the Pearl Harbor attack.

The author not only covers his subject's activities in the early 1940s but describes his early career as well. In the process he shows how an individual who grew up as a political radical raised in urban small-town Indiana evolved into a Wall Street-based defender of the public utilities industry. Yet, though always a booster of 'free enterprise,' he backed major parts of the New Deal, including old-age pensions, unemployment insurance, federal assistance to farmers, and wages-and-hours legislation. In 1940, as one of America's first 'media candidates,' a man who had been a Democrat all but four years of his life received the Republican presidential nomination. Though he lost the election to Franklin D. Roosevelt, he polled a record number of Republican votes and ran ahead of his party's Senate and House candidates. An ardent internationalist, he backed Roosevelt's lend-lease program and the arming of merchant ships. In 1942, he traveled around the world to promote the Allied cause and liberal peace aims.

Zipp's sources are wide-ranging. Not only are contemporary newspapers and journals cited in abundance; archival research includes the papers of Willkie, Roosevelt, and Irita Van Doren, who was book editor of the *New York Herald Tribune* and an intimate confidant. Zipp has consulted material in the British National Archives in London and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Moscow. Curiously missing in his extremely extensive listing is Donald Bruce Johnson's *The Republican Party and Wendell Willkie* (1960), a thorough account of his subject's interaction with party anti-interventionists.<sup>4</sup>

Over half the book deals with the *Gulliver's* flight, when Willkie flew over 28,000 miles in 49 days. Zipp offers deftly drawn descriptions of each of the countries Willkie visited, thereby giving the reader a bird's-eye view of nations and regions that during the Cold War would be deemed part of the 'Third World.'

Upon landing in Cairo, Willkie learned that most Egyptians hated their de facto British rulers far more than they feared any fascist advance on their soil. Some Egyptians, including later President Anwar al-Sadat, actually cheered on the forces of General Erwin Rommel. Farouk, the nation's nominal king, at one point formed a government under the gunpoint of the British ambassador. The globetrotter also met with Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, although British censors severely muted Willkie's report that the recent halting of the German onslaught marked a turning point in the war.

Arriving at Ankara, Willkie failed to realize that the new Turkish republic was "an experiment in benevolent authoritarianism, a kind of top-down populism sold on the godlike persona of the benign dictator," President Ismet Inönü (81-82). Soft-peddling its most autocratic elements, Willkie stressed a far-from-complete technical and educational advancement that bypassed much of a nation that remained largely rural, Moslem, and illiterate.

As he visited Syria and Lebanon, Willkie again saw the not-so-hidden hand of colonialism. Both were strictly French puppet-states, being ruled by Free French General Charles de Gaulle, who personally told the unofficial American emissary, "In no place in this world can I yield a single French right" (98). Just after a dinner in Beirut, the wife of the high

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<sup>4</sup> Donald Bruce Johnson, *The Republican Party and Wendell Willkie* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1960.



commissioner for the French mandate boasted that she could arrange an “accident” to befall de Gaulle if the Allied guaranteed that her husband, General Georges Catroux, could lead his nation’s troops into a liberated Paris.

Although he spent only one day in Jerusalem, Willkie realized the intransigent nature of the conflict between Jews and Arabs. Though he remained silent during his visit to Palestine, he was always sympathetic to the ideal of a Jewish homeland. Impervious to any dispossession of Palestinians, he was drawn to the image of Zionist ‘pioneers,’ whom he saw as similar in some ways to the White settlers of the American West.

In some ways, Willkie’s visit to Iraq was similar to that of Egypt. The recently installed prince-regent, Abd-al-Ilah, had just been installed by British forces who had overthrown a ruler who was sympathetic to the Nazis. At a state banquet, the prominent Hoosier referred to Prime Minister Nuri al-Said as “the modern thief of Baghdad,” who had “stolen his heart,” Willkie himself being “the modern Sinbad” who had swept into the city on “on a modern flying carpet” (122). In reality, al-Said was a ruthless power broker who reassured the dominant British while recognizing the domination of local sheiks over the peasantry.

Iran, in a sense, signified instant replay. The Allies had just installed the young insurgent Mohammed Reza Pahlavi as shah, forcing out his pro-Axis father. (Willkie thrilled the 23-year-old by giving him his first airplane ride). As often during his trip, Willkie sought to assure the Iranians that the Allies were fighting to allow citizens of “small countries” as well as large to “live decent and free lives under governments of their own choosing” (133). Again, as elsewhere in his journey, he kept stressing that subject nations could only achieve democratic goals by backing the Allies.

The most controversial part of Willkie’s trip undoubtedly lay in his visit to the Soviet Union. Both in Moscow and in the interior city of Kuibyshev, where a fleeing government had taken refuge, he toured state farms and industrial plants and met with top officials. Russia was at the height of its peril, with the Wehrmacht just having retreated from Moscow’s suburbs and the fate of Stalingrad still dubious. The American visitor was continually pelted with questions concerning the imminence of a second front. Zipp finds the gregarious Willkie to have been naive concerning the nation and its leaders, buying in to the “convergence theory” (page citation) that state-directed industrial development would bring Soviet and Western societies ever closer. Though he knew of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s genocidal activities and realized that he personally was under surveillance, he thought that mutual dependence would lead to the postwar continuation of the wartime alliance. He also felt a personal tie to Stalin, who said to him, “I like you very much” (163).

China served as another proving ground for Willkie’s ebullience and naiveté. During a ten-day visit, he met hundreds of people and toured factories, orphanages, universities, and the battle front. To the dismay of the “old China hands” who staffed the State Department, in Chongqing showed himself easy prey to the blandishments of the Goumindang, which staged massive rallies on his behalf. Madame Chiang Kai-shek, in fact, may have engaged in a sexual relationship with the roving ambassador, who at one point invited her to accompany him back to America. He deemed her taciturn husband, Generalissimo Chiang, a man of “reflective manner” and “quiet poise” (185). Ever the optimist, he claimed—after conferring with (add title or label) Zhou Enlai—that China’s Communist movement was “more a national and agrarian awakening than an international or proletarian conspiracy” (189). Later, in meeting with Roosevelt, Willkie made no secret of his preference for the victory-through-bombing strategy of General Claire L. Chennault over the ground-warfare approach of his counterpart, General Joseph Stillwell.

Upon returning to the United States in October, Willkie was perceived as the nation’s most influential advocate of internationalism, exceeded only by Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. To writer and political leader Clare Boothe Luce, he was “a global Abraham Lincoln” (230). His report, which was published in a book titled *One World* (1943), reached two million in sales, was serialized in over a hundred newspapers, and became number two on the year’s best seller list.<sup>5</sup> Though much of the account was sheer travelogue, he used the work to advance his pet ideas: public recognition of global

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<sup>5</sup> Wendell Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943)

interdependence, the need for a United Nations council (the term United Nations was used during the war to signify the anti-Axis coalition), the inevitability of colonial liberation, and an end to domestic racism.

When, however, Willkie tried to advance his agenda in a bid for the 1944 Republican presidential nomination, he failed miserably, unable to win a single delegate in the crucial Wisconsin primary. Americans might have been briefly inspired by Willkie's lofty rhetoric, but most Americans perceived the war in strictly utilitarian terms: "a job to get done in order to bring everyone home" (274). Zipp does an excellent job of showing how even dedicated internationalists soon took a more 'realistic' approach, as evidenced in the writings of theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, columnist Walter Lippmann, and publisher Henry Luce, a man who had been instrumental in launching the Willkie presidential boom of 1940. The very Clare Boothe Luce who saw Willkie as the reincarnation of Abraham Lincoln started using the term "globaloney" (279), a label which was admittedly aimed at Vice President Henry Wallace but which betrayed a wider frustration with cosmic war aims. Roosevelt's international scheme of the Four Policemen was a far cry from Willkie's stress upon the empowerment of smaller and newly-created nations. In a sense, Willkie's death in October 1944 was anti-climactic, as he had already used up his political capital.

Only in one area of his narration could Zipp be more nuanced. He accuses aviator Charles A. Lindbergh, the spearhead of the America First Committee in 1941, of drifting "toward sympathy for Hitler" (48). Wayne S. Cole's definitive study, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle Against American Intervention in World War II* (1974), a work based upon extensive work in the Lindbergh papers at Yale, specifically denies such a claim.<sup>6</sup> Nor is there much evidence that during 1940-41 "the country swung between war and descent into homegrown fascism" (319). Such demagogues as Father Charles E. Coughlin, William Dudley Pelley, Gerald Winrod, and Gerald L.K. Smith were rapidly weakening, not gaining in strength.<sup>7</sup>

Zipp is on firmer ground in indicting Lindbergh for his speech, delivered in Des Moines in September 1941, that implied that Jews were manipulating public opinion in favor of intervention. When the aviator claimed that "their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio, and our Government," he was juxtaposing "the Jewish race against "our interests" and offering a view of Jewish power that was conspiratorial.<sup>8</sup> In effect, he was using stock anti-Semitic claims to tell his followers that the "Jewish," curiously used as a noun, were seeking to brainwash them.

Zipp could have mentioned that in September 1941 Willkie defended the movie industry as legal counsel when anti-interventionists sought a full-scale of its "propagandistic" efforts, pointing to the Jewish background of many producers. Only a traitor could doubt their loyalty, Willkie said.<sup>9</sup> He had recently drawn anti-interventionist scorn when, in testifying

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<sup>6</sup> "Lindbergh did not like either Hitler or Nazism. He did not favor a Nazi dictatorship either for Germany or for the United States. He did not want Nazi Germany to triumph in Britain or in the United States." Wayne S. Cole, *Charles A. Lindbergh and the Battle against American Intervention in World War II* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 152.

<sup>7</sup> See Sheldon Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973); Donald Warren, *Radio Priest: Charles Coughlin, The Father of Hate Radio* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Justus D. Doenecke, *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940-1941 as Revealed in the Papers of the America First Committee* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 37-40.

<sup>9</sup> Lynne Olsen, *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight over World War II, 1939-1941* (New York: Random House, 2013), 371.

before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the lend-lease bill, he referred to certain anti-Roosevelt remarks as “a bit of campaign oratory.” The world would continue to haunt him during the next few years.<sup>10</sup>

These points, however, remain minor. Zipp’s appraisal of “the idealist” is most balanced. He obviously admires Willkie’s efforts to make Americans more globally aware, not to mention the attempts to convert Allied war aims into something more than national survival and preservation of the status quo. The Indiana voyager captured public imagination in a way that few other wartime leaders could. Zipp is appalled at American postwar efforts to prop up authoritarian regimes throughout the world. President Donald Trump’s ascendance simply “unleashed the white nationalism that has always underpinned the American experiment” (319).

Yet the book is no hagiography. Willkie is revealed as neither a profound nor a systematic student of international politics. Though seeking to understand the underdeveloped world on its own terms, he still saw the globe through star-spangled glasses. He embodied what Eric F. Goldman calls an American law of history:

Human beings everywhere and at all times, the law ran, seek peace and democracy, want to get ahead to a farm of their own or a house on the right side of the tracks, prefer to do it all gradually and with a decent regard for the amenities. The history of man is consequently a long slow swing toward a world consisting entirely of middle-class democracies.<sup>11</sup>

In time, Willkie believed that the rest of the world was bound to adopt U.S. values, economic policies, and democratic practices. To Willkie, modernization, by which he meant “irrigation projects, power plants, fertile fields and pastures, whole cities,” would invariably lead to a more open society (158). As Zipp notes, he stressed that the Russians, Chinese, and Zionists all shared common frontier experiences that were shaping their societies. In the process Willkie ignored deep-seated value systems and cultural differences. He failed to realize that free trade, a favorite cause, would invariably work in favor of already industrialized powers, thereby increasing the very inequality he hoped to eliminate.

In short, Zipp has produced a beautifully written, well documented, deeply reflective account that shows mature reflection on its subject. He able captures the combination of shrewdness and naiveté embodied not only by Willkie but by the American diplomatic experience as a whole. The Willkie story remains relevant today.

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, 179.

<sup>11</sup> Eric F. Goldman, *The Crucial Decade-- And After, 1945-1960* (New York: Vintage, 1960), 114.

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 REVIEW BY ANDREW JOHNSTONE, UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER
 

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Wendell Willkie's political career was a rollercoaster ride in the early 1940s. He was a prominent anti-New Deal businessman who came from political obscurity to gain the Republican nomination for the presidency in 1940. Defeated by Franklin Roosevelt, his support for aid to Britain and Roosevelt's foreign policy kept him in the headlines in 1941. Following the American entry into the war, his political future was uncertain. Yet in the autumn of 1942 he undertook a semi-official forty-nine day around the world trip that would put him firmly back in the public limelight. The book recounting that trip, *One World*, made Willkie a bestselling author in 1943.<sup>12</sup> However, Willkie failed in his attempt to gain the Republican nomination for the presidency in 1944, and he died a month before the election took place. Since then, historians have hardly forgotten him, but much of the interest in Willkie has focused on his run for the Oval Office in 1940.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Samuel Zipp's *The Idealist* focuses on Willkie's circumnavigation of the globe and the implications of that trip for American foreign policy (and beyond). The result is a fascinating, well-written book that – just like Willkie – asks difficult questions about the place of America in the world.

