

[H-Diplo Roundtable XXIII-25 on Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain](#)

Discussion published by George Fujii on Monday, February 14, 2022

H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXIII-25

Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton (eds.). *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-4780-0603-9 (cloth, \$104.95); 978-1-4780-0694-7 (paperback, \$28.95).

14 February 2022 | <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT23-25>

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Introduction by Gilbert M. Joseph, Yale University

As a historian of Latin American social movements and U.S. empire in the region, who has recently focused on the Cold War era, it is a pleasure to introduce and participate in this roundtable on Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton's stimulating collection *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*. Although the volume primarily focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which are often regarded as the heyday of "formal" empires, the collection is also generative for understanding U.S. involvement in imperial formations over a longer haul, and I found it particularly helpful for thinking about the origins of America's post-1945 hegemony. Not

surprisingly, I join my fellow participants in expressing great admiration for the collection.

Technically speaking it may not qualify as “pathbreaking,” since it builds firmly on almost thirty years of scholarship plumbing the meaning and connections of both the ‘transnational and imperial turns,’ which in recent years have given rise to several critical anthologies on the transimperial dimensions of the British and European empires. Still, *Crossing Empires* should be agenda setting for scholars working on the U.S. empire. It may be too much to expect that it will hammer the final nail in the coffin of “empire denial”—a shibboleth that, while long past its prime, continues to nettle the U.S. and the World field, more than fifty years after area specialists laid it to rest. In the case of my own area specialization—Latin America—U.S. empire was “called out” several academic generations ago. Indeed, the very series in which *Crossing Empires* appears, “American Encounters/ Global Interactions,” which I co-edit, was launched in the late 1990s with a volume based on a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) conference—“Close Encounters of the Imperial Kind”—that brought Latin Americanists and foreign-relations scholars together to brainstorm new ways to conceptualize the nexus of politics and culture in the US’s longstanding hemispheric imperium.

Yet if empire deniers are as hard to get rid of as climate deniers, *Crossing Empires* certainly does much to shred the last remnants of U.S. “exceptionalism.” Scrutinizing the U.S. empire’s long-running entanglements with other empires, the collection offers richly detailed, archivally based case studies that demonstrate how transimperial connections on a global scale buttressed and often “co-produced” imperial rule. Across thirteen chapters framed by the editors’ incisive conceptual introduction, the contributors persuasively argue that it is only by “making these [transimperial] formations visible,” asking “what empire does,” that we can “recognize the many asymmetric power relations that have crisscrossed over time and space.”^[1] More than the sum of its parts and pointing future scholars in allusive ways to fill in more of the ‘transimperial map,’ *Crossing Empires* lays bare the imperial relations and mechanisms that have structured our modern world—processes that too often are vaguely or euphemistically characterized by terms such as ‘transnationalism’ and ‘globalization.’

But if these essays show us anything, it is that the process whereby the modern world was articulated through the circulation of people, commodities, and ideas was rarely uplifting or unproblematic. It was often predicated on settler colonial and other forms of violence and exploitation that appropriated native lands, degraded environments, and endangered natural species. It was managed by elite-led political regimes that fostered unequal trade relations, harsh dependent labor systems, immigration controls and restrictions, and state systems of surveillance. Indeed, one of the abiding strengths of this collection is the editors’ commitment to “bring state power out of the shadows and give it form” (13). Transimperial modernity also entailed the rise of the narcotics industry and unprecedented addiction; a greater prevalence of epidemics and pandemics, and—not to be minimized in any discussion of the politics of empire—countervailing networks of transimperial activism and resistance. By assembling some of the more engrossing transnational histories that reflect the United States’ multivalent involvement in the imperial origins of the contemporary world, *Crossing Empires* puts cutting-edge research on U.S. empire in dialogue with new currents in world and imperial history and colonial and postcolonial studies.

In the process the collection brings sharper semantic focus to the study of the politics of the United

States' transimperial pasts, freeing the enterprise from reflexive overuse of the 'transnational' label, which is sadly leaching it of meaning. I was struck by the fact that for all of the insights reaped by the transnational turn since its flowering in the wake of Thomas Bender's seminal collection *Rethinking American History in the Global Age* thirty years ago, the term "transnational" has suffered some of the same overexposure and devaluation that 'encounter' did in the years following an avalanche of scholarship in the wake of the Columbian quincentenary, when it risked becoming a euphemizing device to defang historical analysis of early imperialism.^[2] Hoganson and Sexton's Introduction is particularly helpful in sorting out and operationalizing their use of "transimperial," "transnational" and, as the editors put it, an array of other "transi" terms that have been deployed in the new imperial history—e.g., translocal, transcolonial, transborder, among others. All of them, they contend, "do analytical work" (11), but imprecise use can impede an understanding of the politics of transimperial pasts, which embraces an array of state and non-state actors.

The participants in this roundtable elaborate on many of the strengths of the collection, which I have alluded to above in broad terms. Historian of South Asia Jayita Sarkar highlights the volume's efficacy as an "antidote" to empire denial; she also lauds its capacity to probe the transimperial terrain for what it can tell us about the everyday, particularly the U.S. empire's role in promoting "business as usual"—not least its maintenance of "acute racial inequality" and racial hierarchies. At the same time, she acknowledges the efforts of certain contributors to identify transimperial spaces for resistance and struggle for social change.

The commentary of David Atkinson, a historian of British and American imperial relations and of international migration, emphasizes the timeliness of the collection at a national and world historical moment when transnational frameworks and commitments are under attack by nativist populists and pandemic disease. In the face of these challenges, he applauds the adoption of the transimperial frame, not to dismiss or supplant transnationalism but as "a constructive counteractive" to describe more precisely imperial complexity, competition, and contingency. Atkinson also picks up on a theme made by the editors themselves: the recognition of the limitations of single-authored studies of transimperial formations. Most individual researchers simply lack the time, languages, funding, and mastery of the multiple historiographies involved in transimperial projects. He calls for "*integrative collaborations*" in research and writing that most historians, working in artisanal style, have typically eschewed, but which may be required if the next generation of transnational and transimperial scholars is to produce distinctive, truly border-crossing work.

The commentary of Jeannette Jones, a historian of the U.S. who has written extensively on questions of race and representation in the context of American empire, is particularly helpful in synthesizing the crosscutting themes of this sprawling and ambitious collection and then glossing the contributions of the case studies around them. Her intervention pays particular attention to "the myriad ways that American Empire forged itself in dialogic relationships with other contemporary empires," and how these transimperial relations were ideologically constitutive of America's modern liberal democracy back home. While she finds little to criticize conceptually, Jones aptly suggests the volume might have benefitted from the inclusion of an essay on the Middle East as well as additional treatment of the transimperial borderlands that separate the U.S. from Canada and Mexico.

The roundtable's final participant, Einar Wigen, who is a specialist in Middle Eastern and Ottoman

studies, more critically develops some of the issues suggested in the pieces by Atkinson and Jones. First, while Wigan affirms the analytical value of *empire* and *imperial* as central organizing concepts, observing that empires have been much more the norm in world history than nation-states, he calls for greater precision in the use of these terms. For, “if empire is everywhere, the concept becomes too vague to help scholars” with any degree of nuance. Second, and perhaps of greater concern (since as I’ve suggested, the editors actually devote more attention to defining concepts than Wigan allows), his intervention critiques the works of the contributors for their almost exclusive reliance on English-language sources. This despite the manifest reality that “empires are polyglot enterprises.... There are linguistic encounters within the empire and often also when empires meet or when different imperial subjects interact.”

These imperial exchanges leave sources in multiple languages, which are essential to understand the operation of empire and encounters across imperial terrains. This fundamental critique, coupled with a related one that the volume is vastly more concerned with the American empire’s entanglements with its British sibling than relations with other empires (e.g., Russian, French, German, Hapsburg, Dutch, Ottoman, Japanese, Qing) obliges Wigan to raise what he sees as the ultimate irony connected with this otherwise laudable historiographical initiative: namely, that while the volume’s contributors share a negative critique of empire, especially Anglophone imperial hegemonies, their perspective gives them “pride of place.” Thus, even as the contributors seek to ‘call out American empire,’ by focusing almost exclusively on the U.S. and Britain, and working almost exclusively with English-language sources, the book unintentionally underscores “the true mark of United States’ imperial power.”

