

Antony G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global View of An Insular History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2018), 980 pp.

In his monumental new book, Antony Hopkins argues that the rise of American Empire can best be understood within the dynamics of globalization and worldwide imperial formation and contestation. The two phenomena (empire and globalization) interact, with empire seen as both a contributor to globalization and a consequence of it in terms of the various shapes and trajectory of empire. The British Empire is treated as key to this process. The rise of an independent American empire is explored within this context.

Hopkins uses this approach to encompass the inception and growth of the United States. He gives space to westward expansion, the challenge of the American Civil War, and the emergence of a formal empire in 1898, but also the nation's role as global hegemon after World War II. Hopkins's work reshapes the scale of U.S. history in temporal as well as spatial reach by treating U.S. history with a trajectory that speaks not to the ephemera of the present era but linking the future and the past.¹

The central idea is that the fate of the United States was bound up with three phases of, or crises within, globalization: 1) the decay of the eighteenth century national fiscal-state empires that produced what Hopkins has called "proto-globalization." Especially through the American Revolution, the Americans were part of this process with all of its military and political convulsions; 2) "modern globalization" of the mid-to-late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which he treats as the product of industrialization's spread and "the creation of nation states" (36); 3) Empire and decolonization, which he rightly argues extends well beyond the 1940s when the United States gave independence to its principal overseas possession, the Philippines. Decolonization stemmed from a third crisis. This was a "transition from modern to postcolonial globalization," when colonial exchanges of manufactured goods for raw materials lost their central place in the international economy; instead, economic integration based on "inter-industry trade" drew "advanced economies together" (39, 40). Decolonization was characterized also by a crisis of authority in the colonial world. Although this process did not begin in the 1940s, successful challenges were made post-World War II to "the belief in white supremacy that had justified imperialism and facilitated colonial rule" (40-41). Often these days put in terms of a Cold War context, the American Civil Rights struggle is discussed by Hopkins as part of a decolonizing moment, "joining it to the global trends that brought the western empires to a close" (665).

Though focused specifically on globalization rather than a more descriptive and ad hoc approach to the diverse transnational aspects of history, *American Empire* allows us to understand much more about specific U.S. interactions abroad by putting them in a context of global processes. The American reader can learn how the nation's economic expansion influenced Cuba. In U.S. history texts, interest in Cuba tends to stop with the 1902 Platt Amendment only to resume with the coming of Fidel Castro to power in 1959. This is exactly what Hopkins is attacking—no one can really understand the Cuban revolution of the 1890s without the intrusive penetration of American capital and the protectionist regime within which the United States grew to industrial supremacy, nor the Cuban revolution of the 1950s without the Cold War and the global convulsions of decolonization.

Globalization is seen as a multifaceted process, but one in which politics and economics are dominant. The technological changes which facilitated and

¹ His book may be superficially compared with Bulmer-Thomas, *Empire in Retreat*, a more conventional descriptive work.

resulted from globalization are rightly not treated as separate forces, but the relationship of technology and especially new forms of communication needs further articulation and theorizing; this is because technological change contributed to the reorganization of imperial space; this process profoundly affected the nature of late nineteenth-century imperial globalization, as I would term it, through a speed up of time, the territorialization of global space, and a change in geopolitical outlooks to accommodate technological change. Imperialism and technologies of globalization were never coterminous but came close to being so around 1900 (see Tyrrell, “Connections”).

This line of argument is, perhaps, less likely to be raised in the United States than Hopkins’s treatment of culture, whereas the cultures of imperialism, especially as racial formations are commonly emphasized in contemporary historiography. The causes of the war of 1898 are today sometimes explained as aspects of masculinist or racial anxieties. These cultural phenomena are, in Hopkins’s view, important, but “a response to promptings stemming from economic, social and political causes” (343).

As this example suggests, his framework is fundamentally within politics and economics. In a historiography that routinely privileges the new and the specialized, this may create for Hopkins a problem for the adequate reception of his book, but it is also an opportunity for historians to embrace historiographical integration through big picture history. Culture is not absent, to be sure; there is surprising coverage that illustrates Hopkins’s incorporation of cultural influences. Along the way, we glean many nuggets of information on transnational connections that enliven and enrich the narrative. Thus, the abolitionist Hutchinson Family Singers of the 1840s and 1850s imported their songs and style, including Swiss yodelling and Tyrolean dress; 1890s moustaches and masculinity were elements of trans-Atlantic “cultural convergence” (326); *Guys and Dolls* represented Cuba just about as well as *West Side Story* represented Puerto Ricans; acculturating Puerto Ricans after 1898 were perfectly happy to appropriate American expressions into a resilient Hispanic identity, thus “El Sandwich.” Such transnational influences and exchanges are shown to be pervasive, but Hopkins frames them through global economic influence, and nation-building, not as separate entities.

