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Introduction by Jerald A Combs

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Contents

Introduction by Jerald A Combs, Emeritus, San Francisco State	2
Review by Todd Estes, Oakland University	6
Review by Lawrence B. A. Hatter, Washington State University.....	10
Review by Timothy Mason Roberts, Western Illinois University.....	14
Review by Jay Sexton, Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford	18
Author's Response by William Earl Weeks, San Diego State University	22

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Introduction by Jerald A Combs, Emeritus, San Francisco State

It was with a twinge of regret that I realized this H-Diplo roundtable concerned a book that was replacing the volume in the Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations series written by my old mentor, Bradford Perkins. As Todd Estes notes in his review, Perkins was not only a great historian but also a generous and congenial presence for younger scholars. Nevertheless, all of the reviewers agree that William Earl Weeks's *Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754-1865* is a worthy successor to Perkins's *The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865*. Estes and Jay Sexton particularly endorse the view of Warren Cohen, Akira Iriye, and Walter LaFeber, the other authors in the Cambridge series, that Weeks is the preeminent scholar of early U.S. foreign relations and fully deserving of their choice to write this volume.

All of the reviewers praise Weeks's assertion of empire as the dominant theme in early American history. They also praise his ability to integrate foreign and domestic affairs into a single narrative of the American past, or, as Lawrence B. A. Hatter puts it, Weeks's "concept of empire helps to break down the false divide between foreign and domestic affairs in the history of the early United States."

Although Cohen and the other Cambridge Series contributors note that both Perkins and Weeks emphasize the theme of American expansionism and include the word 'empire' in their titles, the reviewers point to some significant differences between the volumes. By beginning his narrative in 1754 rather than 1776, Weeks can include more of the joint British and American imperialism of the pre-Revolutionary period in his analysis and emphasize that American imperialism was a matter of outright conquest rather than mere expansion into empty territory. Hatter points out that while Perkins devoted more space to the period before 1812, Weeks emphasizes the period after 1815, the most aggressive period of American expansion. Hatter argues that Perkins, by emphasizing the importance of republican ideology and the desire for political isolation in the "Republican Empire" prior to 1812, marks himself as a believer in American exceptionalism while Weeks sees little difference between the American empire and any other empire. Thus, Weeks mentions the early American ideal of non-entanglement hardly at all. Hatter sees this difference between Perkins's Republican empire and Weeks's American empire as part of "the 'global turn,' beginning in the 1990s, which encouraged scholars to look beyond national boundaries. This is one of the most significant shifts in the scholarship of the last twenty-five years, and it marks an important revision to the Cambridge series."

But for Hatter, this revision is not enough. He argues that Weeks needed to include more emphasis on "local diplomacy," or history from the bottom up. He provides a useful discussion of several recent books that emphasize the role of local federal agents in the Orleans Territory who shaped expansion into that area, the insistence of westerners on a government that could control the Indians, and land agents who sold land to settlers.

Hatter agrees with Richard White that settlers led the U.S. imperial charge rather than following it.¹

Timothy Mason Roberts, on the other hand, believes that Weeks has done a very good job of including the role of private individuals in furthering American imperialism. He argues instead that Weeks needed to incorporate more transnational and comparative histories. Sexton agrees with Roberts that Weeks did a good job of including non-state actors in his narrative and criticizes instead Weeks's lack of emphasis on the role of British power in shaping the contours of American imperialism. Sexton also wishes that Weeks had said more "concerning [Abraham] Lincoln's engagement with concepts and practices of American empire."

Estes's criticism of Weeks is of a different sort. Estes wonders whether Weeks shows favoritism "toward those figures who advanced the cause of imperialism (George Washington, the Federalists, James Monroe, and James Polk) and a corresponding, if subtle, bias against those who opposed it or did less to pursue it (the Jeffersonians, John C. Calhoun)? Estes points out that Weeks uses words like "Oedipal rage" to describe the opposition of Jefferson and Madison against "Hamiltonian Federalist empire builders," praises Monroe because he "rejected Jeffersonian doctrines and adopted a neo-Federalist foreign policy" and "elevates Polk because he outdid even Monroe in his tenacity and audaciousness in service to the single-minded pursuit of expansionism."