Wigan, a scholar whose research privileges issues of language and translation in studies of the Ottoman empire, registers critiques that are particularly valid and, as I’ve come to learn through my own experiences assembling collections at an early moment in the development of a field of inquiry, often come with the terrain. Hoganson and Sexton appreciate that theirs is an exploratory effort, and that more precise concepts and definitions will hopefully emerge as more work is done on transimperial terrains and their still “pointillist” version of the map gets increasingly filled in. Moreover, one does not have to argue for linguistic quotas to appreciate, as the editors do in this roundtable, that more non-English sources and voices can only bolster their agenda to write a transimperial history of the United States (and other empires) that integrates subaltern perspectives.

As H-Diplo roundtables go, this one generates clear approval for enacting an historiographical agenda for the U.S. and the World field that was long overdue. The editors and contributors, who represent a broad swath of historical subdisciplines that encompass studies of business, politics, diplomacy, labor, the environment, migration, gender, race, and ethnicity, represent something of a discursive community. In one way or another, they are all committed to “globalizing U.S. history, understanding empire, and historicizing the global” (12). Their diverse approaches cohere in bridging “the old historiographic divides” (12) between history from above and below, from the imperial center and the peripheries, and between traditional diplomatic history and the newer international history that integrates recent trends in social, cultural, and political history, and from transnational and postcolonial studies.

I hesitate to call for more than the editors have delivered in this already ambitious initial foray. Their response in this roundtable indicates the possibility of a sequel. As one who works on the variety of

border crossings and transimperial exchanges that marked the Latin American and Global Cold War, I'd like to see a future volume that gives more weight to the post-1945 period; here only two of the essays engage or transcend the Second World War.^[3] There are a variety of thematic issues that would lend themselves extremely well to that kind of sequel. For example, here only the surface of environmental history has been scratched in John Soluri's superb essay on transoceanic fur-sealing during the long nineteenth-century.^[4] The origins, environmental stakes, and politics of big oil cry out for transimperial analysis. Moreover, the broader relevance of the environment only increases as we move through the twentieth century into the contemporary moment when the transnational and political-economic dimensions of environmental threat and governance dwarf virtually every other matter.

Transnational studies of tourism have similarly blossomed in recent decades (especially for Latin America) and overlap with themes of imperial mobility, privilege, and military occupation that are taken up in this collection. Indeed, tourism and travel were avenues of institutionalizing and normalizing the transition from military conquest and occupation to imperial rule (think big game expeditions, more eco-friendly safaris, and securely protected beach enclaves). Of course, the military is itself a classic imperial contact zone, a site where empires meet. Future transimperial research privileging the post-1945 period might entail engagement with the Central American wars of the 1970s and 80s, not to mention the conflicts in Vietnam, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. More work remains to be done on the social and gender histories of military bases or of transnational revolutionary and counterrevolutionary movements (the Nicaraguan Sandinistas and "Contras," the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN; *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*), and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC; *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) present viable possibilities, to name but a few from my own field). Finally, themes of military aid and alliance afford transimperial entry points into the politics of Bandung and the Non-Aligned Movement—or the politics of NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and the United Nations.

In sum, Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, who are also the editors of the forthcoming, long awaited *Cambridge History of America in the World*, have advanced a transimperial project with tremendous possibilities for U.S. and the World historians and scholars of comparative empire. For my money, they have also provided us with one of the more memorable book covers in recent memory. Showcasing Rebecca Riley's three-dimensional wall installation "Fracked World," which is centered on a collage of discarded maps from around the globe,^[5] the cover dramatically evokes the stacked imperialisms, compressed spatiality, and squalid economic excess of a runaway global capitalism. It also triggered in my imagination an (admittedly suprahistorical) association with the mechanized, power-driven, world-in-miniature that constituted the weekly lead-in to *Game of Thrones*.

Participants:

Kristin Hoganson is the Stanley S. Stroup Professor of United States History and lame duck Director of Undergraduate Studies for the History Department at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her most recent monograph, *The Heartland: An American History* (Penguin Press, 2019), is a global history of a seemingly all-American place.

Jay Sexton is the Rich and Nancy Kinder Chair of Constitutional Democracy at the University of Missouri and director of Mizzou's MA in Atlantic History and Politics. His most recent publications include *A Nation Forged by Crisis: A New American History* (Basic Books, 2018) and two co-edited volumes, with Kristin Hoganson, *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020) and *The Cambridge History of America in the World*, Volume 2, general editor Mark Bradley (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2021).

Gilbert M. Joseph is Farnam Professor Emeritus of History and International Studies at Yale University and past president of the Latin American Studies Association. He is the author or editor of numerous books and articles on modern Mexico, Latin America, US-Latin American relations, and the Latin American Cold War. These include *Mexico's Once and Future Revolution: Social Upheaval and the Challenge of Rule since the Late Nineteenth Century*, co-authored with Jürgen Buchenau (Duke University Press, 2013); and *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War*, co-edited with Greg Grandin (Duke University Press, 2010). Since 1998 he has co-edited the book series "American Encounters/Global Interactions," with Duke, initially with Emily Rosenberg and more recently with Penny Von Eschen.

David C. Atkinson is an associate professor of history in the Purdue University History Department. He received his Ph.D. from Boston University in 2010, and he is the author of *The Burden of White Supremacy: Containing Asian Labor Migration in the British Empire and the United States* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2017) and *In Theory and in Practice: Harvard's Center for International Affairs, 1958-1983* (Harvard University Press, 2008). He is working on a new book project that explores how imports shaped the political economy of the nineteenth-century United States, and he has published articles on Asian migration in the Pacific Northwest, on the international resonances of American immigration restriction in the 1920s, and on the imperial and international implications of Australian immigration policy.

Jeannette Eileen Jones is Associate Professor of History and Ethnic Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is a historian of the United States, with expertise in American cultural and intellectual history and African American Studies. Her research expertise and interests include Gilded Age and Progressive Era history, transnational history, and America in the World. She is the author of *In Search of Brightest Africa: Reimagining the Dark Continent in American Culture, 1884-1936* (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 2010). She is currently working on her second monograph, *America in Africa: U.S. Empire, Race, and the African Question, 1821-1919*, which is under advanced contract with Yale University Press.

Jayita Sarkar is an assistant professor at Boston University's Pardee School of Global Studies, where she is also the founding director of the Global Decolonization Initiative

Einar Wigen is associate professor of Turkish studies at the University of Oslo, where he works on political legitimacy and imperial legacies in Turkey, the Ottoman Empire and the wider Turkic world. He is author of *State of Translation: Turkey in Interlingual Relations* (University of Michigan Press, 2018) and (with Iver B. Neumann) *The Steppe Tradition in International relations: Russians, Turks, and European State Building, 4000 BCE-2017 CE* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

Review by David C. Atkinson, Purdue University

I think I could read Kristin Hoganson's grocery list and become a better historian of Americans' engagement with the world. I say that not just because of her ability to glean insight from the most ordinary cultural artifacts, including old grocery lists: I say it because everything she writes reformats my thinking about where and how we discover evidence of the world in United States history.^[6] Jay Sexton's scholarship constitutes equally essential reading, and his talent for resuscitating seemingly stale corners of the historiography has helped revitalize interest in the financial, political, and intellectual history of nineteenth century U.S. foreign relations.^[7] It is therefore not surprising that together they convened an exceptional group of historians to grapple with the idea of transimperialism—which Hoganson and Sexton define as nonstate actors interacting across empires—in U.S. history at the University of Oxford's Rothermere American Institute in 2016. The resulting anthology constitutes an exciting proof of concept, and this rich, agenda-setting volume should be a cornerstone of graduate seminars that center Americans' interactions with the world—just as it should be required reading for historians whose scholarship does the same.