Hopkins’s pattern of causation is that economic globalization made certain changes very likely, if not inevitable. Contingency only influenced the timing and precise shape (376). Globalization provides the context for assertion of American power abroad in the 1890s because it wrought structural disruption in the Caribbean region (386), due in part to U.S. tariffs and their precipitate shifts in line with election cycles. Globalization interacted with nation-building, and U.S. economic strength was a precondition of global power and assumption of a colonial empire. For the actual events of 1898, Hopkins follows older scholarship, which stands up surprisingly well as a study of war as national consolidation, not the New Left’s arguments about export markets.

Hopkins is particularly strong on the insular empire, 1898–1940, which has been relatively neglected in U.S. historiography and often marginalized as an aberration (see Bemis 467).² The architecture of that empire, of course, encompassed more than the Philippine Islands, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Cuba; the latter was in fact only a protectorate for four years, and its inclusion and Hawaii’s blurs the boundaries of the formal empire, though Cuba’s status as a *de facto* economic colony is undoubted. Santo Domingo and Haiti were occupied by the United States for much longer periods, and the terms of U.S. intervention across the Caribbean were first articulated in the Platt Amendment

² For modern echoes of the aberration thesis, see Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman’s suggestion that the United States has been an empire rather than an empire in global politics and diplomacy from 1776 to the present; Jeremi Suri argues that the United States has been a non-imperial nation-builder abroad in *Liberty’s Surest Guardian*. For the contrary view, see the contributors to McCoy and Scarano’s *Colonial Crucible*.

for Cuban independence but incorporated into the Roosevelt Corollary of the Monroe Doctrine (1904). Using this pretext, the United States invaded Nicaragua more often than it did Cuba.³

Other *actual* colonies are not included—the Panama Canal Zone, Samoa, and Guam, and also, in effect, Alaska. Though not dwelt upon in Hopkins's book, the architecture of empire encompassed as an ancillary part an inland "empire," in which the United States would project its power from the natural resources of the existing states and, unincorporated until 1912, Alaska (see Tyrrell, *Crisis*; more generally, Black). All this entailed the transformation of a settler colonial process. This empire was sometimes conceived of in popular culture as "Greater America." It is hard to conceptualize this new imperial formation without the imperial transition around 1900 as a crisis in settler society transitioning to a globally significant nation-empire. The United States never needed a large overseas territorial base because its fin-de-siècle architects of empire understood the geopolitical significance of its inland "empire" geographically, mostly as set by the time of the Treaty of Guadeloupe Hidalgo with Mexico (1848).⁴

This process required subjugation of the Indigenous people, but settler colonialism is not a theme in *American Empire*, and arguably a lost opportunity to explore another dimension. Hopkins maintains that westward expansion was not empire because it incorporated the territory taken as states with individual citizenship. Yet American Indians mostly did not get national citizenship until 1924, and, even then, did not gain full voting rights. Many lived in reservations and were regarded as "wards" of the nation, a category not unlike what was projected upon the people of the Philippine Islands. Hopkins does not treat the eclipse of settler colonialism in the twentieth century in detail, though he discusses the Native American protest movements in the 1960s as part of the international debate over "self-determination for American Indians" (669) and global decolonization movements (665). The earlier history of U.S. settler colonialism is partly subsumed into the concept of a military-fiscal state. Therein, states expanded empire through military conquest, state-building, and revenue raising: a circular process boosting the size of the state and the tax base through the acquisitions of war.