*The Idealist* offers a brief examination of Willkie's life up to 1940, but his globetrotting trip is very much at the book's heart. The particulars of that trip, including its numerous stops in Africa, the Middle East, the Soviet Union, and China, comprise over half of its contents. Yet the book does far more than simply repeat Willkie's own recollections from *One World*. *The Idealist* puts Willkie's various visits to Egypt and Turkey, Lebanon and Palestine, and Iraq and Iran into their wider context, revealing a wide variety of international perspectives on the nature of the war and the shape of the future peace. The final third of the book examines the last two years of Willkie's life, as Willkie tried unsuccessfully to convert his public popularity into political popularity, and struggled to translate his 'One World' philosophy into a practical political program. Zipp's combination of detailed travelogue and big-picture analysis is impressive throughout. The research is extensive, drawing on a vast array of archival and secondary sources in order to examine American views on numerous aspects of the war and the wider world. These include post-war planning, relations with major allies (especially the USSR and China), questions of imperialism and nationalism, the role of technology and the perception of a shrinking globe, as well as domestic politics and racial issues in the United States.<sup>14</sup> The book engages with so many different historiographical debates that it will be of interest to a wide audience. Zipp uses Willkie very effectively as an American lens to view the mid-century world.

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<sup>12</sup> Wendell Willkie, *One World* (London: Cassell, 1943).

<sup>13</sup> See for example, Warren Moscow, *Roosevelt & Willkie* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968); Steve Neal, *Dark Horse: A Biography of Wendell Willkie* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984); Charles Peters, *Five Days in Philadelphia: The Amazing "We Want Willkie!" Convention of 1940 and How it Freed FDR to Save the Western World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005); Susan Dunn, *1940: FDR, Willkie, Lindbergh, Hitler – the Election Amid the Storm* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Andrew Johnstone, "'A Godsend to the Country?' Roosevelt, Willkie, and the Election of 1940" in Johnstone and Andrew Priest, eds., *US Presidential Elections and Foreign Policy: Candidates, Campaigns, and Global Politics from FDR to Bill Clinton* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 19-39; David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Willkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country, and Conceived a New World Order* (New York: Liveright, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> It would require a historiographical essay to survey the literature on the various themes covered in *The Idealist*, so this note does little more than make some preliminary suggestions. On postwar planning, see Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *FDR and the Creation of the U.N.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Patrick J. Hearden, *Architects of Globalism: Building a New World Order during World War II* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2002); Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020). On relations with allies, see Frank Costigliola, *Roosevelt's Lost Alliances: How Personal Politics helped start the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013); Susan Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin: Portrait of a Partnership* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015). On imperialism, see Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Christopher D. O'Sullivan, *FDR and the End of Empire: The Origins of American Power in the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Aiyaz Husain, *Mapping the End of Empire:*

Zipp highlights how Willkie raised important but difficult questions about the state of the world and indeed, the state of his own nation. In particular, Willkie's journey highlighted the issue of imperialism and the need for an end to colonial oppression. The war was one of freedom, but Willkie argued that it had to be a war of freedom and liberation for everyone. In *One World*, he claimed that "freedom means the orderly but scheduled abolition of the colonial system. Whether we like it or not, this is true."<sup>15</sup> This was not a view shared by America's allies in London and Moscow. Closer to home, Willkie boldly acknowledged that the United States had imperial issues of its own in places like Puerto Rico, though Zipp rightly notes he saw American imperialism, both formal and informal, as somewhat exceptional. Still, Willkie also acknowledged domestic racial injustice. "Our very proclamations of what we are fighting for have rendered our own inequities self-evident. When we talk of freedom and opportunity for all nations, the mocking paradoxes in our own society become so clear they can no longer be ignored."<sup>16</sup> Willkie believed the United States had a responsibility to lead, but he recognised his nation was flawed.

The future therefore required a bold new vision. In *One World*, Willkie argued for a new international system that was more than the "Anglo-French-American solution" that merely retained "the old colonial imperialisms under new and fancy terms" represented by the League of Nations. He also argued for greater consideration of economic issues, calling for free trade and international development as "political internationalism without economic internationalism is a house built upon sand."<sup>17</sup> But finding fault in the League of Nations and the tariff policies of the 1930s was easier than finding a coherent set of solutions to those faults. Willkie's rhetoric worked best when applied with a broad brush. His argument that the United States had to avoid "narrow nationalism" and "international imperialism" was a relatively easy sell in 1943. The call for the creation of "a world in which there shall be an equality of opportunity for every race and every nation" was more controversial.<sup>18</sup> How was that world to be achieved?

Unfortunately, Willkie lacked a coherent plan to create his ideal 'one world.' He did an excellent job of asking how the United States should act in the world. *The Idealist* makes it clear that Willkie was less effective in providing an answer. Zipp astutely positions Willkie as "more expansive and idealistic than the nationalist [Henry] Luce, less enamored of state planning than [Henry] Wallace, and more democratic than [Sumner] Welles or the elite committees" leaving Willkie

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*American and British Strategic Visions in the Postwar World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014). On technology and a shrinking globe, see Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Alan K. Henrikson, "FDR and the 'World-wide Arena,'" in *FDR's World: War, Peace and Legacies* ed. David B. Woolner, Warren F. Kimball and David Reynolds (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Jenifer Van Vleck, *Empire of the Air: Aviation and the American Ascendancy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013). On domestic issues, see Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1967); James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); M. Todd Bennett, *One World, Big Screen: Hollywood, the Allies, and World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). On racial issues see Ronald Takaki, *Double Victory: A Multicultural History of America in World War II* (New York: Little, Brown, 2000); Kevin Kruse and Stephen Tuck (eds), *Fog of War: The Second World War and the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: Liveright, 2013). For a historiographical review of literature on World War II, see Andrew Johnstone, "U.S. Foreign Relations during World War II" in Christopher R. W. Dietrich, ed., *A Companion to the History of U.S. Foreign Relations: Colonial Era to Present* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> Willkie, *One World*, 151-152.

<sup>16</sup> Willkie, 156.

<sup>17</sup> Willkie, 160-161.

<sup>18</sup> Willkie, 165.

“second only to the two Roosevelts, Franklin and Eleanor, as a popular *and* influential advocate for internationalism.” (217). But beyond that, it was not clear exactly what Willkie’s internationalism would look like.

Like many of his generation, Willkie served in World War I, was inspired by Woodrow Wilson’s call for a League of Nations, and was subsequently disappointed by the American decision not to join the League. But Willkie never lost faith in the idea of the League. By the end of the 1930s, Willkie held a worldview similar to that of those on the conservative end of the increasingly fragmented peace movement, such as the League of Nations Association. In the face of fascist aggression in Asia and Europe, words were not enough, and the United States could not remain aloof from world affairs. Some kind of collective security machinery, like that suggested by Franklin Roosevelt’s quarantine speech of 1937, would be required to keep the future peace. Yet Willkie was never one for details. He lacked a blueprint of his own. Despite his popular appeal, there is no evidence that Willkie had knowledge of the State Department’s planning process. As the war progressed, he was reluctant to sign up to proposals offered by the many private organisations investigating postwar plans, such as the Commission to Study the Organization of Peace.

Rather than criticising this lack of detail, Zipp notes how Willkie “floated above” (62) competing visions of international organization during the war. However, Willkie’s lack of commitment makes it difficult to see a convincing plan in his soaring rhetoric. Zipp highlights Willkie’s desire for political independence, likely fuelled by his ongoing ambitions for the presidency, which no doubt influenced his unwillingness to show his hand. He even refused the offer to lead Americans United for World Organization, a group created in 1944 specifically to promote American entry into the new international organization.<sup>19</sup> Willkie informally supported Americans United, but that organization’s limitations reflect his own, as divisions within it developed almost immediately in response to the Dumbarton Oaks conference of 1944. While there was agreement on the need for an international organization, there was disagreement over exactly what it should look like. Divisions emerged over whether the United Nations Organization should be dominated by great nations holding the power of veto, or whether it should evolve into a world government. We will never know if Willkie would have supported calls for a stronger international organization, or the plan ultimately proposed by the Roosevelt administration. Did he simply believe that the creation of an international organization would be enough? Zipp does not speculate. Instead, he praises Willkie’s admirable if rather vague geopolitical desire to avoid both “Anglo-American dominance” of Europe and “a standoff with the Russians” (307).

It is impossible to read *The Idealist* without thinking of contemporary debates about America’s place in the world, largely because Zipp directly connects Willkie to the present day. Zipp is openly sympathetic to Willkie’s vision for an engaged America that avoids narrow nationalism and imperialistic tendencies in search of an “interdependent internationalism” (10). Zipp argues that Willkie’s “diagnosis of the value of global interdependence has never been more prescient” (14). He concludes that today offers “an opportunity” for the United States to accept a role of “true interdependence” that would “displace the paternalistic right to lead a benighted world” and see democratic ideals “perfected, shared and transformed into a new worldly spirit” (320). While I do not disagree with Zipp, the United States has struggled with the opportunity to create an interdependent world ever since Willkie passed away. While the history presented here is truly fascinating and superbly written, the book is a little less convincing when looking forward.

*The Idealist* concludes by examining the legacy of Willkie’s activism and the ‘one world’ idea. This includes tracing the varied use of the phrase “one world” in the 75 years following the book’s publication. World government advocates used it in the late 1940s; proponents of globalization used it very differently in the 1990s. It is not clear exactly how much credit Willkie deserves here, as the phrase is so brief and so vague that it can easily provide alternate meanings for different audiences. Zipp even notes how the phrase pervaded popular culture. Sting released a song entitled *One World (Not Three)* in the 1980s, though another 1980s song entitled *One World* that leapt to mind was by the band Utopia. It is hard to be

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Johnstone, *Dilemmas of Internationalism: the American Association for the United Nations and US Foreign Policy, 1941-1948* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 99-100.

certain if Willkie's call for a more interdependent and less militaristic vision of U.S. foreign policy is a utopian one, but so far, history is not on his side.

Still, Willkie's story remains fascinating, and Zipp tells it superbly. As *The Idealist* ably shows, Willkie was in many ways ahead of his time. His vision of a globally engaged yet relatively benign America, that played a role befitting its power yet was aware of its limitations, has never gone away. It was a vision shared by many Americans during World War II and throughout the last 75 years, most notably in the late 1940s, the Vietnam War era, the immediate post-Cold War era, and today. The challenge for those who share it remains translating that vision into a coherent reality.

## REVIEW BY ADRIANE LENTZ-SMITH, DUKE UNIVERSITY

If Wendell Willkie were alive today, the Proud Boys would have him on a list. A heartland internationalist turned anti-New-Deal businessman turned 1940 Republican candidate for President, Willkie seems almost unimaginable—certainly “improbable,” to quote his 2018 biographer David Levering Lewis—in our political moment.<sup>20</sup> His outsized, garrulous engagement with the world evokes some of the bigger personalities of the early twentieth century: Louisiana Governor Huey Long minus the legacy of agrarian populism; or President Woodrow Wilson with a more earthy and winning personality. His idealism feels discordant with the Republican Party of the early twenty-first century, defined as it has become by a besieged America First mentality so antithetical to Willkie’s wide-armed worldliness and his emphasis on interdependence over boundaries. To be fair, Willkie seemed out of step with the party politics of his own era, too, despite being able to generate a mass appeal. The figure who emerges from Samuel Zipp’s excellent book, *The Idealist: Wendell Willkie’s Wartime Quest to Build One World*, is simultaneously quixotic and savvy, out of step because he has fashioned his own drum and invited others to march to his beat.

To call *The Idealist* a biography is to mischaracterize it, although it draws on state documents, Willkie’s papers, and others’ accounts of him to paint a rich and vivid picture of an outsized personality. Were Zipp’s book solely a portrait of Willkie as an improbable Republican, it would be valuable and engrossing in its own right, but it proves both more ambitious and more rewarding than that too. In some ways, the book is reminiscent of David Milne’s *Worldmaking* or Christopher McKnight Nichols’s *Promise and Peril*, both of which use biography as a frame on which to build a history of some of the same ideas that animate this book: the conflicts and overlap between internationalism, nationalism and isolationism; how to frame and face an ever intensifying global age.<sup>21</sup> To explore these questions, Zipp’s book takes as its organizing hook not biography, per se, but Willkie’s “unruly journey” in the fall of 1942 from the eastern American coast across Africa and the Middle East, through the Soviet Union, and on to China (9).

*The Idealist* offers a grounded portrait of World War II as a truly global conflict—one that upended and destroyed the lives of millions of people. It is hard to take in the war’s devastation or Willkie’s fraught bonhomie with Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin without thinking of Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands*, nor to consider Willkie’s faith in modernization after war without recalling Timothy Mitchell’s *Rule of Experts*.<sup>22</sup> In Zipp’s deft telling, the tack between insistent optimism and sober reality serves not as a backdrop but as the conditioning field on which events unfold. Willkie’s circumnavigation of the globe took him to multiple territories reckoning with the fallout of empire and working to bring about a postcolonial future. Both the Allied position and the local leaders’ support felt fragile and contingent. The key actors he encountered in places like Egypt, Turkey, or Iran knew too much—and had lived through too much—to share the Allies’ faith in themselves as the trustworthy protagonists in a good war. Wooing them to the Allied cause required some kind of assurance that “the leading democracies of the world” were ready at war’s end “to stand up and be counted upon for the freedom of others” (204). The wartime world, Willkie’s journey reminds us, was simultaneously a decolonizing one.

The heart of the book lies with these encounters between Willkie as America’s most prominent private citizen and a host of state builders, nationalists, politicians, and diplomats in what would soon come to be known as the Third World and the Iron Curtain. Indeed, part of the story involves disrupting the teleology of these Cold War geographies. The idea of “One World” that Willkie refined in his travels emphasized connected fates rather than entrenched rivalries. Stressing economic

<sup>20</sup> David Levering Lewis, *The Improbable Wendell Willkie: The Businessman Who Saved the Republican Party and His Country, and Conceived a New World Order* (New York: Liveright, 2018).