Crossing Empires gestures toward numerous challenges and opportunities for the future of globally-inflected studies of United States history. One of this collection's most intriguing implications is the opportunity it provides to reflect on transnationalism and the conceptual and methodological revolution it inspired. This is a good time to take stock. The transnational turn in U.S. history is now some thirty years old and it has stimulated a generation of transformative scholarship. It has proven especially productive for scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a period during which Americans hewed the national from the colonial, even as they became ever more enmeshed in global networks of commerce, culture, and colonialism. Inspired by this innovation, historians have followed Americans into the world and, albeit to a lesser extent, they have followed the world back into the United States. In doing so they have mapped countless flows, exchanges, conduits, and webs, and they have analyzed the interactions, relationships, and engagements that those connections cultivated. Put simply, the transnational turn has revolutionized our scholarship.

At the same time, many of the commitments that underpinned this endeavor are under attack. The diminishing retrenchments of nationalism, insularity, and pandemic disease have subdued those more capacious inclinations, encouraged as they were by a century of globalization and growing interconnection. Since contemporary concerns are never far from the historian's mind, we might expect to see a historiographic retreat from the global, and a renewed emphasis on the parochial and territorializing imperatives of the nation-state, its institutions, and its agents. But we are just as likely to see an enthusiastic riposte, dedicated to reminding ourselves and others how inextricably embedded in the world our politics, economy, and culture have always been. There is an especially urgent need to assess our methods and assumptions in this context, and this collection is an excellent place to start.

For its part, *Crossing Empires* suggests that what we need in this moment of global attenuation is not a reversion to the narrow nation-centric obsessions of the past, but a reorientation—or perhaps a clarification—of what we mean when we talk about the transnational. Transnationalism does a lot of heavy lifting in contemporary scholarship. It often serves as a metonym for a range of globally oriented connections involving individuals who are unaffiliated with the state, and many of us have eagerly reached for it in trying to explain the panoply of interactions that connect American people, things, ideas, and institutions to others around the globe. But there are reasons to be cautious.

Indeed, numerous scholars have offered trenchant critiques of our captivation with the transnational, offering instead affirmations of the international or vigorous statements on reviving our scrutiny of the state and its agents in our scholarship on Americans and the world.^[8]

Two deceptively simple questions underpin this collection's contribution to that conversation: what if the thing that Americans were historically transecting when they ventured out into the world was not the nation, but something else? Is it time to conceptualize a new spatial referent that more accurately captures those circumstances? Hoganson and Sexton say yes, and their volume allies with those who urge putting empire at the center of our analytical frame.^[9] I certainly would not characterize *Crossing Empires* as a broadside against transnationalism—many of the authors have exemplified that approach in their previous scholarship, and this is no polemic—but I do think it represents a constructive counteractive to transnationalism's preponderance in the modern historiography of Americans' relationship with the world. In that respect, this volume makes a convincing case for transimperialism as a mode of analysis which recognizes that nonstate actors often transversed imperial formations rather than national boundaries when they sailed as sealers around the Pacific Poles, or when they travelled to the United States to protest the British Empire in India, as John Soluri and Moon-Ho Jung demonstrate in their respective contributions.^[10] Stephen Tufnell neatly articulates the advantage of this approach in his article on American engineers working in British East Africa: "Historians seeking to globalize the U.S. past require a sharper, more precise analytical vocabulary to discuss global connectivity in the nineteenth century" (48).^[11] I enthusiastically agree with that assessment, and the essays in *Crossing Empires* provide ample evidence of its veracity, as well as concrete tools with which to work.

This attention to detail exemplifies the contributions to *Crossing Empires*. Each author takes care to reveal not only hitherto obscured connections, but to describe, understand, and *situate* them in their varied, overlapping imperial contexts. Ikuko Asaka's chapter on African American migration to Upper Canada in the 1830s provides an excellent case in point, situating debates about the racial and physiological suitability of African American migrants for settlement in London, Ontario in a sprawling transimperial framework that encompasses the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and Liberia.^[12] A transnational conception of the backdrop against which this discourse transpired would have yielded many insights, no doubt, but it would not have accurately captured the varied ways in which the geography and meaning of empire conditioned those debates.

Indeed, the transnational frame can be extraordinarily revealing, but it can also flatter to deceive: the excitement of uncovering previously concealed contacts can sometimes induce us to deemphasize difference and anomaly. Complexity and contingency matter, and those singularities can get lost amidst the urge to expose commonalities. By accentuating the influence and consequences of empire, the transimperial frame helps to restore that which might be lost through a predominately transnational approach to these particular historical junctures. For example, there have been some very incisive studies that center the mobility of Caribbean labor, and many have certainly put empire at their core,^[13] but Julie Greene's discussion of Afro-Caribbean workers in the transimperial labor circuits of the Americas—and her attention to their personal testimonies—vividly captures the very

individual experiences of those who circulated through multiple empires in search of work in the early twentieth century.^[14] All these chapters reflect a similarly discerning eye for nuance and distinction, all are analytically rich, and I will return to them repeatedly for the specificity of their interpretive insights as much as for their empirical revelations.

It is also clear that adopting this transimperial frame in no way diminishes the payoffs tendered by transnationalism. One of the delights of good transnational history—and indeed all good history—is its attention to messiness and complexity, and the contributions to this volume enthusiastically embrace that disorderliness. Oliver Charbonneau elegantly puts it this way in his chapter on the Islamic Philippines, arguing that the transimperial approach reveals “heterogenous webs of exchange and provide[s] a window onto the contingent and coproduced qualities of U.S. imperial rule” (185).^[15] Similarly, we clearly lose none of the attention to scale that typifies transnational history when we recalibrate our canvas to the transimperial. Genevieve Clutario, for example, elucidates the most personal scale in her study of those Filipino women who navigated the sudden shift from one empire to another following the Japanese invasion of the Philippines in 1942, while Anne Foster adopts a much larger regional scale to illuminate the transimperial network of doctors and colonial administrators who reconstituted the meaning of opium throughout the empires of Southeast Asia at the turn of the twentieth century.^[16] We still see repeated confirmation of the outside influences and collaborations that inform American history, and the ways American history inflected that of the world, and we see them taking place at every level of human interaction. But the difference here is that we get greater fidelity to the filaments of empire and the relationships those fibers nourished.

Crossing Empires also suggests to me that we cannot simply conceptualize our way out of a fundamental limitation of contemporary historical scholarship on the U.S. in the world: single-authored studies. Conceptually, those who study America and the world have never had it so good. But to paraphrase my mum, our eyes have become bigger than our stomachs. Whether we construe ourselves as venturing into the transnational, transimperial, international, or the global, we are reaching the limits of what individual scholars can reasonably achieve on their own. Even the most capacious single-authored studies can still only provide glimpses and fragments of what our theorizing tells us is possible. No single author has the time, the languages, the funding, or the grounding in the necessary historiographies to capture the full spectrum of what our conceptual and methodological imaginations tell us we could explore.

Wide-ranging edited volumes like this certainly contribute a tremendous amount, but I cannot help but think our more expansive concepts and methods ultimately call for *integrative* collaboration in ways that historians are not usually comfortable with. However we conceive our geographic palettes and panoramas beyond the nation state, working not only alongside but *with* other scholars—both at home and abroad—would further enrich the scope and scale of the histories we write. Perhaps truly collaborative research and writing would allow us to realize the loftiest possibilities of the transnational—and now transimperial—turns?

Before being asked to participate in this roundtable, I had already assigned this book in my graduate reading seminar on “Americans in the World.” That class explores the concepts and methods scholars have used to place United States history in a broader global context. I have taught it multiple times

over the past decade, and the students and I have often resorted to transnationalism when describing the array of experiences uncovered by a rotating list of historians across a range of brilliant books. Often, that impulse felt if not inaccurate then inexact, especially when dealing with geographies and communities whose engagements transcended the confines of the nation. This semester was different, and it was different because of *Crossing Empires*. No author whose monographs we read this semester used the transimperial framing advocated by this book (and that is not surprising given the collection's recent publication). And yet, the students and I frequently invoked transimperialism when analyzing the other books we discussed. That approach often proved more explicative than any other framing we might have chosen: that in itself is a strong testament to the value of this collection and the analytical move it recommends. Next time I find myself reaching for transnationalism, I will pause and consider whether what I'm really trying to explain is in fact reflective of the transimperial.

