

Book Review: American Empire: A Global History by A.G. Hopkins

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Hopkins, A. G. *American Empire: A Global History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018, xviii + 980 pages. Hardcover, \$39.95.

The September 11, 2001 attacks against the United States drew British economic historian A. G. Hopkins to examine Washington's response to the first strike against the nation's mainland since 1812. Considering the vast literature on US history, Hopkins concludes "the only possibility I had of making a contribution to the subject was by looking at it from the outside in, instead of from the inside out" (xv). Hopkins delivers by applying his decades of knowledge from three specific fields: 1) Globalization as the analytical framework; 2) Western imperial expansion as the globalizing impulse; and 3) Former colonial states regarding their reception and negotiation with the colonizer. The Emeritus Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History at the University of Cambridge, Hopkins views empires as agents of globalization. He thus argues that U.S. history ought to be interpreted beyond a national context; indeed, analysis within a global, imperial context "changes the questions asked of some of the central themes in the history of the United States" (p. 7).

Anchored in three key phases and crises of globalization over a three-century period—at the end of the eighteenth century, near the end of the nineteenth century, and during the mid-twentieth century—this work offers alternative readings of the term "empire." Comprehensive yet accessible, and well-illustrated with nineteen informative figures and maps, this authoritative work features nearly two-hundred pages of in-depth annotated notes. The carefully crafted chronological structure provides four parts with nested chapter titles supported by useful, thoughtfully paginated subheadings. A prologue and then an introductory chapter introduce the three crises of globalization undergirding Hopkins' organizing scheme, and further explore the relationships among globalization, empire, and periodization, particularly in Western Europe and

the United States. Part I, “Decolonization and Dependence, 1756-1865,” comprises three chapters analyzing the Seven Year’s War, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, and the Union’s triumph over the Confederacy, along with the intervening periods. Part II, “Modernity and Imperialism, 1865-1914,” comprising four chapters, addresses imperial expansion, economic nationalism, social Darwinism, and an “unexceptional” insular empire connected to the mainland by sugar.

Hopkins then provides an unexpected Intermission—literally so titled—appealing to Theodore Roosevelt admirer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and his literary creation Tarzan. With the first book in 1912, the English “Lord of the Apes” falls for American Jane Porter, thereby personifying the Anglo-Saxon union. A blue-blood member of the master race, yet physically invigorated by exotic frontiers, Tarzan’s gold from the lost city of Opar ensures his emergence as a wealthy imperialist. Widely read during the first half of the twentieth century, these adventure books helped shape American character. The American people might not closely identify with the likes of Henry Cabot Lodge or Alfred Mahan; however, “Tarzan swung in Africa but resonated in the United States” (p. 440).

The remainder of the book focuses on the century leading to today’s American Empire. Part III, “Empire and International Disorder, 1914-1959,” also comprising four chapters, peers through an imperial lens at “The American Century,” the two World Wars and the emerging Cold War. Chapter titles such as “Caribbean Carnival” and “Paradise in the Pacific” preside over discussion of colonial territories and the conundrum they offer. Part IV, “The Outcome: Postcolonial Globalization,” at only one chapter—followed by an Epilogue on the lessons of Iraq—addresses an aspiring hegemon dealing with dominance and decline.

The alternative readings of empire within US history appear throughout Hopkins' narrative. Despite imperialism being traditionally referenced as an aberrant episode, as with the Spanish-American War, he argues his approach stands consistent with a broader interpretation of the post-revolutionary era. Thus, the nineteenth century actually represents a drawn-out period of Anglo-decolonization, with the United States actually seeking its own autonomy and self-determination yet still subject to informal British influence. Despite the United States emerging as a Caribbean and Pacific colonial power after defeating Spain, "the study of U.S. colonial rule between 1898 and decolonization after World War II is one of the most neglected topics in the historiography of the United States and presents research prospects for a new generation of historians" (p. 7). That very decolonization proved incompatible with territorial empires, as Hopkins' concluding section posits in his exploration of US power and its limits in an age of postcolonial globalization.

Hopkins' ambitious work delivers a bold reinterpretation of the United States in a global framework—sans exceptionalism. This vital international dimension, often relatively lacking in textbooks and historical treatments of the United States, should be reinforced with students as well as citizen-readers who increasingly live in and interact with a globalized world. By way of contrast, Harvard history professor Jill Lepore's well-received and equally hefty *These Truths: A History of the United States*, which came out the same year, represents a more inward-looking, less global treatment. Hopkins' work, however, is not without shortcomings. Despite excellent analysis of Puerto Rico during the New Deal as critical in legitimizing FDR's Good Neighbor Policy with Latin America, the all too brief treatment of the neighboring Dominican Republic proves surprising for a global history of the United States. The 1916-1924 Dominican intervention by the Marines undermined and made hypocritical the self-determination arguments

espoused by President Woodrow Wilson in his Fourteen Points speech at the end of World War I. Similarly, the imperial elements of US longstanding support for the Republic of China (Taiwan), vis-à-vis the mainland PRC, even back to the Chiang Kai-shek era, would have made for a valuable analysis. That said, additions to this excellent tome could risk unwieldiness. This global reappraisal certainly represents a welcome and important contribution to the study of American history and to the study of empire.

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