<sup>21</sup> David Milne, *Worldmaking: The Art and Science of Diplomacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).



and political interdependence intensified by technological advancement—globalization, in contemporary parlance—Willkie promulgated what Zipp dubs “a new kind of geopolitical vision of a world remade” and “a new kind of global imagination” (240). The book he published after his world tour, a travelogue-cum-position statement titled *One World*, became for a time the bestselling nonfiction book of the twentieth century, but its popularity with the American public did not translate into influence over U. S. policy.<sup>23</sup> Former supporter Clare Booth Luce captured the sentiment of the foreign policy mainstream when she dismissed visions like Willkie’s (and the even more idealistic Vice President Henry Wallace’s) as just so much “globaloney” (279).

Zipp distills through Willkie the work of scholars such as Carol Anderson, Robert Vitalis, and Elizabeth Borgwardt.<sup>24</sup> The value of using Willkie to organize a history of American ideas about rights and power, development and racial hierarchy, and nationalisms old and new lies not just in the possibilities he evokes but in the limits he underscores. Those limits partially stemmed from the resistance that Willkie met from inchoate Cold Warriors, but they arose, too, from the assumptions he shared with many of those same people. Willkie placed immense faith in what *Life* magazine called “the simple magic of being American” (134). And the even more powerful magic of being an American internationalist. He spoke of self-determination with a broader commitment than his idol Woodrow Wilson ever did, and he embraced the principles of the Atlantic Charter more capaciously than did his friend and rival President Franklin Roosevelt. As Willkie charged and charmed his way across spaces of waning European empire and waxing American influence, he moved with an assurance that Americans’ goals could match those of his hosts, that they all embraced—or could be taught to embrace—the broad spread of democracy in pursuit of peace. Moreover, in this new and improved version of Wilsonianism, it mattered whether white Americans stood with or against Jim Crow—“race imperialism,” he called it in a speech to the NAACP in 1942 and in his book the following year. Echoing African Americans in the wartime Double V campaign, he reminded readers of *One World* that the great lesson of the World War was that “one cannot fight the forces and ideas of imperialism abroad and maintain any form of imperialism at home” (252).

Yet for all his rejection of race imperialism when it came to Black civil rights, Willkie did not credit the extent to which empire had already shaped American state and nation. Like many of his predecessors and contemporaries, he had absorbed both lessons in “how to hide an empire” and tacit assumptions that America would serve as model, beacon, and helmsman in any postwar order.<sup>25</sup> Black commentators understood that “until Puerto Rico obtains self-rule,” the decolonizing world would never trust American idealism. Willkie, by contrast, both understated the extent and the nature of American territorial empire and misapprehended the consequences of the newer American empire crystallizing during the war (256). His misunderstanding did ideological work: Willkie embodied the kind of bighearted openness that Americans liked to associate with themselves, but, as Zipp notes, those claims of good-natured fellowship were “often stories of American niceness as innocence” (257). Inasmuch as that offhand innocence served as a denial of responsibility, it left room for “one world” to devolve into fields of American self-interest. The newly formed United Nations, undergirded and hobbled as it was by a defensive Great Power nationalism, was one example of Willkie’s ideas diluted.

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<sup>23</sup> Wendell L. Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943).

<sup>24</sup> Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation, 1941-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African-American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America’s Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019); Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

If interdependence was the key to *One World's* ideas, so, too, is it core of *The Idealist's* structure. Zipp aims less to intervene in one conversation than to bring a number of conversations together. His prodigious research around Willkie is bolstered by a daunting amount of synthesis: several chapters provide mini political histories of each new place on Willkie's itinerary. Although area specialists will find little new in these accounts, every stop is vividly, poignantly, and occasionally hilariously rendered. The value lies in the juxtaposition and the accrual of understanding. This is a book filled with grand ideas and even grander plans—interdependence, freedom, development, and modernization. But grand ideas land on messy earth, and each place has its own histories, possible trajectories, internecine rivalries, and political complications. Zipp tells a big story about Americans' ideas about the nation's power by exploring how Willkie tweaked his thinking in the specifics of each encounter, how the press and his handlers processed and narrated those encounters, and how all parties sometimes looked past the facts on the ground to admire their own reflections.

It takes moxie to tackle to a book with this kind of sweep, and skill to pull it off. Zipp is a skilled craftsman and a lovely writer. Reading *The Idealist*, I found myself pausing to admire the basics: a confident opening paragraph or an expert use of detail. More viscerally, I found myself stopping on occasion to marvel at a sentence: "Like so many nations, Lebanon was an idea before it was a place," Zipp writes in the first third of the book, "but the place it became could never be made as pure as the original idea" (93). As both a piece of prose and a summary of the postcolonial nation, that sentence shines. So, too, does Zipp's argument in the book's final pages that "freedom is a liquid and capacious sentiment" whose "power can be put to work for any number of ends" (305).

In the end, this is where Zipp leaves us, with the Willkie's idealism, liquid and capacious. In one reading, his vision of one world petered out not long after his 1944 death, too diluted to matter. Zipp, by contrast, argues that his ideas lived on. "One World" became the slogan of the nonaligned movement, embraced by Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and adapted for the times. In later decades it become more sentiment than politics, expressed with a certain urgency but not much of a plan. From the standpoint of the dystopian 2020s, Willkie's vision seems achingly distant, not just improbable but perhaps impossible. "We must love one another or die," poet W. H. Auden wrote to mark the outbreak of World War II.<sup>26</sup> In our modern iteration of globalization, where some of the strongest global networks connect over their commitment to violent racial nationalism, it is hard to know which we have chosen.

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<sup>26</sup> W. H. Auden, "September 1, 1939," *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940).

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 REVIEW BY SARAH MILLER-DAVENPORT, UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD
 

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Historians have often dismissed Wendell Willkie as, well, an idealist, one whose romantic worldview and quest to convert fellow Americans to internationalism was based on a quixotic and contradictory understanding of U.S. foreign policy and global affairs. His immense popularity likewise reflected a short-lived utopian movement—a national flirtation with world government, fueled by wartime emotionalism and Willkie’s own impassioned advocacy—that ebbed as quickly as it peaked, as hard-nosed postwar planning gave way to ever-more uncompromising Cold War strategy.

Samuel Zipp’s sweeping account of the travels of this unlikely citizen-diplomat, who barnstormed the world full of “Hoosier heartiness” as an unofficial U.S. envoy during World War II, rescues Willkie from the “idealist” epithet (214). Zipp does not deny Willkie’s idealism, obviously, but, by combining biography, travelogue, and deep contextualization, he showcases Willkie’s savvy and, more importantly, the truly global appeal of Willkie’s internationalist vision. If Willkie was quixotic, then so too were nationalists across the colonized world.

One of *The Idealist*’s main strengths is how it uses Willkie’s wartime journey to give voice to those anti-colonial struggles and to show, just as Willkie himself claimed, that the war was upending the old imperial order. As Willkie made his way from the Middle East to China and then the Soviet Union, he met a motley group of characters, from the Shah of Iran to Soviet workers to the (possibly murderous) wife of a Free French official. In nearly every encounter the question of what the postwar world should look like came up, and Zipp conveys just how fragile European rule was in the colonies and mandates the Allies hoped to bring into the fold. Suddenly, the balance of power was starting to shift, as colonial subjects were emboldened to demand meaningful change in exchange for their allegiance in the war against the Nazis. Throughout the book, Zipp grounds Willkie’s itinerary in broader context by zooming out to explain the legacies of colonization and how they produced anti-colonial resistance in each of the locations he visited. Such detours could have been disorienting in the hands of a less gifted writer, but Zipp ably guides the reader through these complex histories and relates them to Willkie’s mission.

Although not exactly a radical leftist, Willkie emerged as one of the most vocal, and most visible, U.S. advocates of global decolonization during the 1940s. As he traveled throughout the world and made his position clear, his presence gave colonized peoples the opportunity to articulate their grievances to a sympathetic American ear with a direct line to President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Because of his apparent sincerity on decolonization, Willkie became “a magnet for inside dope,” as nationalist leaders and ordinary people alike sought him out to convey their hopes and concerns (67). Much like President Woodrow Wilson, whose professed commitment to “self-determination” helped inspire anti-colonial resistance in the aftermath of World War I, Willkie came to serve as a symbol of American anti-imperialism.<sup>27</sup> But Willkie, in stark contrast to Wilson, believed that the principle of self-determination should be applied worldwide, not only to Europe.

In this Willkie was met with fierce pushback from colonial administrators, particularly the British. In his travels in the former Ottoman Empire, he had to contend with British officials who sought to sell him on the virtues of the British empire, and who “were incapable of seeing that the world was changing all around them” (67). And perhaps no one was more committed to the imperial status quo than the British Prime Minister himself, who, in a rousing 1942 speech, insisted that he had “not become the King’s First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire” (208). Despite his signing of the Atlantic Charter—which claimed that all signatories would “respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live”—Winston Churchill, much like Wilson, could not imagine that right extending to British colonial subjects. But while U.S. government officials were generally committed to indulging Churchill and putting aside the colonial question for the duration of the war, “the PM’s intransigence fueled Willkie’s cause” (209).

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<sup>27</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Although Willkie certainly deserves credit for making the case against empire at a time when other powerful Americans were focused on appeasing the British, I wonder if Zipp credits him perhaps too much. Willkie might have styled himself a “town crier on the city walls alerting the citizenry to the great stakes of the war,” but he was far from the only American calling for an end to empire (57). Here Zipp could have zoomed out to situate Willkie in the context not only of global anti-imperialism, but its domestic U.S. variety as well. Willkie might have been the international avatar of U.S. anti-imperialism in the 1940s, but his views spoke to a robust tradition that went back to the nineteenth century and continued to have resonance, particularly among Black internationalists, through World War II and beyond.<sup>28</sup> The focus on Willkie—and perhaps this is one of the limits of the biographical approach—risks exceptionalizing him as the main proponent of an idea that historically held wide appeal in the United States. The popularity of *One World* among American audiences can certainly be attributed in large part to the author himself, but it also cannot be explained without reference to American anti-imperialism, and the ways in which it helped shape prevailing ideas of U.S. national identity.

It is true that many Americans were altogether clueless when it came to empire: Zipp cites a startling poll from 1946 revealing that 50 percent of respondents were unfamiliar with the concept of “imperialism.” And only six percent of those who understood imperialism believed the U.S. was imperialistic (289). Such attitudes, of course, belied the fact that the United States in 1946 not only had a long history of settler colonialism in North America and ‘informal’ imperialism abroad, but it held numerous formal colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific. (Meanwhile, although it was granting independence to the Philippines, it was also in the process of taking sovereignty over the Pacific Trust Territory.) Willkie, too, seems to have been unwilling to acknowledge the history, and durability, of U.S. empire. He critiqued U.S. imperialism, but he applied the term mainly to racial segregation within the continental United States and to its more informal practices of economic coercion abroad.

But this ignorance of America’s colonial empire—both Willkie’s and his fellow citizens’—was, in many ways, a product of U.S. empire itself, and of U.S. anti-imperialism. The two operated in dialectical fashion to convince Americans of their nation’s imperial innocence. Shortly after the United States took possession of Puerto Rico, Hawai‘i, the Philippines, and Guam in 1898, a vocal anti-imperialist movement helped dim American enthusiasm for colonialism. Made up of those who were morally outraged by U.S. colonial practices and nativists who were repulsed by the idea that masses of “foreign” nonwhite peoples were now formally part of the United States, the anti-imperialist movement was central to the “hiding” of U.S. empire.<sup>29</sup> Both the racists and the moralists saw U.S. overseas colonialism as a deviation from American tradition; both wished to return the United States to its true republican form and forget that empire ever happened. By 1934, when Congress sketched out a timeline for eventual Philippine independence in 1946, the official line was that the United States was not engaged in empire per se, but in tutoring colonial subjects in the ways of self-government.

Zipp highlights the absence of U.S. empire in Willkie’s thinking at several points throughout *The Idealist*, arguing that “*One World* treated American empire as an afterthought, assuring readers that the tide of American expansion was receding” (255). Willkie’s dismissive treatment of U.S. empire, and his reliance on “stories of American niceness” that ignored “histories of conquest and inequality,” Zipp writes, “threatened to lodge a persistent note of triumphalism at the heart of his call for one world” (257). I would argue, however, that Willkie’s inability to grapple with those histories wasn’t only a

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<sup>28</sup> Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>29</sup> Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019). On anti-imperialism and its contradictions, see Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). For broader histories of U.S. anti-imperialism, see Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and 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).

hypocritical blind spot that harmed his broader cause (though it was that). Rather, Willkie's project depended on the erasure of U.S. empire. His flair for playing the part of the affable, benevolent American abroad relied on his deep faith in American righteousness, and in a refusal to see any parallels between U.S. and European colonialism. He believed what he was selling.

So, too, did many other Americans. As one of Willkie's readers told him in a fan letter, "America's hands are clean, thank God!" (255). This enthusiastic imperial denial carried over into the postwar years, even as the United States exploited its superpower status to engage in all kinds of dirty business abroad. Indeed, the United States government mobilized this "clean hands" narrative as it insinuated itself in the decolonizing world, using it to help justify any military interventions or other acts of coercion as short-term imperatives that served the ultimate goal of creating a post-colonial order of independent, modern, nation-states committed to democracy and free trade.