Though the concept of a military-fiscal state for European history has its empirical limitations, and is the subject of a considerable historiography, Hopkins uses this concept to provide context for the American Revolution as an episode in the periodic crises intrinsic to such an imperial state system (see Graham and Walsh). But was the United States itself such a state? Hopkins intriguingly notes that the new nation faced the dilemma of whether to "recreate a version of the military-fiscal state or to found a 'virtuous' republic" (140). These tensions were reproduced in the nineteenth century in the ongoing battles between the Hamiltonian version of a strong federal state and the Jeffersonian alternative. Hopkins is well-versed in the recent literature on the role of the American state in the nineteenth century, and he frames those historiographical controversies in terms of the flows and eddies within the military-fiscal state of the British Empire (147-48).

The military role of the *American* state provides some evidence which might support Hopkins's position. That role was limited from 1815 to 1890 (excepting of course the war with Mexico and the Civil War) to the policing of the frontier and consequent supervision or coercion of American Indians. But in that duty, the state did assist the annexation of territory through war, and the accession and redistribution of the public domain promoted economic growth. Apart from British capital and customs duties, continental expansion was financed

³ Direct intervention recurred during the era of decolonization, e. g., in 1953-54 in Guatemala, 1965 in the Dominican Republic, and 1983-84 in Grenada.

⁴ See Tyrrell, "Connections." The contemporary cultural flavor of "expansionism" was conveyed in Anonymous, *Greater America*.

largely by land sales, so fiscal capacity was connected to successful settler expansion even as the state apparatus was decentralized, fractured, and different from European counterparts.

Insightful also is Hopkins's treatment of the antebellum United States as a kind of neo-colony of the United States, and under a cultural umbrella of Britain. At least until the Mexican War (1846–48) this makes good sense and Hopkins's views seem compatible with Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (2010), in arguing for a British cultural influence (see also Clark). The Mexican War began to change this British tutelage (and the geo-politics) even before the Civil War, but Hopkins's account of the world-historical contexts of the Civil War and its significance for American nation-building remains sound.

It is on the dénouement of the post-colonial state that this reviewer differs most. Hopkins avers that formal colonial relationships characterize true empire. Post-1950s, the United States decolonized, and became a hegemon, in a world where post-colonial globalization made formal empire untenable. But did the United States give up an empire? Philippine independence does not establish anti-imperial credentials, as Hopkins makes clear on the role of tariffs and immigration policy in the decisions to cut the islands loose. Nor did it mean abandonment of much of the maritime empire. If we adopt a slightly wider definition of empire, it is not just that the United States stubbornly hung on to its other island territories but also that it expanded control of the oceans around them. Certainly, the United States amassed a huge maritime territory from those origins, from UN Trusteeships taken from Japan post-1945, and after Hopkins's period, over seabed resources under the Exclusive Economic Zones through the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Seas (UNCLOS).⁵ Thereby, the nation's defence and economic capacity was enhanced (see Nolan).

Granted, as Hopkins himself states so elegantly, “‘empire’ is a term that frays at the edges” (25). But the use of coercive power ought to be taken very seriously in evaluating imperial relations (see Kramer). The United States is not a consistent hegemon, if hegemony implies the routine practice of consent and some kind of reciprocal relationship between hegemon and subordinates. Where one country invades, occupies, and otherwise coerces other governments to change policy and infringes sovereignty, and makes decisions of life and death *on behalf of* other peoples, we have something arguably imperial, albeit little resembling the nineteenth-century empires. The 2003 invasion of Iraq and regime change was nothing other than an episode in this type of empire, concerning who controls the world order. Though often operating covertly, U.S. forces remained in and over Iraq in 2018, Afghanistan, and across the larger Middle East and the parts of the northern third of Africa (see Niger; Myre). Though much of the contemporary fighting is done by proxies, drones are constantly on surveillance over foreign territory and still rain down missiles in extraterritorial abrogation of national sovereignty.⁶ The United States has over 800 bases abroad, while Russia, France, and Britain have thirty in total.

For the end of formal empire, we must shift the analytical scale. One key difference is that the American empire Hopkins discusses was in a world of competing empires. Since 1989 and the fall of communism, competing empires have been in short supply indeed. What makes the U.S. empire different from some other empires in world history is that it grew within imperial globalization led by the British, c. 1870–1914, and improvised on the basis of the British model as a *successor* empire—not the same empire: that is, focused domestically on in-

⁵ The United States, ironically, has not ratified UNCLOS. But it claims to adhere to the principles enunciated therein.