Review by Jeannette Eileen Jones, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Crossing Empires asks us to consider the ways in which we approach the history of the United States as an empire. While most scholars of U.S. history and of America/the U.S. in the world have conceded that the United States became an empire once it began spreading westward, they sometimes differ about the contours, mechanisms, and manifestations of that empire. Often operating on the assumption that the United States was exceptional in its imperial formations, those historians have often failed to see the ways in which the U.S. empire derived its ideas and practices from other empires (most notably, European ones), or how the U.S. developed imperial formations that other empires adopted abroad. Additionally, the United States engaged in transimperial cooperation from the earliest days of European expansion into Africa, Asia, and the Pacific. Accordingly, the studies included in this volume reveal the myriad ways that American Empire forged itself in dialogic relationships with other contemporary empires, exploring how American commercial imperialism, industrial capitalism, settler colonialism, and overseas expansion figured prominently in the transimperial world. Moreover, the authors expose how transimperial and interimperial relations were constitutive of American modern liberal democracy.

Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, acclaimed historians of America in the World, assembled thirteen chapters by scholars who take the reader on journeys to South America, Canada, Africa, South Asia, Australia, the Alaskan borderlands, the Philippines, China, and across the United States, where transimperial networks, ideas, and technologies forged and sustained the “modern” world. Collectively, the essays redirect the historiography of American empire to take up Paul Kramer’s 2011 charge to not only explain what American empire is, but also what it is not. As Hoganson and Sexton state, we must “ask what empire does” (11).^[17] They divided the volume into five parts that correspond to particular themes in the historiography of empire. One overarching research question connects the essays. How did the United States cross empires and engage in transimperial activities—figuratively, politically, and physically—during key periods in the global history of imperialism, beginning in the nineteenth century (post-1815)? As Hoganson and Sexton explain, “Taken together, these essays de-exceptionalize the study of U.S. imperialism by weaving the strands of empire involving the United States and U.S. actors into world history” (13).

One approach of the contributing authors is to focus on U.S. colonial expansion and settler

colonialism, offering the reader insights into transimperial undercurrents of American policies enacted in overseas colonies and U.S. relationships with Indigenous Nations within its borders. Four authors—Julian Go, Anne L. Foster, Oliver Charbonneau, and Genevieve Clutario—scrutinize imperial policies and technologies used to govern the Philippines, and expose the ways that Filipinos responded to colonial rule.^[18] Rather than depict Filipinos as passive in the face of imperial and transimperial impositions on their daily lives, these authors attend to the interplay between Filipino local autonomy and imperial power.

Charbonneau explores the early years of U.S. imperial rule over the Philippines, when American officials engaged in transimperial learning in their efforts to negotiate with the Sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao who ruled the Muslim South of the colony. These officials not only relied on documents produced during Spain's 300 years of contact and rule over the Moros, but also studied the successes and failures of the British and other European empires that ruled over Muslim populations. In addition, they studied non-European empires, such as the Ottoman empire, to understand how to construct "a colonial state in the Islamic Philippines" (196). This knowledge gathering involved not only reading imperial texts, but also traveling to European "metropolises" and their colonies to witness first-hand imperial rule in action. Charbonneau reveals how officials on the ground slowly realized how connected the Moros region was to other empires in the region—the British, French, and Dutch—which provided avenues for Muslim Filipinos and Chinese in the province to engage in illicit trade through the Sulu Sea, especially with Borneo. Charbonneau makes a compelling case for "the coproduced character of the U.S. Empire in the early twentieth century," disclosing "how preestablished regional connections," as existed in the Philippines, "shaped a colonial state" (197).

Foster offers another example of transimperial policies implemented in the Philippines—the regulation of the use of opium and opiates. Foster explores transimperial campaigns in Southeast Asia enacted during the late nineteenth century that aimed at improving public health, introducing modern medicine into colonies, and preventing disease as part of a broader movement to manage "tropical labor." In this study, Foster traces how the British, French, and Dutch—countries that held colonies in Southeast Asia and traded with China—began to question the efficacy of traditional medicinal uses of opium. Bringing together doctors and public health experts, imperial managers made distinctions between opium as medicine and opium as drug—viewing the latter as not only a path to addiction, but also a potential threat to colonial order and the management of indigenous laborers. American membership in the Anti-Opium League of China, founded in 1896, emerged primarily to address U.S. officials' concerns that the lack of regulation of opium in colonies and countries neighboring the Philippines would spell disaster for the American colonial project in the Pacific. Foster uses interviews taken by U.S. commissioners and letters from American missionaries, among other sources, to unveil "an ambitious transimperial learning project" aimed at determining the "best opium policy for the Philippines" (123).

Go explores how the United States introduced the secret ballot, an "imperial technology," (page citation) as Go designates it, into the Philippines. Borrowed from Australia, the secret ballot made its way to Puerto Rico and the mainland United States. The U.S. imperial administration introduced the ballot into the Philippines, presenting it to both schoolchildren and adults as a tool of modernity and civilization. Once implemented in the colony in 1899, Filipinos seized on their efficient use of the

secret ballot as proof of their capacity for modern self-government. In other words, they pointed to their mastery of the ballot to agitate for their independence. Go reveals how the introduction of the ballot to the United States became a tool of voter suppression. In the Jim Crow South, Redeemers used the printed ballot, which required voters to be literate, to discourage and prevent the African American franchise. In the North, Republicans advocated for the secret ballot to break the Democratic urban machines that relied on the immigrant vote. Here too, literacy requirements acted as a deterrent to universal male suffrage. Go concludes that the secret ballot was neither a “national” or “colonial” invention. Moreover, its adoption in the U.S. colonies and the states as an “Anglo-American transimperial invention...should remind us of the transimperial origins of America’s political system—and of the modern world more broadly” (108).

Clutario’s study of the Philippines centers on World War II and the experiences of Filipinos caught between two empires—the United States and Japan. After 40 years of subjection to U.S. rule, during which Filipinos vigorously fought for their independence, the islands fell to Japanese occupation in 1941. After the U.S. military retreated in 1942, Filipino resistance took a decisive turn to counter “Japan’s ‘Co-Prosperity’ ideology,” which claimed to bring all Filipinos “a better way of life” (242). Clutario centers the experiences of women who “are all too often regarded as peripheral to imperial histories” (243). As she argues, exploring “life under underlapping empires” in times of war (or even transitions) requires scholars to pay attention to the “everyday lives” (243) of middle-class women like Helen Mendoza, Flora Gimenez, and Pacita Pestaño-Jacinto. Clutario uses their diaries and memoirs to reveal how the Japanese occupation disrupted the “normalcy” of living under U.S. rule; for example, access to food for the family. Overwhelmingly, Filipinos demonstrated skepticism about Japanese propaganda in the face of the food crisis that cut them off from American foodstuffs and slowed the production of food. Clutario concludes that Filipina’s “pursuit of normalcy” required them to live with the “decisions of the Japanese military administration,” as well as “the long legacies” of U.S. and Spanish rule (254).

Like that of Clutario, Margaret Jacobs’s article centers the experiences women; in this case, indigenous women (Native American, First Nations, and Aborigine) who battled with colonial policies that promoted the adoption of indigenous children by white families to save them from alleged “neglect and abuse” (289) from the allegedly deleterious effects of being raised indigenous.^[19] Jacobs’s essay, the only one that focuses on the late twentieth-century, is a comparative study of the persistence of settler colonialist logic and attendant racial fictions that informed adoption policies affecting Indigenous peoples and communities in the United States and Australia. Jacobs demonstrates how women activists from each country engaged in dialogue across empires to devise effective ways to combat the ongoing threat to “indigenous family survival” engendered by “generations of child removal” (283). The experiences and organizing of Mollie Dyer (an Indigenous Australian) and Maxine Robbins (a member of the Yakama Indian Nation) in the 1970s expose the power of transimperial activist networks. Dyer’s reading of *Indian Family Defense* (288)^[20] and travels to North America to talk with Indigenous activists and meet with Robbins, and Robbins’s subsequent trip to Australia to speak at a conference celebrating Children’s Week were just a few examples of how indigenous peoples organized across settler colonies borders to protect their families. Jacobs argues that their experiences offer evidence how Indigenous women could “counteract transimperial tyrannies” through the “circulation of strategies of family reclamation”

(295).