Zipp suggests at the end of *The Idealist* that Willkie's idealism fell out of favor as the United States adopted an aggressive military strategy to contain global Communism during the Cold War. But Willkie's calls for global cooperation lived on in distorted fashion in Cold War policy in the decolonizing world. Discourses of cooperation were central to the U.S. strategic goal of winning the allegiance of the newly emerging nations in Asia and Africa. Hawai'i statehood, for instance, was promoted as a way to prove to the world that the United States "practice[d] what we preach" when it came to self-government and demonstrate its commitment to 'mutual understanding' between Americans and Asians, who constituted the majority ethnic group in Hawai'i. (Statehood, not incidentally, served to obscure the long and troubling history of U.S. colonialism in the islands, including the U.S.-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy.) The need to foster "mutual understanding," meanwhile, was touted as a key component of broader cultural diplomacy and development efforts, perhaps most notably in the Peace Corps.<sup>30</sup> However wide the gap between rhetoric and practice, the self-imagining of the United States as an anti-imperial global power shaped U.S. behavior abroad in profound ways.

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<sup>30</sup> "Practice what we preach" quote from Secretary for the Interior Fred Seaton, testifying before the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in 1959; "mutual understanding" was a commonly used phrase in Cold War cultural exchange programs in Hawai'i (and in other cultural diplomacy programs). See Sarah Miller-Davenport, *Gateway State: Hawai'i and the Cultural Transformation of American Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 45, 79-115.

## REVIEW BY DARA ORENSTEIN, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

*The Idealist* is a biography of a failed visionary. Samuel Zipp resurrects a Don Quixote from Indiana, a business executive with political aspirations whose 1943 blockbuster manifesto *One World*—a travelogue that anticipated the commonsense of globalism—now languishes in the dustbin of history. Wendell Willkie, our knight errant, lost two successive bids to represent the Republican Party in the White House, in 1940 and 1944. After the first defeat he was poised to cross the aisle for a consolation prize, but President Franklin Delano Roosevelt decided against appointing him as secretary of state. After the second defeat, which came at the Republican convention, he was eyed for a variety of high-profile positions in the next Roosevelt administration, including that of the U.S. ambassador to the nascent United Nations, but he died of a heart attack before the general election. He was 52 years old. “In the immediate aftermath of his death many believed that his name would never be forgotten,” Zipp notes, underscoring the extent of Willkie’s obscurity in our day (308). I myself can attest to this contrast. I knew of little more than Willkie’s bestselling book before I read Zipp’s elegant, entertaining, and occasionally salacious account of his exploits; to wit, I was unaware of his propensity for “freeing himself, noisily, of superfluous bodily gasses” in meetings with dignitaries (132) and for writing speeches “in the buff” (180).

Zipp frames Willkie’s fall from prominence as the result of a life cut short, not as the sign of a limitation of Willkie’s. *The Idealist* is not a biography of a “born loser,” or of a “minor character,” or of a major character whose sex or skin color all but guaranteed marginalization from birth, to cite a few alternative approaches to archival recovery.<sup>31</sup> This study is about a big white guy—“he has the well-organized bulkiness of a healthy bear,” admired the British writer Rebecca West (39)—who popularized a big idea. *One World*, which was “by some accounts the fastest-selling book ever published in America” (3), traced out, in the middle of World War II, a cognitive map for global interdependence, helping Americans understand themselves as more than Americans, as members of the family of man.<sup>32</sup> “In just a few short months,” Zipp writes, “the book became a talisman of wartime life, its title a new shorthand for a whole worldview and a slogan around which internationalists everywhere rallied” (239). *The Idealist* is not a full-fledged biography. It spotlights the trip that Willkie revisits in *One World*, and its narrative frisson lies in our knowledge of its author’s abrupt passing. We forget him at our peril, Zipp insists; “we risk missing what almost happened, and what could happen still” (5).

What did happen, meanwhile, was so epic that it comes across in *The Idealist* as something of a gimmick, almost as if Willkie had intended his journey from the start to be the basis for a book and a film. The trip lasted seven weeks and spanned 31,000 miles, covering thirteen countries on five continents and dozens of meetings with heads of state and their associates. The trip involved an airplane, at a time when air travel was regarded as “more potential than practical, the province of the rich and the daring” (16). The trip, in short, was front-page news. In the judgement of *Time* magazine, “Wendell Willkie had seen the war as no other private citizen had ever seen it, perhaps more of it than even Winston Churchill has seen so far” (212). Such grandiose assessments would seem to support my hunch that I was not alone as a reader of *The Idealist* in feeling, initially, more intrigued by the trip than by the man who took it. Indeed, one challenge Zipp faced with this biography was to ensure that the man did not pale in comparison to the trip. In other words, for this biography to justify its existence, the man needed to be made to matter in his own right, and then his significance needed to be linked with that of

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Scott Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Joyce Johnson, *Minor Characters: A Young Women’s Coming of Age in the Beat Orbit* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983); Lisa Cohen, *All We Know: Three Lives* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012); and Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> In the annals of middlebrow aesthetics, we can think of *One World*, I submit, as a prospectus for *The Family of Man*, the celebrated photography exhibit that debuted at New York City’s Museum of Modern Art in 1955. Both the book and the exhibit receive mention in Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

the trip. The content of Willkie's persona needed to find its fitting expression in the form of the trip—the globalist circling the globe.

The key to how Zipp succeeds brilliantly in this task is in his attentiveness to Willkie's formation as a Midwesterner. Midwesterners have tended to be deemed apathetic towards the wider world because of their distance from the seacoasts. Supposedly they have typified isolationism—if they went to Paris, they searched for an American bar.<sup>33</sup> But Zipp manages to render the man as the perfect embodiment of the trip by characterizing the Midwest of the early twentieth century as a residual frontier, “a place that looked back fondly on a pioneer past” (29). Joining a scholarly trend that stretches from Bill Cronon on Chicago to Kristin Hoganson on Champaign to Walter Johnson on St. Louis, Zipp apprehends the “mid” in Midwest not as an average or a center but rather as a go-between, a transit point.<sup>34</sup> In this light, Willkie was raised to be adept at navigating borderlines, growing up the son of lawyers—the middling class—in a city on a prairie. As Zipp puts it, “he could talk wheat harvests one day and address an audience at Carnegie Hall the next” (41). Mobility defined him. Summers spent working in a tin mill and hopping trains to find odd jobs in the Northwest prepared him to tour Soviet factories and to withstand nearly two months of bumpy, cacophonous plane flights. Add to this eclectic résumé the “neighborly folksiness” for which Midwesterners have been lauded (11), and we can agree that Willkie was born for a marquee role as “a new kind of international American” (58).

*The Idealist* brims with colorful depictions of the gaseous, boundary-crossing Willkie, yet it never becomes cartoonish; one of its chief accomplishments as a work of biography is that it rigorously refrains from hagiography. Trained as a cultural historian, Zipp frequently remarks on the mythologizing of this or that aspect of “Willkie,” whether by Willkie's chroniclers or Willkie himself. This posture is especially evident in Zipp's meticulous treatment of the textuality of his primary sources. Sometimes he doubles back on them to read them against the grain, such as when he appends an incisive caveat to his summary of sexist and Orientalist representations of Mayling Soong, “the inimitable Madame Chiang” (195). His meta-commentary begins, “These accounts, most often crafted by men...” (196). And sometimes he weighs in more subtly, such as when he opens a profile of Willkie's parents thusly: “Willkie's father, Herman, was a lawyer, as was his wife, and they found themselves in the middle of the action” (21). His wife? Presumably she had a name? After three additional paragraphs of erasure, Zipp teases us with a new paragraph: “Henrietta Trisch Willkie was by all accounts remarkable.” She earns a paragraph of her own, as it were, after Zipp initially seems to subsume her to her husband in the conventional mode. These and other vignettes exemplify a feminist mode of interpretation that is essential for a biography of a man who simultaneously sought public office and conducted numerous extramarital affairs as “open secrets,” taking advantage of “the privilege that powerful men of his era enjoyed” (39).

Zipp's sensitivity to gaps and silences in the archive means not only that Willkie is revealed as the right man for the trip in all his complexity, but also that the trip itself comes under scrutiny to strong effect. The trip drew praise as a feat of intercultural exchange. Willkie schmoozed with the citizens of thirteen countries! Except that, of course, he did no such thing. He met with bigwigs and bureaucrats, and in between banquets he tried to peel off to mingle in the streets. Time and again, Zipp highlights this disjuncture in the design of the trip. To be sure, there are moments when Zipp describes how Willkie bonded with strangers, usually in impromptu, private conversations. “In Egypt and beyond,” Zipp quips, “he became a magnet for inside dope” (67). But mostly what registers is Willkie's remove. There are repeated mentions of how “Willkie longed for more contact with ordinary people” (114). And there are a couple of references to outright manipulation of this desire, as in China, where Willkie met “staged crowds” (178) and visited a battlefield that he suspected had been contrived for his benefit. Altogether, what Zipp evokes is less a panorama of face-to-face meetings between Willkie and waves of common folk—the Whitmanesque romance of *One World*—than a close-up of a millionaire who was far more

<sup>33</sup> I am indebted to Andrew Seal for these observations on the provincialism of Midwesterners.

<sup>34</sup> William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Kristin L. Hoganson, *The Heartland: An American History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019); Walter Johnson, *The Broken Heart of America: St. Louis and the Violent History of the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

familiar and fleshed-out to the masses than they were to him. Willkie's humanitarian mission appears to have mirrored the logic of a photo-essay in *Life* magazine: "collecting encounters with anonymous people Americans might admire" (154).

This quality of estrangement reflected the coloniality of Willkie's expedition. As a critical geographer would point out, Willkie was as far away from "regular Iraqis" (119) when he was standing next to them in Baghdad as when he was sketching them on his typewriter back in Manhattan. The airplane—a dingbat of which playfully demarcates section breaks in *The Idealist*—signified both how distances were shrinking during the Jet Age, and, as historians have explored, how they were experienced unevenly, and measured in multiple ways.<sup>35</sup> "Looking down from above," as Zipp writes of Willkie's take-off from an Iraqi airfield, "it would have been hard for Willkie to discern any jeers behind the roaring turbines and the lively acclaim still echoing in his ears" (124-125). This quote is a sample of Zipp's deft handling of Willkie's viewpoint, and it speaks to one of the core questions of the book: How did American empire diverge from British empire? Zipp gives a wonderful gloss on American-style free-trade imperialism in Chapter 11 (pardon the pun), and he extends some of that analysis in the conclusion, which is a tour-de-force on the permutations of "one world" after Willkie's death, from the future-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's embrace of the idea in India on the eve of independence to the "One World Observatory" at the top of the post-9/11 World Trade Center. Mainly, though, his slant on this enduring question is to illuminate the personality, the disposition, of American power. He figures Willkie as a metonym for "an easy intimacy" (127) between the United States and the world. As a reporter declared, "Willkie was the Four Freedoms taken out of the realm of the abstract and clothed in a rumpled blue suit" (120). Willkie stood as the polar opposite of the imperious Brit. He typified how Americans fancied themselves "natural democrats" and "straight shooters" (136), as Zipp phrases it. He wanted nothing more than to buy the world a Coke with a handshake and a hearty laugh, first among equals.

Panning out from Willkie, Zipp further appraises American empire by contemplating it through an urbanist's lens. *The Idealist* is ostensibly about relations between nations, but its table of contents reveals a preoccupation with cities. This orientation is unsurprising, for another mark of Zipp's sensibility as a cultural historian is his interest in cities as structures of feeling. In his first book, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York*, he probes how a range of real estate developments needed to be "imagined" before they could be built; in his second book, *The Idealist*, he scales up this inquiry.<sup>36</sup> Willkie resembled city planners like Jane Jacobs and Robert Moses in that he promoted his policy agenda by attempting to persuade people to close their eyes and picture their surroundings in his terms. He tried to show that Akron and Kansas City were not so far apart from Ankara and Tehran: "If I had not known I was in Russia," as he enthused to journalists after witnessing Soviet Fordism, in a typical formulation, "I should have thought that I was in Detroit or Hartford" (147). While this focus on imagineering is the most prominent parallel with *Manhattan Projects*, others jump out, too. Both books touch down in cities at the dawn of the Cold War. Both books testify to the clout of urban-centered "middle-class modernizers" (121). We can even posit that both books are about New York City. After all, by the time Willkie ran for president he had graduated from "Pioneer Indiana" (155) to become a corporate titan in Manhattan whom Democrats mocked as "the barefoot boy from Wall Street" (42). And arguably *One World* paved the way for the United Nations, which was responsible for establishing New York City as "the center of the new 'one World,'" as Zipp reports in *Manhattan Projects*.<sup>37</sup> Emplotting Gotham's global reach by following Willkie from his home and back,

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<sup>35</sup> On the disparate impacts of time-space compression, see, for instance, Valeska Huber, *Channeling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). And on air travel itself, see Mia Bay, *Traveling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2021); and Luis Rafael Sánchez, *La Guagua Aérea* (San Juan: Editorial Cultural, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>37</sup> Zipp, *Manhattan Projects*, 64.