⁶ See, e.g., the interactive website “Out of Sight, Out of Mind” and Borger. It is key that the use of drones under Trump had aimed at regime intervention, not just counterterrorism (see Luce and Naylor).

tensifying and rationalising resource use, and abroad on military bases, control of lines of communication, especially sea lanes, and significant infrastructure. Traditionally, seaports, telegraph cables, canals, steam-powered warships, and freedom of the seas took precedence. The key American strategist A. T. Mahan saw this as the essence of British imperial power (see Mahan; Armstrong). Today the means are spy satellites, drones, internet cable, and land and sea platforms for bombers, but freedom of commerce is still the aim. It is only about territory where that does not involve long-term occupation of foreign countries (except control over bases). Thus, Cuba is independent, but that relic of the Platt Amendment, Guantánamo Bay, continues as a U.S. possession without regard to Cuba's wishes.

If understood as the combined economic, military, political, and territorial presence, the American Empire remains strong, though it is indeed a different "empire" now, through the global reach of its military and bases. Like earlier forms of empire, the American is constantly contested. U.S. dominance is being challenged by China, and that is one context of Donald Trump's policies abroad. It is also why Chalmers Johnson (esp. ch. 6) and Andrew Bacevich, especially, should be consulted on this most modern phase of American empire, or whatever this novel imperial formation is to be labeled (see also Vine).

The United States arguably remained a variety of empire in the early twenty-first century because it did use force on key occasions, though modified by the hegemony of persuasion for its allies, as appropriate to post-colonial globalization and nationalism. Since Trump we see how empire can be detached from globalization, and perhaps even signal a phase of de-globalization, whereas since 1945 the American empire has been a prime force facilitating global economic integration. The United States now threatens to rely less on hegemony, and more on force, while seeking to limit global entanglements; for this reason, the Trump era fits theories of perceived or actual imperial decline as much as it does theories of globalization.⁷ Still, among many merits in Hopkins's book, it makes global entanglement central. Trump's chaotic and contradictory attempts to break those ties already reveal how difficult they are to sunder.

Hopkins has written an incredibly learned work. He is familiar with the most recent literature, and is astoundingly widely read. The footnotes should not be missed as they testify to this point. In many ways, this work is a distillation of his theories, formed over many years and applied to American history. Overall, he makes sound analytical judgments, and always provides interesting social, economic, and political contexts. His interpretation does indeed amount to a fresh and innovative treatment of the American empire. It will provide one more nail in the coffin of American Exceptionalism, while amply illustrating the distinctive aspects of that empire. On the links between globalization as an economic process and the American empire, Hopkins's book will be the first port of call for all scholars. It is likely to become a standard reference work, and will also be instructive for students of globalization more generally.

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⁷ On the U.S. imperial decline, the books pile up. See bibliography, esp. from Go to McCoy.

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Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 205. \$29.95, hardback (ISBN: 9780691171845). Published online by Cambridge University Press: 29 November 2019. Type. Reviews of Books. Information. The Journal of African History , Volume 60 , Issue 3 , November 2019 , pp. 518 - 520. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853719000999>[Opens in a new window]. Copyright. Copyright © Cambridge University Press 2019. By Frederick Cooper. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 205. \$29.95, hardback (ISBN: 9780691171845). In *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton University Press, 2018) "a book of enormous sweep, ranging widely from the mid-18th century to the present day" Professor Hopkins introduces the reader into an exploration as to the issues of continuity versus discontinuity in British, Imperial and American history, as well as the intersection of empire with Globalization in its various incarnations historically. In short, Professor Hopkins's study is an extremely important book; every historian of whatever specialization should invest the necessary time and attention to read and study it at length. Charles Coutinho holds a doctorate in history from New York University. Where he studied with Tony Judt, Stewart Stehlin and McGeorge Bundy. His Ph. Chartered in 1746, Princeton is the fourth-oldest college in the United States. The University has been led by 20 presidents, spanning colonial times to the 21st century. 2000s. 2018. The first 13 transfer students are offered admission as part of a reinstated transfer program, which aims to especially encourage applications from students with low-income, military or community college backgrounds. 2017. Nobel Laureates Toni Morrison and Arthur Lewis honored by the naming of Morrison Hall and the Arthur Lewis Auditorium. Read the announcement. Princeton issues a new planning framework, proposing the construction of two additional residential colleges and the Lake Campus. Read the framework. 2013. Christopher L. Eisgruber named 20th president of Princeton. 2009.