U.S. relations with South and Central America are the subject of the essays of John Soluri, Michel Gobat, and Julie Greene.^[21] Their essays offer needed interventions into the historiography of U.S. empire, demonstrating the transimperial dimensions of commerce, labor, and migration in these relationships. Gobat calls for a reappraisal of William Walker's conquest of Nicaragua as not only having been influenced by his belief in Manifest Destiny and a defense of slavery, but also by his admiration for European liberalism, liberal imperialism, and expansion. Gobat demonstrates how Walker's time spent in Europe prior to the 1848 revolutions led him to embrace liberal democracy based on republican government, universal white male suffrage, and the "destruction" of aristocracies (72). This viewpoint endorsed settler colonialism as a means to an end—spreading American democracy in the Western Hemisphere in the face of European failures to do so as imperial powers ruling over Latin America and the Caribbean. Contextualizing Walker's filibustering in the global push for expanded empires and settler colonies, Gobat reveals the interimperial and transimperial connections between the United States and Europe prior to the so-called "age of empire" (1876-1914)—more specifically, prior to 1898, when the United States acquired its overseas empire. Walker's supporters compared his empire in Nicaragua, which lasted from July 12, 1856 to May 1, 1857, to British control over India. However, as Gobat explains, they failed to "see the similarities between the wars waged against both entities" that fueled the "anti-imperial struggles"... "that culminated in the expulsion of Walker's group in 1857 and the Indian Rebellion of the same year" (87).

Greene explores the migration of people of Anglophone African descent—Black British Antilleans—to the Panama Canal Zone to participate in the U.S. canal-building project. When the United States won its bid to construct the Panama Canal, American officials launched a massive labor recruitment plan that brought to Panama Black workers primarily from across the Anglophone Caribbean, as well as workers from Europe. Officials in Jamaica, St. Kitts, Antigua, Grenada, and Montserrat forbade the United States from setting up recruitment stations on their islands. In contrast, Barbados welcomed the Americans, who established a station in Bridgetown where men and women could sign up to work in Panama. Greene uses the testimonies of these Black workers (including many who traveled to Barbados to sign a labor contract) to demonstrate how they navigated and challenged the racism and discrimination attendant to the U.S. industrial imperialist project. When the building ended, many workers returned home or immigrated to the United States or other parts of the Caribbean, South America, and Central America. As Greene explains, during their time in zone, "[t]hey found tactics developed in coping with one empire [the British] helped them create limited space for independence in another" (237-8).

Like Greene, Ikuko Asaka explores labor, migration, and Black mobility in her essay.^[22] She writes about African American migration to Upper Canada in the 1830s, focusing on debates about whether they should immigrate instead to Liberia. In the wake of increased anti-Black violence and legislation aimed at excluding free Black Americans from enjoying the rights of citizenship, emigration schemes became more popular among whites and Blacks. So-called humanitarians, in both Great Britain and the United States, questioned whether Blacks were climatically fit for permanent settlement in the northernmost climes of North America or in the Northwest Territories. Asaka provides details of various pseudo-scientific theories proposed to claim that free African Americans could only thrive

economically and enjoy self-determination by “returning” to Africa. She also explains how Blacks themselves responded, some embracing emigration to Africa, but many more objecting to emigration projects, viewing them as a front for the white supremacist settler colonialist agendas in North America. Asaka points to the incongruity between statements that claimed to be saving Indigenous people and lands from Black encroachment while simultaneously doing nothing to check white settler expansion. She concludes that in their fight to determine their own future, “African Americans...fought a mode of dominance that transcended the nation in its significance and operation” (218). They fought for “political rights and social inclusion,” (218) insisting that they could forge a life in North America and were not biologically destined to live in Africa.

The significance of Africa in U.S. transimperialism extended beyond settler colonial politics in Liberia. Stephen Tuffnell explores the roles that American engineering firms played in helping the British empire build up its colonial infrastructure in Uganda, as part of “surging U.S. commercial expansion” (53) during the late nineteenth century.^[23] Winning a competitive bid to construct the Uganda Railway, the American Bridge Company sent U.S. engineers to the British protectorate where they enmeshed themselves in colonial efforts to mobilize African and Indian migrant laborers to perform the work of empire. Tuffnell explains, “Coercive power over labor was systemic to...imperial capitalist expansion overseas” (58). He treats the railway as an imperial technology. American engineers wielded their expertise to push U.S. “industrial capitalism.” As Tuffnell explains, the U.S. was an “accomplice” to British empire in Uganda, where “American corporations coproduced products of imperial rule” (60). The railway project was just one instance of how U.S. capitalism played a broader role in “transimperial relationships” fundamental to exercising “imperial power around the world” (60).

Nicole Phelps also examines how the United States cooperated “with other imperial powers to preserve and expand imperial structures” as it built its own “informal empire” and acquired overseas colonies (139).^[24] Exploring the three U.S. consular systems that operated from 1789-1924, Phelps demonstrates how the U.S. Consular Service (USC) “helped to enmesh the United States in a global trade network dominated by the great imperial powers” (135). At root, the work of the USC “was the stuff of both transnational and transimperial connections” (135), as Phelps explains. From 1789 to 1856, the USC only had nineteenth posts abroad. After the 1856 legislation restructured the USC, posts expanded in the British and Portuguese empires. After the Civil War through 1872, the growth of the USC “allowed for the exchange of people, goods, and capital between the British Empire and the expanding U.S. empire” (145). Canada became an important site for consular work, hosting disproportionately most of the U.S. consular servants. The reforms that took place between 1906 and 1924 eventually relegated consular duties to “border maintenance” and helping Americans traveling or residing abroad. Trade no longer came under their purview. The new U.S. Foreign Service vested sole power in high-level plenipotentiaries to liaise with other imperial powers around the world.

While the United States expanded its own empire and engaged in transimperial cooperation, people on the ground actively resisted imperialist power and founded organizations dedicated to dismantling empire. Moon-Ho Jung explores the experiences of Har Dayal, an Indian-born intellectual whose anticolonial activism “made him...a target of the British imperial security state” (261).^[25] An outspoken critic of the British Empire, Dayal sought to immigrate to the United States or Canada.

U.S. immigration policies targeted South Asians, especially dissidents who sought to escape imperial subjugation. When U.S. officials arrested Dayal in 1914, they viewed his immigration case as a “political question” (270). Jung reveals how Dayal’s case embodied “the power of the modern state to legitimize and consolidate race and empire” (271). Similarly, the arrest of Bhagwan Singh (another anti-imperial activist) in the United States further elucidated how America and Britain collaborated to repress South Asian “anticolonial revolutionaries” (272) who fought to liberate their people from imperial rule.

Marc-William Palen also examines anti-imperialist activism, focusing on the emergence of anti-imperial sentiment in the United States and Great Britain more than 50 years before the founding of the American Anti-Imperialist League (AIL) in 1898. ^[26] Palen traces that sentiment to “the mid-nineteenth century Anglo-American free trade movement” (159). He argues that the AIL embrace of “free trade ideas” emanated from “the metropolitan heart of the British Empire” and its anti-imperial free trade position that dated back to the late 1700s (160). Palen’s study excavates the transimperial context in which “protectionist economic policies” were linked inextricably to anti-imperialism. Taking cues from British Liberal Richard Cobden, American anti-imperialists embraced his “economic cosmopolitanism” (162). These American Cobdenites founded the AIL, forging ties between anti-imperialists on both sides of the Atlantic. Palen concludes that transimperial anti-imperialists sought to dismantle the very “economic theories” that had produced the empires in which they resided (page citation).