*The Idealist* contributes to scholarship on cities as imperial hubs, presaging the expanding influence of New York City after World War II.<sup>38</sup>

What is missing from this impressive work is a thoroughgoing engagement with political economy. Aside from the subject of free trade, *The Idealist* divorces the political from the economic. We do not learn how or if the trip benefitted various factions of capital (save for, by inference, the publishing industry tied to New York City). Nor do we discover whether or not Willkie held talks with business leaders, in the United States or abroad. And what we do glean tends to be relayed ad-hoc. For instance, we find out only in Chapter 10, glancingly, that Willkie “paid his own way” on the trip (222). He paid for what, precisely? He covered the salaries of the U.S. Army pilots? He reimbursed the U.S. government for fuel? Lingering on these and other logistical matters would have been a way to pursue the full implications of President Roosevelt’s nickname for Willkie—“Private Citizen Number One” (19)—and to ponder the trip as a preview of the neoliberal modes of governance that started to emerge during the American Century, as Amy Offner demonstrates in *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy*.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, more reckoning with capitalism and its operations in Willkie’s orbit writ large also would have better equipped us to evaluate his grasp of the goals of decolonization. How was Willkie’s egalitarian philosophy constrained by his managerial stints with Firestone and Commonwealth & Southern? Is it possible to be, as Zipp implies it is, “a borderline radical on questions of race and empire [and] a classic liberal on economic questions” (264)? Is capitalism separable from racism and imperialism? Whereas Walter White, the anti-Communist leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and Willkie’s friend, certainly thought so, we do well to remember that White’s Marxist peers, such as W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James, believed otherwise.<sup>40</sup> If Willkie thirsted for freedom for all—his mindset is summed up by Zipp in a lovely last line, “How can we live in the world without needing to dominate it?” (320)—then how did he conceptualize freedom, given that the workplace was (and is) a primary site of domination in everyday life?<sup>41</sup> Zipp concludes that “the postwar consensus unfairly dismissed Willkie’s ideas as naïve fantasies of global harmony” (307). But in the absence of a more complete portrait of Willkie and the material basis for his worldview, it seems that maybe “naïve” is just the word for his fealty to the gospel of so-called free enterprise. As James Baldwin wrote in 1953, “there is a great deal of will power involved in the white man’s naïveté.”<sup>42</sup>

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Willkie’s wealth and whiteness automatically invalidated his claim to radicalism; he could have gone the route of a contemporary like the activist and journalist John Reed, who valued social movements over

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<sup>38</sup> For a sampling of historical scholarship on New York City in the long twentieth century, which thus far has accented the moment of 1898 and its reverberations, see Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *Racial Migrations: New York City and the Revolutionary Politics of the Spanish Caribbean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Peter James Hudson, *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Fiona I. B. Ngò, *Imperial Blues: Geographies of Race and Sex in Jazz Age New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Mike Wallace, *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City from 1898 to 1919* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also B. Alex Beasley, “Globalization and the American City,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, 26 September 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.655>; and “Imperial Cityscapes: Urban History and Empire in the United States,” *Neoamericanist* 5:1 (2010), [www.neoamericanist.org/imperial-cityscapes](http://www.neoamericanist.org/imperial-cityscapes).

<sup>39</sup> Amy C. Offner, *Sorting Out the Mixed Economy: The Rise and Fall of Welfare and Developmental States in the Americas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>40</sup> On the Marxisms of Du Bois and James, see Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, new ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> Alex Gourevitch and Corey Robin, “Freedom Now,” *Polity* 52:3 (July 2020): 384-398.

<sup>42</sup> James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village,” in *Notes of a Native Son*, new ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 166. The essay first appeared in *Harper’s Magazine* in October 1953.

politicians and enlisted with the masses while writing about them (somehow Warren Beatty and *Reds* kept popping into my head for a biopic based on *The Idealist*). I am saying, though, that we cannot overemphasize the circumstances that enabled his star turn on the stage of history, particularly when we look at him now, from the perspective of our own moment. At a time when many of us have been confined at home indefinitely, unless we have been stuck in jobs that have exposed us to premature death, the sheer wondrousness of his “quixotic endeavor” (11) is that much more striking. As I think about Willkie’s continent-hopping access to the oneness of the world, a fundamental problem *The Idealist* raises for me is how to tell stories about elite historical actors. Questions of causality have long nagged at me, and acutely so after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, after our jolt of awareness that the collective, dead and alive, acts on the individual with more consequence than the reverse. *The Idealist* ultimately is a “great-man biography,” which David Huyssen defines as “a linear account of one person’s life that leads teleologically toward the subject’s active transformation of history, privileging the subject as the primary, causal historical force.”<sup>43</sup> As such, *The Idealist* presumes that had Willkie lived he very well might have altered the course of twentieth-century geopolitics. No one can test this speculation, Zipp is careful to grant, even as it amplifies the book’s message that we should heed the idealist’s call for “economic collaboration and racial equality” (203). But what if Willkie’s life imparts a different lesson? What if, instead, the take-away is that Willkie could not have forestalled the Cold War because he could not have resolved the antinomies of liberalism, and because, regardless, to do that he would have needed to lose himself in the crowd rather than deliver speeches to it?

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<sup>43</sup> David Huyssen, “From Socialism to Hedge Fund: The Human Element and the New History of Capitalism,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 21, no. 2 (2015): 287-312. Huyssen is experimenting with what he calls “world-system biography” in order to capture the structural forces that circumscribed the political dreams of his subject, Alfred Winslow Jones. An older example of a structuralist (or post-structuralist) biography of a great man is David E. Nye, *The Invented Self: An Anti-Biography, from Documents of Thomas A. Edison* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983).

## REVIEW BY JOHN A. THOMPSON, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Wendell Willkie's book, *One World*, figures in most accounts of the American experience in World War II, with its huge sales on publication in 1943 seen as both reflecting and stimulating the growth in internationalist sentiment at this time.<sup>44</sup> The narrative thread and much of the material in Willkie's book derived from the round-the-world flight that he made over forty-nine days in August-October 1942. Samuel Zipp's readable, widely researched and probing study is structured as an account of this flight, which is described in detail. But Zipp does much more by artfully setting this core narrative in various contexts – that of Willkie's own life and career, of the situation in the countries he visited, and of American attitudes to the world. Zipp highlights certain central themes and suggests, more tentatively, that there are lessons in this story for our own times.

"Meteoric" is a hackneyed description of a politician's rise but the metaphor is seldom as apt as it is in the case of Wendell Willkie. Never a professional politician, Willkie came to public attention when, as chief executive of the Commonwealth and Southern corporation, he took a leading role in the opposition to the New Deal measure that broke up such utility holding companies. By 1939 he was being talked of as a possible Republican presidential candidate by some of the "eastern establishment," notably the publishers of the *New York Herald Tribune* and *Time-Life* publisher Henry Luce. Taking a firmly anti-isolationist position as Nazi armies swept forward in the spring and summer of 1940, Willkie received energetic press backing as an undeclared presidential candidate but it was his charismatic personal appearance at the Republican convention that won him the nomination. Although during the heat of the subsequent campaign he accused President Franklin D. Roosevelt of leading the nation into a foreign war, Willkie favoured aid to the allies and he doubled down on this stance after the election, visiting London during the blitz and testifying to the Senate in support of the Lend-Lease bill. Such cross-party cooperation was further fostered by America's entry into the war in December 1941 and Willkie's flight, though his own initiative, was made with the informal backing of the President, who gave him confidential messages to foreign leaders. The goal was to rally support for the war effort among both allies and neutrals and to enlighten the American public about the worldwide nature of the conflict.

Willkie wrote few surviving letters and did not keep a journal, so Zipp is reliant on other sources in seeking to reconstruct his activities and private thoughts. For the flight itself, he draws on the letters and recollections of Willkie's travelling companions. These included two professional journalists attached to the Office of War Information (OWI), one of whom, Joseph Barnes, later wrote an admiring biography of Willkie. Zipp's account is also based on contemporary newspaper items, some official records and impressively wide reading in the scholarship on the character and history of the various countries Willkie visited. The flight itself is described in detail in a way that reminds us that flying across Africa, over the Tien Shan mountains and the deserts of western China in those days involved hazards as well as discomfort. A helpful map traces the flight's route from Washington, D.C., to Puerto Rico, Brazil, West Africa, Sudan, Egypt, Turkey and the Middle East and then on to Russia, and the part of China controlled by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist government before the return to America via Siberia and the Pacific. Successive chapters are devoted to Willkie's visits to Egypt, Turkey, Beirut and Jerusalem, Iraq, Iran, Russia and China. In each place, Willkie had meetings with political leaders and these are reconstructed, as far as they can be from the sources, and set in the context of the situation in the different countries. Willkie, like that other former CEO Robert McNamara, tended to identify with leaders and to assess foreign nations according to their leader's quality; as Zipp observes, "from Nuri-al-Said to Joseph Stalin to Chiang Kai-shek, he rendered the leaders he met as resolute and capable, sensitive and forward-looking" (248). The ambiguous status of the trip caused some tensions as Willkie sought to free himself from the embrace of allied as well as American officialdom by trying to arrange his own accommodation and by taking every opportunity to leaven his formal engagements with forays into the streets to meet ordinary people. (The well-chosen illustrations include a photograph of Willkie in a pith helmet striding through a bazaar in Baghdad.) In Moscow, Willkie had a meeting with Stalin and Molotov, to which the U.S. Ambassador (to his great indignation) was not invited (and to which Willkie almost failed to bring the letter Roosevelt had given him to pass on).

<sup>44</sup> Wendell L. Willkie, *One World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943).

Following this meeting, Willkie aroused some controversy by publicly suggesting that allied military leaders might need “some public prodding” to establish “a real second front in Europe” as soon as possible (165-166).

This was a notable instance of the exercise in double persuasion in which Willkie evidently felt himself engaged during the trip. In the countries he visited, he sought to raise allied morale and encourage neutrals to join the fight against the Axis by stressing both the inevitability of victory now that the United States was fully engaged and how much the interests and aspirations of people across the world would gain from an allied victory. In addressing his fellow Americans, Willkie stressed that the credibility of this second claim depended upon a wholehearted commitment to fulfilling the goals set out in the Atlantic Charter, particularly “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live.” This was essentially the reiteration of a principle President Woodrow Wilson had proclaimed during World War I. Willkie had hero-worshipped Wilson and been a passionate supporter of the League of Nations but, as Zipp recounts, his encounter with nationalist leaders in Egypt, Iraq, Iran and China led him to become increasingly critical of Wilson’s failure at the peace conference to uphold the principle of self-determination beyond Europe, allowing Britain and France essentially to maintain and even extend their imperial power in much of Africa and Asia through the mandate system. In a widely reported speech in the wartime capital of China, Chongqing, near the end of his tour, Willkie insisted that the “war must mean an end to the empire of nations over other nations” and called for “firm timetables” and “ironclad agreements” among all the allies to help colonial peoples who joined the cause to “work out and train governments of their own choosing” so they could “become free and independent nations” (203-206). Soon after his return home, Willkie told a national radio audience that from Egypt to China people had asked, “Is freedom supposed to be priceless for the white man, or for the western world, but of no account to us in the East?” (223).

Willkie’s hostility to imperialism, and his sensitivity to the racism on which it was based, is a major theme of this book. In part, of course, Willkie’s anti-colonialism was a traditional American attitude, dating back to the Revolution and widely shared. Following Willkie’s Chongqing speech, Luce’s *Life* magazine warned “the people of England” that “one thing we are sure we are *not* fighting for is to hold the British Empire together” (218). But Zipp shows that Willkie’s feelings on the issue were unusually deep and highlights personal experiences that by Willkie’s own account stimulated them, particularly an act of brutality by a plantation manager that he had witnessed as a young man in Puerto Rico and the unreconstructed imperialistic attitudes of British officials at a dinner in Alexandria early in his tour. Other influences, Zipp indicates, were the attitudes of American journalists with international experience including Joseph Barnes, and, with respect to China, the views of ex-missionaries as these came to him through his friendship with Pearl Buck. None of these, however, really bear upon Willkie’s concern with racial issues within the United States - which was more distinctive and remarkable than his anti-colonialism. After taking a forthright stand on civil rights issues in the 1940 campaign, Willkie developed a friendship with the head of the NAACP, Walter White, with whom he collaborated on various projects. Invited to address the organization’s national convention in the spring of 1942, Willkie called on Americans to “cast our lot as a nation with all those other peoples, whatever their race or color, who prize liberty as an innate right” (73-74). Clearly, his hostility to imperialism and racism had deeper roots than his experiences on his later tour. Willkie was not an ancestral Republican with abolitionist forebears; he did not register as a Republican until early 1940, when his opposition to the New Deal (and his presidential ambitions) led him to abandon his inherited Democratic allegiance. Yet Willkie’s background may have been relevant. The families of his parents, both of whom were well-read and independent-minded lawyers, were among the post-1848 German immigrants who brought with them an almost religious commitment to a principled liberalism that was strongly antagonistic to imperialism (as in the case of Carl Schurz).

Despite Willkie’s concession that “not all peoples of the world are ready for freedom, or can defend it, the day after tomorrow,” (226) these forthright calls for decolonization provoked Winston Churchill to declare that he had “not become the King’s First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.” (207-209). In accordance with Roosevelt’s wishes, Willkie’s flight by-passed India, where the British authorities had responded to the Quit India civil disobedience campaign launched by Mohandas Gandhi in August 1942 by jailing Gandhi and other leaders of the All-India Congress. As Zipp shows, this context affected American reactions to Willkie’s speeches. Progressive journals hailed his idealistic internationalism, with African-American journals being particularly enthusiastic about Willkie’s intensified commitment to anti-imperialism. Conservatives, whether Southern Democrats or Midwestern isolationists, accused him of

subordinating America's own interests to those of foreigners and of endangering allied unity. Some leading internationalist commentators, including Dorothy Thompson and Walter Lippmann, found the criticism of Britain excessive (as did Roosevelt in private).