The essays included in *Crossing Empires* push transimperial and U.S. in the world historiographies in new directions. The geographic scope of the essays cover all the inhabitable continents and various forms of colonial and imperial formations. While the authors dissect the transimperial nature of U.S. empire and American imperial actors in the world, they never do so at the expense of colonized people. The lives of those subjected to imperial rule are central to the arguments put forth by the authors. In this sense, there is little to criticize in the volume. That said, I would have liked to see more essays about the transimperial borderlands that separate the United States from Canada and Mexico, as well as perhaps one essay about the Middle East or what nineteenth century scholars called the Levant. Understandably, this was most likely beyond the control of the editors. This book will be of great interest to scholars of U.S. and the world, Global Studies, World History, and histories of empires.

Review by Jayita Sarkar, Boston University

Crossing Empires is a pathbreaking volume that provides an antidote to the “persistent case of empire denial” in U.S. historiography (5). The thirteen essays of the volume deliver handsomely on the promise of taking the post-1815 history of the United States to the transimperial realm by offering a “pointillist picture” that globalizes U.S. history and historicizes the global (12). This generative volume brings the transimperial to the fore by studying the mobility of capital, labor, medicine, laws, institutions, ideas, and everyday practices, to name a few. It is a refreshing take on the ongoing debate about the U.S. empire in which race, gender, and class are not additive but weaved into the fabric of U.S. power and its manifestations. ^[27]

It is a truly global project that takes the reader down a fascinating journey of discovery of transimperial entanglements that cut across spatial and temporal scales. Naturally it is a multi-historiographical endeavor. The editors, Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, successfully gathered essays by an excellent group of scholars with wide-ranging expertise that covers most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In demystifying their choice of the word “transimperial,” the editors explain that their goal is to render nonstate relations visible in ways that bridge the gulf between traditional diplomatic history and “histories from below” derived from transnational and postcolonial approaches.

It arrives at an opportune moment when there is an ongoing revitalization of imperial, anticolonial, indigenous and Black histories in the English-speaking academe. Recent influential pieces of scholarship include Duncan Bell’s *Dreamworlds of Race* on efforts by prominent individuals across the Atlantic to consolidate an “Angloworld” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Benjamin Hopkins’ *Ruling the Savage Periphery* on the traveling itinerary of “frontier governmentality” from British India to Argentina and Arizona, and Adom Getachew’s *Worldmaking After Empire* on African, African American and Caribbean anticolonial intellectuals who challenged racialized sovereign inequality during the long drawn out process of decolonization.^[28]

This volume stands out for at least three thematic reasons. First, by broaching the transimperial terrain without gesturing at wars or structural geopolitical crises, the essays ensure that the U.S. empire is not construed as an emergency response to structural change, but rather as business as usual. It thereby challenges narratives of exceptionalism about the U.S. empire. This is most prominent in Stephen Tuffnell’s chapter on the construction of the Ugandan Railway in the British protectorate by American engineering firms using Indian and African labor, Anne Foster’s study of transimperial learning for the control of opium in European empires across south and southeast Asia, and Julian Go’s investigation of the transimperial journey of the secret ballot as a technology of democracy from London to Australia to the United States to the Philippines.^[29] Even when war configures, as in the case of Genevieve Clutario’s study of the Philippines under Japanese control during World War II, the author focuses our attention on the day-to-day lives of women, away from the spectacular events of geopolitical violence.^[30] Similarly, Nicole M. Phelps shows the transimperial circulation of capital, goods and people through the day-to-day functions of the U.S. Consular Service from 1789 to 1924.^[31]

Second, the essays show how the transimperial terrain is a realm of acute racial inequality. Its actors, networks and processes were both shaped by racial hierarchies and often contributed to further inequality along racial lines. This is particularly evident in Michel Gobat’s chapter on William Walker’s racialized “liberal empire” built with U.S. filibusters and European émigrés at the invitation of Nicaragua’s Liberal Party, John Soluri’s study of fur sealing that undermined the indigenous sovereignty in Tierra del Fuego, Oliver Charbonneau’s contribution on the influence of Dutch, British and Ottoman practices on U.S. colonial policies to fully control the Muslim frontier zone of Mindanao-Sulu in the Philippines, and Ikuko Asaka’s examination of racial geographies of climatic essentialism surrounding Black settlement in the Wilberforce colony in Upper Canada in opposition to Liberia.^[32]

Third, the essays reveal the transimperial space as a turf of resistance and struggle for change. This is conspicuous in Julie Green's examination of Afro-Caribbean laborers' episodic loyalty to the British Empire in the Panama Canal Zone as a strategy of resistance against U.S. imperial extraction, Marc William-Palen's study of transimperial connections of anti-imperial dissent through the free trade economic cosmopolitan critique of imperialism, Moon Ho-Jung's chapter on Anglo-American coordination in the surveillance and control of anticolonial South Asian revolutionaries Har Dayal and Bhagwan Singh, and Margaret D. Jacobs' examination of transimperial sensibilities in Indigenous women's activism against Indigenous child removal in Australia, Canada and the United States in the 1970s.^[33]

Crossing Empires thus showcases cutting-edge scholarship that will transform our conversations about empires over the ensuing decades. This volume with its thoughtfully curated essays with an insightful introduction is a must-read not just for historians of empire. It ought to find its place in graduate seminars on race, capitalism, colonialism, decolonization, Indigenous rights, labor, migration, and citizenship.

Review by Einar Wigen, University of Oslo

Taking on American notions of exceptionalism and setting out to "call out empire," (page citation) *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* is a book that delivers on its subtitle. To some extent global in reach, this is a work of U.S. history, based on English-language sources and largely taking the Anglophone world for granted, even as that empire was polyglot at home and gained global reach. Accepting the premise that the U.S. was an empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (and probably still is), co-editors Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton deliver a set of solid studies of American transimperial interaction. Many of the usual criticisms of the study of empires seem to be anticipated, as the work includes contributions on workers, indigenous people, environmental humanities, women, drugs and anti-imperial activism, and almost entirely emphasises imperial peripheries. There are chapters that take into account legacies, resistance, and the everyday, and so the book is in many ways at the cutting edge of historical research into empire. The book is at its best when it does what can be summed up in a quote from Julian Go's chapter:

By tracking a technology or an idea across and through empires - hence tracking it *transimperially* - we hold the thing constant while varying the context of its usages. This enables us to see something about those different contexts that we might not otherwise see. When we do this in a world of nation-states, we track things cross-nationally. We shine a light on social, political, or cultural differences that presumably align with national differences. When we track something transimperially, we track it through or across multiple empires. Doing so illuminates something about that diversity within and across empires; it also shows us the various projects of racialized power and fields of competition within and across those empires (107).

In the thirteen chapters, the contributors provide a set of empirical studies that somehow have to do with Americans interacting in a transimperial setting. All of them are interesting and enjoyable,

exhibiting solid scholarship. It is when they are viewed as a whole that the book's weaknesses become apparent – as I will return to below. Although there are five thematic parts, there is also a somewhat chronological organisation to this book, in that it starts with sealers in the early nineteenth century and ends up with transimperial networks of indigenous activists in the 1970s and 80s.

While the introduction to the book emphasises the analytical value of *empire* and *imperial* as concepts, there is little or nothing in terms of definition.^[34] This is also one of its main weaknesses. I agree that dispensing with exceptionalism and treating the U.S. as any other empire is a valuable contribution. If the nation-state is a recent phenomenon, then almost every large-scale polity *before* its inception can be understood as *imperial*. Moreover, if the nation-state arose in Europe and spread from there, anything geographically *beyond* first Europe and then, perhaps, America, must be analysed in terms other than the nation-state. Again, *empire* fits the bill. In other words, *empire* can perhaps be normalised as the main large-scale form of political organisation for most of the world for most of history – or at least for the past two millennia. In short, it is more of a historical norm than is the nation-state. However, the problem is that if empire is everywhere, the concept quickly becomes too vague to help scholars with analytical precision.