Zipp sets such specific comments within a concise account of American opinion during the war years more generally in which he brings out both its shifts over time (often in response to events) and some of its less attractive features (such as the transformation of America First from an ideologically broad anti-interventionist movement into a right-wing slogan). Naturally, the principal focus is on the scale and character of internationalist sentiment. Drawing on the work of earlier scholars, notably Robert Divine and Andrew Preston,<sup>45</sup> Zipp records the growth in support for participation in an international organization after the war; the widely favorable reception of *One World* in 1943 both benefited from and gave further impetus to this tide. But Zipp also emphasizes the diversity of attitudes involved. In particular, he perceives two versions of American internationalism that he traces back to earlier in the century – a conservative, unilateralist one embodied by President Theodore Roosevelt, and the more multilateral, anti-imperialist version advocated by social reformer and peace activist Jane Addams. As thinking about the postwar era began to crystallize in late 1943, Zipp suggests, the former, more nationalistic version of internationalism became the dominant one in both public opinion and official planning. Willkie resisted this trend, calling for “the democratization of the relationship between the four great powers and their smaller allies – some of them not so small – and a liberalizing of the relationship of colonial powers to their colonies” (267). Although the opposition to great power dominance struck a chord with many and was shared by other leading Republicans, Willkie's stand further distanced him from the administration and led some internationalist commentators such as Lippmann and Reinhold Niebuhr to view Willkie's idealism as unrealistic and others, like Luce, to see it as insufficiently nationalistic. For someone whose political strength had been so dependent on favorable press coverage, and with the constituency for his idealism, as Zipp stresses, largely confined to middle-class white liberals and African-Americans, these developments were fatal for Willkie's chances of a second presidential nomination. The shooting star fell rapidly to earth. After a disastrous performance in the Wisconsin primary in April 1944, Willkie dropped out of the race and in October he died of a series of heart attacks at the age of fifty-two.

In making a case for the wider significance of this story, Zipp first points to what he sees as the novel source of Willkie's political influence, which owed nothing to party or other organizational structures but arose from his charisma and the media. This “broadcasting power,” Zipp suggests, gave him the potential to achieve his aim of shaping Americans' understanding of world events through creating “a state of mind in this country”; in the United States, Willkie told Stalin, “public opinion controls everything” (9-11, 165). More tentatively, Zipp also suggests that the popularity of Willkie's “one world” approach shows that the United States came close to adopting a different course in the post-war era. It might have led “the planet to a new era of cooperation” based on Willkie's “vision of global freedom” instead of adopting “a bellicose liberal internationalism ... no less nationalistic in its determination to see the United States at the top of the Great Power pile.” This possibility has been overlooked by historians but, Zipp argues, “in concentrating on what is said to have *really happened*, we risk missing what almost happened, and what could happen still” (3-5, 235-236).

Such observations raise questions about the nature of Willkie's vision as well as about the reasons why it was not fulfilled. Willkie's critics saw him as naïve and to some extent Zipp accepts this charge. He recognises that Willkie's aerial perspective on the unity of the “one world” overlooked the conflicts by which it was riven, such as that Willkie encountered in Palestine between Zionists and Arabs. Zipp is especially critical of Willkie's laudatory portrayal of Chiang Kai-shek and his regime, describing this as “the least reflective or critical” part of *One World* (184). The almost equally uncritical appraisal of Stalin, however, is defended on the grounds that Willkie's attempt to establish good relations with the Soviet leadership arose from a desire to foster post-war cooperation (170-172). Altogether, Zipp argues, Willkie “offered a new geopolitical vision” that not only included “a planet united in cooperation through a new world body” but “was strategic as well, envisioning the

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<sup>45</sup> Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America during World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1967); Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of the Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

United States cooperating with the Soviet Union, championing decolonization, and managing a reinvigorated network of world trade” (240). This formulation glosses over the tension between great power cooperation and the promotion of freedom and self-determination. Wilson had been forced to recognise this tension when he yielded to the colonial ambitions of the British empire rather than break with his principal partner in establishing the League of Nations, and in early 1944 Willkie himself cautioned that the tension existed with regard to eastern Europe (280).

In Zipp’s view, Willkie’s naiveté was greatest with regard to America’s own imperialism. The fact that his flight skirted Latin America and the Pacific, Zipp notes, made it easier for Willkie to claim that people everywhere had “one common bond and that is their deep friendship for the United States” (251-256). More important probably was Willkie’s hortatory aim, which Zipp also recognizes. Like Wilson before him, Willkie sought to persuade his countrymen to engage more fully with world affairs by assuring them that such involvement would be welcomed by people in other countries. This persuasive purpose led Willkie (and other internationalist writers) to stress how much foreigners had in common with Americans; both an arduous road journey in the Russian interior and what he saw of China’s far west reminded him “of the stories my father used to tell me of conditions in pioneer Indiana” (154-157, 194-195, 257-258). Likewise, as the prominent writer John Chamberlain observed at the time, Willkie needed to be seen as “an internationalist because he is an American” rather than as someone who was prepared to subordinate the nation’s interests to those of other countries (261-262); after all, it is the opponents not the advocates of foreign assistance who describe it as a “giveaway” program. Similarly, it is hardly surprising that Willkie, although critical of the means by which the United States exercised dominance in Latin America, did not see the promotion of modernization and free trade as itself a form of imperialism, which Zipp at times suggests that it was. (254-261).

In the end, it is not so much in its larger arguments that the strength and quality of this book resides as in the detailed, historically sensitive and illuminating reconstruction of a man and a moment. It is also a very good read.

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 RESPONSE BY SAMUEL ZIPP, BROWN UNIVERSITY
 

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Writing about Wendell Willkie, internationalism, race, and empire was always going to be a bit of a dicey proposition. If “*who?*” was the usual reaction to the idea from people at large—outside Indiana, at least—the prevailing response from scholars seemed to be “*why?*” The book on Willkie had long been written and closed, and recent retellings featured a rather predictable line: he was the great also-ran who helped President Franklin D. Roosevelt take the nation into the war and the world in 1940 and 1941. Beyond that Willkie was basically forgettable: the afterthought of an afterthought. “One world” was “just a dream some of us had,” as the Joni Mitchell song would have put it, a vague and wistful vision that was either close to meaningless or essentially congruent with the world-ordering shape of emerging U.S. post-war power.

So, my great thanks go out to Mary Bridges, Justus D. Doenecke, Andrew Johnstone, Adriane Lentz-Smith, Sarah Miller-Davenport, Dara Orenstein, and John A. Thompson for entertaining the idea that there might be more to say, to Diane Labrosse and H-Diplo for thinking the book worthy of notice, and to David Milne for his introduction to this roundtable. I am a bit of an interloper on everyone’s turf here, a cultural and urban historian who wandered over to the “U.S. and the World” aisle on a near whim and got a bit lost, so I appreciate the interest and the patience you’ve shown towards me. By way of response to these critiques and comments, let me say a bit about how this project came to be, and how I came to write a book that, in the end, hopes to see the story of the “quixotic and savvy” Willkie (exactly right, Adriane Lentz-Smith!) and “one world” as a vehicle, or medium, perhaps, through which to think about the unexpected openings, dilemmas, failures, and legacies of U.S. political culture during World War II.

This book has three origin points. One was in my own failure, in the fall of 1997, my first semester in graduate school, to take Melani McAlister’s seminar on transnationalism and U.S. empire. Consider this book an attempt to take stock of everything I should have begun learning sooner than I did. The second is probably an obvious one, shared by many who might read this: the events of September 11, 2001. That day was not, perhaps, as important as it seemed it would be at the time—twenty years later it is clear it unveiled one amongst many overlapping cataclysms we’re still enduring—but I was living in New York City then and one effect of watching the towers burn and fall that morning from our roof was to pitch me headfirst into realization of my own ignorance. I had the obligatory left-ish suspicion of “Cold War American foreign policy,” and an embryonic understanding, by that point, after four or so years of graduate school in American Studies, of U.S. empire, but precious little other preparation for grasping how we got to the point where a small group of fanatics would feel it necessary to commandeer passenger planes and pilot them into the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon.

*The Idealist* is not, in the end, a direct explanation of those events. But the third spark for it can certainly be found in that morning and the months and years afterward. In those days I was researching and writing my dissertation—the work that would result in my first book, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York*—and struggling to find in the history of urban renewal the same urgency that jumped out of the headlines every day.<sup>46</sup> (It was, at the time, another topic that had been all but lobbed into the proverbial dustbin.) In retrospect the parallels were plain: the WTC was the greatest modernist project of them all. It was the sublime and terrible icon of Fordist, Cold War America, the final expression in glass and steel of the public-private compact that drove urban renewal and the ‘growth politics’ of the postwar consensus, the full realization of the decline of ‘tower in the park’ modern housing ideals into corporate banality and American triumphalism, a colossal paean to the emerging forces of globalization and neoliberalism, constructed as a real estate gambit by a ‘public authority,’ and raised over the cleared wreckage of a mixed commercial and industrial neighborhood hard by the old port and Wall Street alike.

I sensed all this then, of course, but a planned section on the WTC never materialized. I could not touch Eric Darton’s still under appreciated *Divided We Stand: A Biography of the World Trade Center*, and I was drawn instead to an earlier

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<sup>46</sup> Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in Cold War New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

expression of modern idealism.<sup>47</sup> Searching for a story about American city and world shaping for which I did not already know the punch line, I chose instead the urban history of the United Nations headquarters building on Turtle Bay. To tell that tale I drew on E.B. White's famous essay "Here is New York"—in which the U.N. is indelibly and improbably rendered as "the greatest housing project of them all"—and discovered his 1946 short book *The Wild Flag*, which collected his writings on world government.<sup>48</sup> Finding that the circumspect and skeptical author of *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little* had embraced what I thought to be a marginal and fanciful political ideal like world political union, and in the pages of *Harper's* and *The New Yorker* no less, was something of a minor revelation to me, if not a major historical discovery.<sup>49</sup>

Could it be that there was a larger tradition here? Was there a current of popular intellectual and political engagement with the world that had been, if not quite forgotten, then not given its full due? Amongst historians and American Studies scholars there had been much writing on Cold War liberalism—Henry Luce's "American Century" was the critical lodestar—and the radical alternative, with the CIO and Henry Wallace's "Century of the Common Man" or "People's Century" taking pride of place.<sup>50</sup> Most pressing was the emerging literature (by now an established tradition) that was uncovering an African-American internationalism that, as Nikhil Singh told it, could be understood through Ralph Ellison and Angelo Herndon's call for "the peoples' century"—with that subtle shift of the apostrophe to the right making all the political difference.<sup>51</sup> These stories always seemed to operate through a post-1960s lens—by way of attempts to look for antecedents to the anti-imperial New Left or freedom struggle movements of the Cold War years.

But what if these White essays were but the visible summit of a different iceberg? Perhaps there was a less radical but more popular—by which I meant widespread, and widely diffused—body of internationalism that hoped to rival and contest the assembling forces of Cold War liberalism and America First nationalism—one that drew on or contested the currents to its left and right but was not immediately reducible or eclipsed by them? (I thank Justus Doenecke for his useful correctives on the dynamics of America First and its waning potency in 1940 and 1941.) If, throughout the 2000s and 2010s, many critical perspectives on the "U.S. in the world" were, consciously or not, stories about how 9/11 happened, they often came pre-freighted with accounts of the built-in limits to the horizons of American internationalism. They foregrounded critiques of Cold War ideology or, increasingly, of the pervasive power of U.S. empire, in a way that had begun, to me at least, to feel at once both correct *and* expected. I would be influenced by both these currents, but was not sure I had much new to contribute to either. But here was a tendency that predated the Cold War and suggested the possibility of a less-noticed anti-imperial strain in American internationalism. Would pulling on that thread reveal roads not taken in U.S. political culture, or maybe buried ideas, fresh for revival in our new times of global connection?

My first thought was that a group portrait was wanted, an account of what I'd taken to calling 'popular internationalists' during the 'postwar moment'—that period from the Atlantic Charter in 1941 when the Allies begin to fitfully envision what the war was all about to the full arrival of the Cold War in 1948. There were, it turned out, lots of these people: in

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<sup>47</sup> Eric Darton, *Divided We Stand: A Biography of the World Trade Center* (New York: Basic Books, 2011 [1999]).

<sup>48</sup> Originally published as a magazine article for *Holiday* magazine in 1949, "Here is New York" has been republished as E.B. White, *Here is New York* (New York: The Little Bookroom, 1999). E.B. White, *The Wild Flag* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946).

<sup>49</sup> See Samuel Zipp, "Raising The Wild Flag: E.B. White, World Government, and Local Cosmopolitanism in the Postwar Moment," *The Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4:1 (March 2012) 1-33.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Luce, *The American Century* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1941) and Henry A. Wallace, *Century of the Common Man* (New York: International Workers Order, 1943) and Henry Wallace, "The Price of Free World Victory" (1942) in Russell Lord, ed., *Democracy Reborn* (New York: Reynalt Hitchcock, 1944) 190-193.

<sup>51</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004) 130.



internationalist organizations, in Protestant churches, in journalism and broadcasting and Hollywood, in academia, in unions, and elsewhere, and this history has, of course, been approached in one way or another.<sup>52</sup> Someone should still attempt this in full—last I heard Lawrence J. Friedman was working on a book called “Compassionate Globalism: The ‘One World’ Movement” that will take a run at it—but I decided that the varied and dispersed nature of this tendency called for a picture of it in solution, through its single most influential figure, the person who popularized the phrase “one world” itself.

I knew about Willkie already, of course, and could recall some discussion of *One World* from cultural histories of the WWII home front. This conjuncture had been, as I have already suggested, more or less dispensed with in books like John Morton Blum’s *V Was for Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* or William Graebner’s *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s*, and Willkie portrayed as a failure.<sup>53</sup> This was no doubt true, from one angle, but the history of failure is underrated, as I argue in *The Idealist*, because it provides a window not just into the world as it was, but as some imagined it otherwise, and thus goads us to imagine anew the world as it is.

Plus, I had written a complex book about places, and how debates over transformations in the built environment had shaped historical change, and now I wanted to try to experiment with a different form: a short and popular book for the public with a main character at its heart. I’ll have more to say on the problems inherent in doing cultural history through biography below, but for now suffice it to say that the Willkie story seemed tailor-made for the job. It had the sudden rise to fame of a semi-famous white man, a campaign for the Presidency, a world-circling journey, radio addresses to dozens of millions, a best-selling book, an early death—all the ingredients of perhaps not a Presidential biography or political thriller, but a slim volume capturing a thrilling and largely forgotten moment in American political culture.

That little book is still out there. It got lost in the need to understand, and write about, the thirteen countries on five continents Willkie visited in the late summer and fall of 1942. My story of Willkie and “one world” remains a lens onto roads not taken in U.S. relations with the world. But it also became a focused way into seeing the unsettled state of the world at war, and the overlapping and shifting currents of U.S. political culture as people and groups on the right, left, and center jostled to shape the American approach to that world at a moment when much was, as Mary Bridges notes, “up for grabs.” And beyond that, I hoped, it might offer some unexpected perspectives on the larger shape of twentieth-century history—revealing opportunities to return some contingency to a story that has often seemed cut, dried, and sealed away.

Writing about Willkie requires full investment in the power of this contingency. To do it I had to believe, first, that much *was* plastic and malleable during the war. Second, I had to suspend some of my understanding of what did happen to be able to focus on this submerged alternative current. That, and my interest in capturing Willkie as way into a cultural history of political ideas—the history of rising and falling “sensibilities” as Daniel Wickberg has it—will suggest the nature of my differences with some of my respondents.<sup>54</sup> Put simply and maybe too crudely, their generosity towards the Willkie story appear to remain shadowed by familiar scholarly suspicions. They wonder, in one way or another, whether Willkie really matters, whether he really did anything, or whether his contributions were truly distinctive.

Andrew Johnstone writes that Willkie’s “rhetoric worked best when applied with a broad brush,” that “it was not clear exactly what Willkie’s internationalism would look like,” and that “Willkie’s lack of commitment makes it difficult to see a convincing plan in his soaring rhetoric.” Mary Bridges suggests that we see “a talking head offering more words than action.”

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<sup>52</sup> Begin with Robert A. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America During World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1967).

<sup>53</sup> John Morton Blum, *V Was For Victory: Politics and American Culture During World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), 262-9; William S. Graebner, *The Age of Doubt: American Thought and Culture in the 1940s* (New York: Twayne, 1991), 69-100.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Wickberg, “What is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *American Historical Review* 112:3 (2007): 661-684.

Ultimately, Johnstone argues, “we will never know if Willkie would have supported calls for a stronger international organization, or the plan ultimately proposed by the Roosevelt administration.” First, Willkie did call for a stronger, more democratic international organization—both at the time of the Moscow agreements in late 1943, and then throughout 1944, as the contours of FDR’s vision of what would become the United Nations emerged for the public. By the time he died, in October of 1944, he had well established that he wanted a “common council” of all the Allies that would give equal voice to all members of a postwar body.

But it is certainly true that Willkie refused to pin himself down and offer a plan. As I detail in the book I think he was reluctant to do so (even after his failed 1944 Presidential bid) for several reasons that nonetheless rested on one central conviction: he wanted to drive the overall climate of opinion on world organization, not shape its final structure. Then, of course, he died. This fact is a convenient out for me, I will admit (on any number of questions where we might suppose that Willkie’s ideas would have tracked towards the political center or mainstream conventional wisdom over time!), but this is where the contingency comes in. I am interested less in the various counterfactuals: What would Willkie have done? What would the alliance with Roosevelt they both considered have produced? I wanted to bring out instead a vibrant picture of the dilemmas of the moment and the possibilities of ideas that gained a great following during that moment. What I’ve hoped to do is provide a portrait of someone thinking in time and in context—during a journey around the world, under the klieg lights of “the age of broadcasting”—as he was shaped by the anti-imperial currents of his moment and the demands and opportunities of midcentury public culture and as he tried to work out a way to push the debate around world organization in a more democratic direction.

I guess I am also less troubled than Johnstone or Bridges by Willkie’s failures to offer a plan or do more than talk because I am willing to grant that any plan that went beyond Roosevelt’s was likely to fail at that moment. This is both because the administration’s postwar planners had already decided on a plan to enshrine U.S. power at the heart of the postwar world (and had the power to make it stick), and because it is clear that Willkie and others who did have plans were unable to build a constituency for a more “progressive” world body. (I think the reasons for this are complex, and have to do not only with the power of government planners, but the ways that “one world” ideals lost the short-term battle to make theirs the common-sense understanding of U.S. internationalism due to the fact that all concerned had not fully divested themselves of American exceptionalism.)<sup>55</sup>

The point of my book is not that Willkie would have realized something bigger or better. It’s that during the war Willkie gave a name—“one world”—to a sensibility that envisioned enshrining the idea of equitable interdependence as a vision of world order, that it achieved a measure of popularity and was then eclipsed—in part because of the tensions within Willkie’s own ideals, as Bridges and others note—but that it then lived on as a kind of free-floating signifier. So, this is a history of a contingent moment *and* a failure—the book is pitched on that contradiction and the dilemmas that it reveals. Ultimately, I think that as an interdisciplinary cultural historian I am perhaps more comfortable than Bridges or Johnstone with the idea that Willkie was engaged in a form of symbolic action, and that to observe and track the shifts in public affect that collect and dissolve around Willkie’s activities must be seen as a contribution to the history of political culture writ large.<sup>56</sup>

Sarah Miller-Davenport lodges something of the opposite objection. If Johnstone and Bridges feel that Willkie did not or would not go far enough, she implies that Willkie was not quite as daring as I am inclined to think. Actually, Bridges hints at this too: Willkie, she says, “project(ed) existing beliefs within the new, globalizing media.” This is undoubtedly true. Part of the point of the book was to show how Willkie sits on the horns of a dilemma at midcentury. Most forms of U.S.

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<sup>55</sup> For an elaboration on this, see Samuel Zipp, “Choosing Empire: America Before and After World War II,” Public Books, April 16, 2021, <https://www.publicbooks.org/choosing-empire-america-before-and-after-world-war-ii/>, accessed May 20, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> Samuel Zipp, “When Wendell Willkie Went Visiting: Between Interdependency and Exceptionalism in the Public Feeling for One World,” *American Literary History* 26:3 (Fall 2014) 484-510.

internationalism, as I noted above, draw on currents of American exceptionalism and nationalism that work, unbidden, just beneath the surface of overt ideas and policies. This was true of Willkie on any number of counts.

For instance, Bridges says that my book does not offer a “new understanding of a larger field of historiography about U.S.-led modernization.” I did not elaborate on this, true, and I have not followed the recent contributions to this history in the work by Amy Offner or Stephan Link and Noam Maggor she cites, I am sorry to say, but building off David Ekbladh, David Engerman, Nils Gilman, and others, I wanted to show that for all Willkie’s narrowly political differences with the TVA—and the way he used it to set up a battle of political philosophies for his 1940 campaign—he still subscribed to the common sense theories of history and progress that underpinned the worldviews of many on the left and right, internationalist and nationalist alike.<sup>57</sup> Willkie tried to move away from the racist, ‘civilizational’ impulses that had long accompanied—and even inspired—modernization ideals, but he remained a true believer in a shared impulse that motivated many across the political spectrum.

Miller-Davenport points out that Willkie was a product of a certain ambivalent strain of U.S. anti-imperialism that, in the end, worked to shore up and secure the power of the new, U.S. global empire emerging after World War II. This is correct, of course: Willkie’s good-natured glad-handing would, I note in the book, become one template for the Cold War-era “ugly American” (306). His critiques of empire did have one root in an older kind of anti-imperialism, informed by U.S. exceptionalism, that saw the country as the original anti-colonial nation and that, as I suggest in several places, informed much anti-British and anti-colonial opinion amongst Americans during World War II. She is probably right that I did not bring out this thread as explicitly as I might have—although I did try to show how U.S. internationalism at large had long been ambivalently motivated by anti- and pro-imperial visions, both of which relied on visions of difference and hierarchy.

As I’ve already hinted, thinking about Willkie and empire can be vexing. Throughout my work on this project I worried not only about the general irrelevance of Willkie, but the sense that he offered little fresh perspective on the topic. Historians and critics of U.S. empire could point out that American imperial power of various sorts long predated Willkie and that he did little to alter the course of its elaboration. Some of them said as much to me. True enough! But here I return to the question of contingency, to the unsettled nature of world and national affairs during the war, and to the idea that Willkie offers unexpected perspectives on the kinds of change unfolding at this moment.

What I tried to show was how the less exclusive, more capacious anti-imperialism that Willkie was learning abroad, and from the black freedom struggle, was dulled or neutered by his lingering faith in U.S. exceptionalism. This led to what Miller-Davenport calls “the erasure of U.S. empire” in Willkie’s work. I think this erasure was not total—he did take up explicit positions against actually existing U.S. empire—but the point I try to make (and that I have pursued at greater length in a 2018 article in *Modern American History*) is that his ambivalence about empire (and his great popularity) reveals the way that Americans were unable to see how their imperial power was shifting from the hemispheric to the global at this crucial moment.<sup>58</sup>

Overall, I’ve hoped to stress the multiple strains of competing discourse that informed Willkie—and how he reveals the larger, shifting currents of opinion and power roiling the public culture of the wartime world. That is, as I’ve well established now, why he’s good to think with, and why he is a useful lens through which to see this moment of transition.

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<sup>57</sup> David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of An American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); David Engerman, *Modernization from the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Kiran Klaus Patel, *The New Deal: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Zipp, “Dilemmas of World-Wide Thinking: Popular Geographies and the Problem of Empire in Wendell Willkie’s Search for One World,” *Modern American History* 3 (2018): 1-25.

Put that together with my stubborn insistence on the utility of lingering with contingency and it suggests how I hope to resist foreordained stories that begin by foreclosing possibilities if they do not issue from expected or valorized political or cultural precincts. I continue to insist on this in the face of the other two major, related critiques raised here—both by Dara Orenstein—having to do with political economy and the perils of biography.

I am grateful to Orenstein for seeing the threads that run from my work on the cultural history of mid-century urbanism into *The Idealist*. She notices the way the book is aligned with my larger interest in understanding the “structures of feeling”—the phrase from Raymond Williams she uses—that shape my approach to the history of political culture. I am also pleased to see that she credits the book with some measure of feminist imagination—a surprise to me, since I felt I was never adequately or fully able to puzzle out how Willkie’s masculinity shaped his public life or his internationalism.

However, Orenstein writes that the book is missing a “a thoroughgoing engagement with political economy,” and “divorces the political from the economic.” Perhaps, although I think this overlooks what the book does have to say about political economy. On the one hand, there was no point in my pretending that Willkie was anything other than what I called him: a “confident capitalist” (8). This was precisely what Orenstein calls “the material basis for his worldview.” I remarked on the potential contradictions between Willkie’s corporate work, his anti-New Deal politics, and his vision of global freedom—and also noticed how U.S. military and economic power was coming to shape its emerging global empire, and how the trip was entangled in the spread of the airline industry. On the other hand I considered Willkie’s evolving views not just of “free trade” but also of “free enterprise.” In keeping with the contingency theme I wanted to show how his sense of those ideas was changing as he confronted the world—moving away from what Orenstein calls his “fealty” to the “gospel of so-called free enterprise” towards a less defined and more open-ended position—even as I showed how his critics to the left attacked him for his failure to confront the political economy of U.S. empire.

I agree that I was never able to fully see how neoliberalism evolved from “free trade” and “free enterprise.” That’s an entirely different (and important) project. No doubt the positions that Willkie held at one point offer, as reading Kim Phillips-Fein, Lawrence Glickman, and Quinn Slobodian would suggest, elements of a prehistory of neoliberalism.<sup>59</sup> That was, in a way, one of the (perhaps too implicit) goals of my conclusion. I traced the roots of the rhetoric surrounding globalization back to “one world,” but only mentioned neoliberalism along the way.

But what I did not do, and what I remain unwilling to do, for literary and historical as much as critical or analytical reasons, is to adopt a stance that simply seeks to unmask Willkie as a proto-neoliberal, or an unwitting perpetuator of racial capitalism—to, in other words, essentially take W.E.B. Du Bois’s position over Walter White’s, to use the frames Orenstein suggests. One takeaway from my book, following the work of Carol Anderson, was to show how those two famous antagonists had more in common than we assume during the war years.<sup>60</sup> Willkie is precisely a useful lens for understanding this moment of flux because he was bringing into the mainstream *some* of the ideas held by both. That he would not go as far as Du Bois or C.L.R. James or other Marxist black radicals is both true—a point that I, and they, literally, by way of my quotes or citations of each, make repeatedly in the book—and far from surprising.

Orenstein suggests that Willkie should not be seen as a “radical”—and that is true. But I do not claim Willkie as a radical, and he would never have claimed that for himself—the “borderline” in the passage she quotes is quite deliberate; it is there

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<sup>59</sup> Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen’s Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009); Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018); Lawrence Glickman, *Free Enterprise: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

<sup>60</sup> Carol Anderson, *Bourgeois Radicals: The NAACP and the Struggle for Colonial Liberation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

to locate Willkie's evolving political stance in one strain of his thinking, not to praise or condemn him or count him on one or the other side of history, right or wrong.