To take an example from John Soluri's chapter on sealing in the Pacific and the South Atlantic.^[35] While it is laudable to include environmental history in a book on empire, it is also curious that *empire* does not take centre stage in this chapter at all. Yes, a lot of the interaction happens with one or more empires in the background. But the way empire shapes particular actors' preferences and scope for action is never entirely clear. Accepting the author's claim that the United States in 1879 was an empire (which I readily do), of what relevance was this for New England sealers in the South Atlantic, as opposed to Norwegian sealers operating in the same waters (35)? Similarly, Nicole Phelps includes Sweden c. 1897 in a table of 'informal empire' (139).^[36] This begs the question; what was *not* empire at this time? If everything and anything was *empire*; what analytical utility does the concept of empire really have? Would perhaps Soluri or Stephen Tuffnell^[37] (both of whom write on profit) be better served with Owen Lattimore's concept of 'hitchhikers of empire'?^[38] Did it matter for the Americans pursuing profit in the service of British empire (Tuffnell) whether the United States was an empire or not? As Scandinavians were involved in much the same thing despite the non-imperial character of their home states, a comparison and discussion of imperial hitchhikers would help the volume highlight the analytical value of empire.

Empires are polyglot enterprises. There are linguistic encounters within the empire and often also when empires meet or when different imperial subjects interact. These leave sources in multiple languages, and so to understand the operation of an empire and especially for studying encounters *across* empires, one needs to take this fact into account. Anything that falls short can often only account for one side of imperial relations and thus give a partial story of that empire. There are instances where this is not the case, of course, but it is problematic to treat these instances as the norm.

While the editors and contributors of this volume take a negative view of empire, their perspective relies exclusively on English-language sources and this gives Anglophone Americans pride of place.

Contributions that draw upon other perspectives, such as an excellent chapter on Filipina women during WWII by Genevieve Clutario, uses English translations of its three sources.^[39] Apart from Oliver Charbonneau's Spanish quote from José Rizal,^[40] and Clutario's use of translated memoirs, I have only managed to find one German secondary source and one primary source in Dutch. Even when it is studied in the everyday and in the periphery, American empire is apparently studied in English. The editors have gone to great lengths to include subaltern perspectives - short of inviting a historian using non-English sources - but the contents of the book seem to suggest that for a source to present a valuable insight, it must first be in English.

The same point goes for comparisons and for entanglements. The British Empire is there in almost every chapter. Were the Americans really that insular from the beginning? Surely, all those immigrants coming from other empires - Russian, German, Habsburg, Ottoman, Japanese, Qing, French - spoke other languages than English and interacted *transimperially* with other empires than the British?^[41] As for imperial comparisons, not even the Dutch or German empires are used.^[42] The list of empires that the American one *could* be compared to is long and the editors should explain on what scholarly grounds they selected the British for comparison and left out all those others.

The American empire's impact beyond North America has long been recognised in writing on other regions, where relations with the U.S. are the staple of regional historiographies and a mainstay of much area studies. In my own field of Ottoman or Middle Eastern studies, Robert Vitalis's *America's Kingdom*, Ussama Makdisi's *Artillery of Heaven* or Ilham Khouri-Makdisi's *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism* are good examples of how the history of American imperialism can be studied *transimperially* by including Arabic as well as English sources.^[43] The key to success here is to avoid occluding the non-English sources and voices and maintain a relational account of what is going on. Otherwise, centring the narrative on whatever it was Americans were doing overseas still smacks of a somewhat insular approach to history, even if it is global in reach. There are normative, and laudable, aspects to this effort to take American empire into U.S. history, but the fact of largely occluding the sources produced by whomever it was Americans were interacting with is quite problematic.

That a collection of essays by brilliant and critically-minded scholars cannot escape the prism of Anglophone hegemony even when it sets out to 'call out American empire.' That the book explores the United States and its British sibling alone is the true mark of the United States' imperial power.

Response by Kristin Hoganson, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and Jay Sexton, University of Missouri

We are grateful to the H-Diplo team for selecting *Crossing Empires* for a roundtable review and to Andrew Szarejko for recruiting such a field-spanning and reflective team of reviewers. We are doubly grateful to the reviewers for the thought and time they have put into their reviews and triply grateful for their high praise. As their summaries indicate, we were fortunate to recruit thirteen superb historians - Ikuko Asaka, Oliver Charbonneau, Genevieve Clutario, Anne L. Foster, Julian Go, Michel

Gobat, Julie Greene, Margaret D. Jacobs, Moon-Ho Jung, Marc-William Palen, Nicole M. Phelps, John Soluri, and Stephen Tuffnell -- as volume contributors. The reviewers' positive assessments, ranging from "generative" to "refreshing," "cutting-edge," "agenda-setting," "required reading," and "analytically rich" are testimony to the excellence and originality of the contributors' scholarship.

The reviewers' praise confirms our conviction that scholars need to make empire more visible in border-crossing histories; that the term "transnational" has often hidden imperial power relationships. As Jayita Sarkar notes at the start of her review, the volume provides an antidote to empire denial in U.S. historiography. The goal, as David Atkinson recognizes, is not to diminish transnational work but to prompt reflection on the political units being transected. Jeannette Jones highlights another achievement: the volume's success in de-exceptionalizing U.S. imperialism by showing how it was forged in dialogic connection with other empires. Although Einar Wigen has concerns about the analytical precision of the word "empire," he underscores the foundational premise of the volume: that empires have been more a historical norm than nation-states and that the legions of historians who have taken the transnational turn might wish to consider that point.

The reviewers' praise also affirms our sense that there would be great value in bringing a wide range of scholarship together in one volume. Outstanding though the constituent parts are, we believe that the volume is greater than the sum of its parts, that its many geographic and thematic vantage points bring a sweeping landscape into view. We are glad that the reviewers appreciate how the volume helps situate U.S. history in world history by going beyond the common nation-among-nations framework. Though Wigen is critical of the volume's open-ended use of the term "transimperial," we hope that a more inclusive definition will encourage scholars of various orientations to trace the myriad connections and contestations across empires of which our collective knowledge remains in its infancy. It might be that more precise terms and concepts will emerge over time. In the meantime, we hope that readers will find the extensive discussion of terminology in the introduction a useful starting point.

We were likewise pleased at the wide array of themes highlighted by the reviewers (including settler colonialism, the lives of those subject to imperial rule, imperial policies and technologies, commerce, labor, environmental humanities, women, migration, acute racial inequality, and resistance and struggle for change) and their appreciation of the many geographies encompassed by the book (including, but not limited to Africa, Australia, the Caribbean, Central America, North America, the Philippines, South America, and Southeast Asia).

Finally, we were delighted to see that the reviewers put our book into conversation with related scholarship and used it as a launching pad for ideas about future directions. Jones calls for more attentiveness to the "transimperial borderlands that separate the United States from Canada and Mexico," as well as to the Middle East. Though Wigen undercounts the citations in languages other than English (footnotes are to be found in Dutch, French, German, and Spanish), his broader point about more non-English sources and voices is well taken. If moved to work on a sequel, we would certainly circulate the Call for Papers on area studies as well as thematic list serves and more assiduously seek out additional contributors, especially those situated outside of North America and Europe. Given the challenges that face researchers working across multiple sites and languages, we hope that Atkinson's call for integrative collaboration will yield productive partnerships and that synthesizers will continue the work of connecting the dots across imperial boundaries.

Notes

[1] ___ Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, "Introduction," in Hoganson and Sexton, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), hereafter *Crossing Empires*: 1-22, here 11.

[2] ___ Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in the Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[3] ___ Genevieve Clutario, "World War II and the Promise of Normalcy: Overlapping Empires and Everyday Lives in the Philippines," *Crossing Empires*, 241-258, and Margaret D. Jacobs, "Indigenous Child Removal and Transimperial Indigenous Women's Activism across Settler Colonial Nations in the Late Twentieth Century," *Crossing Empires*, 281-301.

[4] ___ John Soluri, "Fur Sealing and Unsettled Sovereignties," *Crossing Empires*: 25-45.

[5] ___ <https://rebeccarileyart.com/work/installations/>

[6] ___ Especially her ground-breaking books, Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Hoganson, *Consumer's Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and most recently Hoganson, *The Heartland: An American History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2020).