I'm reminded of a comment someone else made about this project. Willkie, they indicated, was best seen as a cautionary tale. On the face of it, I think it's a bit unclear what the story of Willkie should warn us off: winning tens of millions of votes in a Presidential election? Getting a chance to fly around the world at the height of World War II? Addressing tens of millions over the airwaves? Writing the fastest selling book in American history to date? Getting a chance to try to push all those many millions to accept a non-racist, anti-imperial future?

No, Willkie offers a warning, according to this view because he did not go far enough. He had insufficiently condemned empire. He was not truly an anti-racist. He was not, in essence, the right kind of historical subject for a properly critical or radical take on empire, race, and internationalism. He was what we today should make sure not to be, and so he can be teed up for our critique, offhand disdain, and ultimate dismissal. I am not disturbed by the functional presentism at work here because I grant the old postmodern line that we can have no direct, unmediated access to the past except by way of our own frames of reference—and because it's certainly true that more radical forms of politics were technically available to Willkie. (So: yes, he was not W.E.B. Du Bois). But I do think, as will become evident, that it miscalibrates the fine balance between past events and present perspective. And I find this position unconvincing because it amounts to either a veiled claim that I have misunderstood the stakes of my project, or that it was somehow not worth doing in the first place because Willkie does not conform to the expectations of this particularly arranged viewpoint—or both.

Orenstein remarks that Willkie could have “valued social movements over politicians and enlisted with the masses while writing about them.” But he went “another route.” In fact, as I argue, Willkie was unlikely to do this, —for reasons that should be clear by now—and wishing he had been more like John Reed is beside the point. (She's right, though, that Warren Beatty would have been the man for a 1980s Willkie biopic, just as Spencer Tracy was the likely choice when a 1940s film version of *One World* was in the offing.) Any historical study has to meet its subjects where they were, so to speak, and pitch its account of the contexts and dilemmas they faced and the choices they made on the ground where they stood.

This kind of take, however, has become quite common in some precincts of the humanities. Work on radical social movements of the left over the last two to three decades has been invaluable—my book depends on and cites that work. Related critical or theoretical work that seeks to identify and critique one or another overarching phenomena that, as Stuart Hall once put it, shape “societies structured in dominance” has been equally influential to me and can reveal the deepest and most pervasive currents in which all of us, Willkie included, continue to swim.<sup>61</sup>

But where this perspective has congealed into a kind of orthodoxy about how to approach a subject it can become unwittingly limiting. Willkie, as his critics on the left often pointed out in one way or another, would never have offered a Marxist critique of the workplace as a “primary site of domination.” I could, of course, have just adopted those critics' position and made that my primary line of analysis, but that would have been as useful to the job at hand as making the main thrust of my book a critique of Willkie's perpetuation of racial capitalism, or his insufficient decolonial approach, or his obeisance to settler colonialism (I more or less did say this), or his refusal to grant non-human agency or indigenous ways of knowing in his view of “one world.” All these things are probably correct, from one point of view or another, but for my purposes they put the cart before the horse and miss the actual stakes of the history that was unfurling around Willkie. Stepping out ahead of the history in this way can, in the kind of situation I was trying to take the measure of, close down contingency and even blind us to the multiplicitous ways that historical change can unfold.

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<sup>61</sup> For the latest reprinting, see Stuart Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” in Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, eds., *Selected Writings on Race and Difference* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 2021), 195-245.

Another way to put this is that I did not come to put Willkie in checkmate, but rather to see how the pieces on the board were arranged, how the state of play unfolded around him as possible moves opened up and closed down, how he moved in response to the other players, and to chart the unfolding possibilities of the game in which Willkie found himself. I suppose one reading of this metaphor has Willkie as the player, moving all the pieces around the board from above, but I'd rather see him as the proverbial king, and the rules of chess give the sovereign relatively limited powers.

This is why I am not convinced that *The Idealist* can be dismissed as “great-man biography.” First of all, it’s not a biography. It’s a history of a moment, or conjuncture. And while it draws formally on a more or less “linear account” of one man’s life to illuminate the dilemmas of that conjuncture, it does not, as David Huyssen’s formula (that Orenstein cites) has it, lead “teleologically toward the subject’s active transformation of history, privileging the subject as the primary, causal historical force,” because in the end I was not fundamentally concerned, as Orenstein partially grants and I have tried show above, with whether or not Willkie “might have altered the course of twentieth-century geopolitics.”

I will, of course, admit to making use of the tropes and forms of biography and to indulging in stories that suggest the way that Willkie’s efforts did, indeed, have effect in the world. One of the hazards of this book was that to convince the reader of its significance I had to give myself over, to some degree, to Willkie’s enthusiasms and his story.<sup>62</sup> But that’s the engine of a book like this. It gives the reader something to care about. If the subject of the book is not compelling, then the larger histories that subject reveals will fail to resonate. But the latter were the true goals of the book. Willkie was a medium through which to see what I called a “disruptive, ephemeral” moment, the kind in which “popular phenomena run headlong into the domains of politics and affairs of state” and “great questions of policy and philosophy emerge in electrified and distilled form in the minds of the many” to “come alive as fully realized dilemmas, becoming real and consequential for the public, not just for policymakers” (306).

Orenstein disagrees for two reasons. First, she argues that “the collective, dead and alive, acts on the individual with more consequence than the reverse.” The second, which is in keeping with her earlier assertion that Willkie should have “valued social movements over politicians,” is that in order to head off the Cold War he “would have needed to lose himself in the crowd rather than deliver speeches to it.” Beyond the problems involved in suggesting how historical figures should have acted in the world of the past and valorizing one kind of social group above all others as the rightful subject of historical writing—things we’ve already touched on—this is an odd place for Orenstein’s response to land. First, one could argue that the various radical social movements of the period, whether they had “resolved the antinomies of liberalism” or not, came no closer to “forestall(ing) the Cold War” than Willkie and other one worlders. That is debatable, I suppose, but not that interesting in the end. Ultimately, Orenstein’s contention reflects a theory of historical change as singular and unidirectional, winnowed down to a narrow point in which only “the collective” makes history.

Of course, there’s another way to see this—one that I think better prepares us to appreciate the particular historical problems Willkie reveals. Karl Marx, of course, said it best, and we all know the line: people “make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”<sup>63</sup> As more Marx-ish than Marxist, I interpret this broadly, but dialectically, to reveal that many kinds of people, individually and grouped together in various ways, make history in ways shaped and determined by many kinds of circumstances, and that in sorting out how any particular history is made the historian must figure out the arrangement between individual people, groups, and circumstances that moved events, and not rely on any formula that predetermines what those relations were and which necessarily shaped the other.

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<sup>62</sup> Some on the right who fear a “one world” superstate are quite sure I am a fervent one worlder, if Internet comment threads are any indication.

<sup>63</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” (1852) at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>, accessed May 25, 2021.

I am well aware that there are moments when social movements shape history. And there are also times when ideas, or the contests over meaning that arise from struggles in the realm of representation, shape history because they become attached to social movements and become the form and content through which groups struggle to supply the common sense of society. But there are also moments when individuals, shaped by ideas and narratives that they wield and that wield them—so to speak—act from within economic and other structural contexts and perform cultural work that shapes institutions—from social movements, to political parties, to bureaucracies, to the culture industries, and so on—that then have an effect on history. Charting the arrangements of these complex effects is exactly how the historian can attend to ways that “structures of feeling” shape the rise and fall of a common sense to which a majority come to subscribe and thus exert forms of rule in the political culture—at least for a time, until that hegemony is unseated.

Without belaboring this too much, I think it should suffice to say that the mode of cultural history I seek to practice asks us to see the complexity of these arrangements, and argues that after the communications revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century this complexity became a fact of life. It has long since been part of how change unfolds. Willkie operated in an intricate midcentury matrix made up of political parties, magazines and newspapers, radio speeches and public addresses, movies and newsreels, opinion polling—and, yes, social movements (on the left and right)—that I call “the age of broadcasting.” (One might actually say that Willkie was immersed in Orenstein’s “crowd,” or operated in it, at least, insofar as that was a term of art deployed, mostly by conservatives, to describe not the power of social movements, but the way that the ‘mass media’ was supposedly eroding the agency of both individuals and organized groups in a ‘mass society.’) However one sees it, change did indeed happen through this complex medium—even if it’s not the radical change that Orenstein is focused on—and Willkie is, again, a vehicle by which we can track the transformations in the political culture of internationalism during this moment.

I am mindful of the fact that Orenstein’s skepticism about Willkie’s effects is particularly turned towards whether or not he could have played a role in stopping the Cold War. We both agree that we can never know—and needless to say, the idea is improbable—but the point of even indulging that counterfactual on my part was twofold. First, as John A. Thompson notes, I wanted to show that Willkie advocated a left-liberal strategic vision—head off competition with the Soviet Union in order to usher in full decolonization and an equitable global economic order—that was not uncommon in those years, but that was eclipsed by the Cold War-era ascendance of a realism/idealism divide predicated on the extension of U.S. power. Thompson is right: this position had proven vulnerable to tensions between the U.S. and its British and Soviet allies, and in the short and medium run it was likely to fall apart altogether.

However, and this is the second reason I raised it, in the long run this view of the world appears quite prescient about the pitfalls of Cold War liberalism and its failures to see the conjoined power of race and empire. I am as skeptical as anyone about the political fortunes of the one world vision, particularly after 1944, but it offers one more way to see Willkie as a useful window onto the historical imagination. I am grateful here to Adriane Lentz-Smith for her remark that *The Idealist* conjures up a middle ground between Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands* and Timothy Mitchell’s *Rule of Experts*. I think I was aiming for something more like a rapprochement between Snyder, Mark Mazower’s *Governing the World* and Pankaj Mishra’s *From the Ruins of Empire*, but I will take it.<sup>64</sup>

The insight is gratifying because when I began this book I felt that histories of the middle decades of the twentieth century tended to divide into two rough camps. One side told it as a trajectory from World War II to the Cold War—from the Holocaust to the rise of “totalitarianism,” for instance. This is a story that links the U.S. and Europe, charts the rise of American power and influence, and foregrounds the contest between two dominant political economies and ideological conceptions of freedom. The other camp saw the mid-twentieth century as a contest between multiple empires in an era of decolonization. The British and other European empires fell as the United States, the Soviet Union, and the decolonizing

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<sup>64</sup> Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin, 2012); Pankaj Mishra, *From the Ruins of Empire: The Revolt Against the West and the Remaking of Asia* (New York: Picador, 2012).

powers rose in an age of “three worlds.” This is a story that foregrounds the global history of race and empire, and measures the degree to which the political freedom colonized peoples sought was curtailed by the bipolar conflict of the Cold War.

By helping us see the true ‘world’ nature of World War II Willkie provides an opportunity to put these two stories into the same frame. The rise of the “American Century” was also a crucial inflection point for the dawning age of decolonization, while the emerging Cold War arrived at the beginning of the age of three worlds. The barrier between these two schools had been breached before, of course, and is perhaps being crossed all the time now—most often by those who would have us replace the Euro-American, “Western” story of modernity’s discontents with one that stresses the challenges of decolonization.<sup>65</sup> Willkie provided one kind of preview of this perspective by suggesting that decolonization should be the primary goal of US foreign relations during World War II, and that U.S.-Soviet relations should be arranged to support that larger goal. “One world” would be the grounds on which two competing visions of freedom—American and anti-imperial—would be joined.

This was not to be, needless to say—American conceptions of freedom, and U.S. investment in empire, could not handle the full implications of decolonization. But now, it seems to me, recalling Willkie and “one world” might be another impetus to telling the story of the recent U.S. past anew and reorienting the global future. From the Cold War to the War on Terror, American global influence has been both benevolent and despotic, but always comfortable in its assurance that American dominance was indispensable to any kind of just world order. Now, however, that faith is in retreat. If Willkie’s trip stood at a hinge moment between the world shaped by European empire and the world shaped by American capitalism, American power is on the wane now and we are living through another hinge moment. The twenty-first century will be shaped by a host of new factors: Chinese state capitalism, Russian authoritarianism, simultaneously rising prosperity and inequality, and a new global upsurge of nationalism in the face of climate-fueled migration and pandemic threats. The United States can no longer pretend to ‘lead’ the rest of the world. Willkie’s story asks us to think about how Americans will live *in* the world, not atop it.

Perhaps “one world” is not the most useful slogan for our shared, precarious future. We need something more planetary and less universalist—something that captures the way that we share not a unified world but an imperiled earth riven by uneven development. I am not sure that any attempt to forge global interrelation can ever fully win out over nationalism, individualism, and all the other forms of particularity that bedevil all claims for global solidarity, whether socialist or liberal. Putting aside whether I think it should—I am vexed on this question, although I admire Willkie’s idealism and embrace it as a useful provocation—we are, as Lentz-Smith observes, certainly no closer to any kind of world organization today than we were in 1944, despite the conditions for it being ever more critical. Globalization has produced an upsurge in nationalism everywhere, and as the old joke goes it will likely take the sudden appearance of a Martian invasion fleet to bring the world together. The drift of things these days suggests that even that is likely to produce more turmoil, strife, and just sheer panic. But who knows? Even five years ago the very idea of talking about aliens as a factor in international relations would have seemed absurd, but recent news about the U.S. government’s attempts to record and track “unidentified aerial phenomena” suggest that, as with so many things in these times of crisis, much could be up in the air again before too long.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On the “age of three worlds,” see Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (New York: Verso, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> For one comprehensive take among many that are suddenly popping up, see Gideon Lewis-Kraus, “How the Pentagon Started Taking U.F.O.s Seriously,” *The New Yorker*, May 10, 2021, at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/05/10/how-the-pentagon-started-taking-ufos-seriously>, accessed May 21, 2021.