[7] ___ See Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837-1873* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Sexton, *A Nation Forged by Crisis: A New American History* (New York: Basic Books, 2018).

[8] ___ See for example Erez Manela, "International Society as a Historical Subject," *Diplomatic History* 44:2 (April 2020): 184-209; Daniel Bessner and Fredrik Logevall, "Recentring the United States in the Historiography of American Foreign Relations," *Texas National Security Review* 3:2 (Spring 2020): 38-55, and the H-Diplo forums on both at <https://hdiplo.org/to/AR975> and <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT21-42>.

[9] ___ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *The American Historical Review* 116:5 (December 2011): 1,348-1,391; Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

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___ John Soluri, "Fur Sealing and Unsettled Sovereignties," in Hoganson and Sexton, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), hereafter *Crossing Empires*: 25-45; Moon-Ho Jung, "Fighting John Bull and Uncle Sam: South Asian Revolutionaries Confront the Modern State," *Crossing Empires*: 261-280.

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___ Stephen Tufnell, "Crossing the Rift: American Steel and Colonial Labor in Britain's East Africa Protectorate," *Crossing Empires*: 46-65.

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___ Ikuko Asaka, "African American Migration and the Climatic Language of Anglophone Settler Colonialism," *Crossing Empires*: 205-221.

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___ For example, Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipman, eds., *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansionism in Central America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Jorge L. Giovannetti-Torres, *Black British Migrants in Cuba: Race, Labor, and Empire in the Twentieth Century Caribbean, 1898-1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Julie Greene's own *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

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___ Julie Greene, "Entangled in Empires: British Antillean Migrations in the World of the Panama Canal," *Crossing Empires*: 222-240.

[15]

___ Oliver Charbonneau, "The Permeable South: Imperial Interactivities in the Islamic Philippines, 1899-1930s," *Crossing Empires*: 183-202.

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___ Genevieve Clutario, "World War II and the Promise of Normalcy: Overlapping Empires and Everyday Lives in the Philippines," *Crossing Empires*: 241-258; Anne L. Foster, "Medicine to Drug: Opium's Transimperial Journey," *Crossing Empires*: 112-131.

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___ Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, "Introduction," in Hoganson and Sexton, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), hereafter *Crossing Empires*: 1-22.

[18] _____ Julian Go, "Empire, Democracy, and Discipline: The Transimperial History of the Secret Ballot," *Crossing Empires*: 93-111; Anne L. Foster, "Medicine to Drug: Opium's Transimperial Journey," *Crossing Empires*: 112-131; Oliver Charbonneau, "The Permeable South: Imperial Interactivities in the Islamic Philippines, 1899-1930s," *Crossing Empires*: 183-202; Genevieve Clutario, "World War II and the Promise of Normalcy: Overlapping Empires and Everyday Lives in the Philippines," *Crossing Empires*: 241-258.

[19] _____ Margaret Jacobs, "Indigenous Child Removal and Transimperial Indigenous Women's Activism across Settler Colonial Nations in the Late Twentieth Century," *Crossing Empires*: 281-301.

[20] _____ *Indian Family Defense* was a journal/newsletter published in New York by the Association on American Indian Affairs, Incorporated beginning in 194.

[21] _____ John Soluri, "Fur Sealing and Unsettled Sovereignties," *Crossing Empires*: 25-45; Michel Gobat, "'Our Indian Empire': The Transimperial Origins of U.S. Liberal Imperialism," *Crossing Empires*: 69-92; Julie Greene, "Entangled in Empires: British Antillean Migrations in the World of the Panama Canal," *Crossing Empires*: 222-239.

[22] _____ Ikuko Asaka, "African American Migration in the Climatic Language of Anglophone Settler Colonialism," *Crossing Empires*: 205-221.

[23] _____ Stephen Tuffnell, "Crossing the Rift: American Steel and Colonial Labor in Britain's East Africa Protectorate," *Crossing Empires*: 46-65.

[24] _____ Nicole M. Phelps, "One Service, Three Systems, Many Empires: The U.S. Consular Service and the Growth of U.S. Global Power, 1789-1924," *Crossing Empires*: 135-158.

[25] _____ Moon-Ho Jung, "Fighting John Bull and Uncle Sam: South Asian Revolutionaries Confront the Modern State," *Crossing Empires*: 261-280.

[26] _____ Marc-William Palen, "Transimperial Roots of American Anti-Imperialism: The Transatlantic Radicalism of Free Trade, 1846-1920," *Crossing Empires*: 159-182.

[27] _____ See for example: Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116:5 (2011): 1,348-1,391; Daniel Immerwahr, "The Greater United

States: Territory and Empire in U.S. History," *Diplomatic History* 40:3 (2016): 373-391; Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Girroux, 2019); Paul A. Kramer, "How Not to Write the History of U.S. Empire," *Diplomatic History* 42:5 (2018): 911-931; David Engerman, "Empires, Visible and Invisible," *Modern Intellectual History* (2019): 1-10.

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____ Duncan Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Benjamin D. Hopkins, *Ruling the Savage Periphery: Frontier Governance and the Making of the Modern State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

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____ Stephen Tufnell, "Crossing the Rift," in Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, eds., *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), hereafter *Crossing Empires*: 46-65; Anne Foster, "Medicine to Drug," *Crossing Empires*: 112-131; Julian Go, "Empire, Democracy, and Discipline," *Crossing Empires*: 93-111.

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____ Genevieve Clutario, "World War II and the Promise of Normalcy," *Crossing Empires*: 241-258.

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____ Nichole M. Phelps, "One Service, Three Systems, Many Empires," *Crossing Empires*: 135-158.

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____ Michel Gobat, "'Our Indian Empire'," *Crossing Empires*: 69-92; John Soluri, "Fur Sealing and Unsettled Sovereignties," *Crossing Empires*: 25-45; Oliver Charbonneau, "The Permeable South," *Crossing Empires*: 183-202; Ikuko Asaka, "African American Migration and the Climatic Language of Anglophone Settler Colonialism," *Crossing Empires*: 205-221.

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____ Julie Green, "Entangled in Empires," *Crossing Empires*: 222-240; Marc-William Palen, "Transimperial Roots of American Anti-Imperialism," *Crossing Empires*: 159-182; Moon-Ho Jung, "Fighting John Bull and Uncle Sam," *Crossing Empires*: 261-280; Margaret D. Jacobs, "Indigenous Child Removal and Transimperial Indigenous Women's Activism across Settler Colonial Nations in the Late Twentieth Century," *Crossing Empires*: 281-301.

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____ John Soluri, "Fur Sealing and Unsettled Sovereignties," *Crossing Empires*: 25-45.

[36] _____ Nicole M. Phelps, "One Service, Three Systems, Many Empires: The U.S. Consular Service and the Growth of U.S. Global Power, 1789-1924," *Crossing Empires*: 135-158.

[37] _____ Stephen Tuffnell, "Crossing the Rift: American Steel and Colonial Labor in Britain's East Africa Protectorate," *Crossing Empires*: 46-65.

[38] _____ Miles Macallister, "The Scandinavians 'Hitchhiked' Their Way to the Boons of Empire," *Aeon* 31 (January 2018): <https://aeon.co/ideas/the-hitchhiking-scandinavian-way-to-the-imperial-riches>.

[39] _____ Genevieve Clutario, "World War II and the Promise of Normalcy: Overlapping Empires and Everyday Lives in the Philippines," *Crossing Empires*: 241-258. The English-Japanese-Tagalog trilingual publication in footnote 40 is a unique exception in this book, but its contents are unfortunately not put to much use.

[40] _____ Oliver Charbonneau, "The Permeable South: Imperial Interactivities in the Islamic Philippines, 1899-1930s," *Crossing Empires*: 183-202.

[41] _____ For the transimperial lives of Ottoman Americans, see Chris Gratien's series "Deporting Ottoman Americans," *Ottoman History Podcast*, <http://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/p/doa.html>.

[42] _____ George Steinmetz's *The Devil's Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007) would have been an excellent reference point for the latter.

[43] _____ Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Ussama Samir Makdisi, *Artillery of heaven: American missionaries and the failed conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom. Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (London and New York: Verso, 2009).