Here I think Estes misconstrues Weeks' overall view. As Estes himself points out, Weeks does indeed praise expansionists like Polk, Monroe, and John Quincy Adams, but he can also be very critical of them. Of Monroe and Adams, he says they understood that "the rhetoric of American empire would trump rational discourse in the theater of American politics" and "that framing foreign policy crises in ultranationalist terms could trump facts contrary to the official story and cast dissenters as unpatriotic." (108, 119)

In criticizing Polk, Weeks says that Polk learned from Adams and Monroe "how a vigorous defense of controversial foreign policy actions, combined with tight control over information about them, could intimidate and overwhelm domestic political opponents." (179) Thus, Polk waged "a war of aggression on a neighboring country [Mexico] based on a flimsy pretext...." (192)

Meanwhile, Weeks chastises Jefferson and Madison not because they were insufficiently expansionist (in fact Weeks calls Jefferson the "most expansionist of all the Founders," p. 69) but because they opposed the buildup of federal power and caution toward Great Britain that the Federalists thought necessary to support American expansion. This emphasis on the politics of federal power Jay Sexton regards as a separate theme equal in importance to "territorial or commercial expansion" in Weeks' narrative of American empire.

¹ Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)

What I think Estes detects in Weeks is not bias but ambiguity. With Weeks's mixture of praise and denunciation, I came away unsure of just what Weeks thinks of the American empire. For Bradford Perkins, as with other realists, American expansion was inevitable because of the vacuum of power in North America but could and should have been accomplished with greater restraint and more humanity. According to Walter LaFeber, and his fellow Wisconsin school revisionists, American and other modern imperialisms were the heinous result of the insatiable capitalist drive for trade and profits.² For cultural revisionists like Walter Hixson, American imperialism is the atrocious result of racism, sexism, and a culture of violence.³ Weeks lists ten aspects of the American empire that incorporate some facets of all of these theories and pulls no punches in describing U.S. expansion, but looks on the results more benignly than these critics. If Weeks represents "a synthesis of traditional scholarship in American diplomatic history" as Roberts asserts, then perhaps that means it is now traditional to assume that America is and always has been an empire but that it is simply to be accepted rather than bewailed, praised, or judged. As Sexton remarks, "'empire deniers' are certainly in the minority of those writing about this period, and I'd venture to say have been so for some time." Perhaps we are in a "post-revisionist" period in early American history in the way John Lewis Gaddis and others assert that we are in a "post-revisionist period" in Cold War history. It will be interesting, however, to see how our profession reacts to the up-coming Roundtable on the new book by Weeks' colleague at San Diego State, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman. Her *American Umpire* is a book that powerfully represents the arguments of Sexton's "empire deniers."⁴

Participants:

William Earl Weeks received his Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego in 1986 and specializes in nineteenth-century U.S. History at San Diego State University. He is the author of *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to Civil War* (1996) and is the author of *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, vol. I: Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754-1865*.

Jerald A. Combs (Ph.D. UCLA 1964) is Professor of History Emeritus at San Francisco State. He has just completed the revisions for the fourth edition of his textbook, *The History of American Foreign Policy* (4th ed., M.E. Sharpe, 2012). He is the author of *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (University of Calif. Press, 1970) and

² See for instance LaFeber's volume in the Cambridge Series, Walter LaFeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³ Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008)

⁴ Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *American Umpire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013)

American Diplomatic History: Two Centuries of Changing Interpretations (University of California Press, 1983).

Todd Estes is Associate Professor of History and Department Chair at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. He is the author of *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (2006; paperback 2008) and is currently writing a book on the debate over ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

Lawrence B. A. Hatter is an assistant professor of history at Washington State University. His current book project *Border Wars: The Laurentine Trade and the Making of American Nationhood, 1783-1846* is a transnational history of the U.S.-Canadian border. His article "The Jay Charter: Rethinking the American National State in the West, 1796-1819" is forthcoming in *Diplomatic History*.

Timothy Mason Roberts is associate professor of history at Western Illinois University. He is the author of *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), and co-editor, with Lindsay Dicuirci, of *American Exceptionalism*, 4 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012). He is currently researching American and French imperialism in the nineteenth century.

Jay Sexton is University Lecturer and Tutorial Fellow in U.S. history at Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford. He is the author of *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War, 1837-1873* (2005) and *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (2011).

Review by Todd Estes, Oakland University

As Warren I. Cohen, editor of *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* notes in his introduction to this volume, the field of early American diplomatic history lost a giant with the 2008 death of Bradford Perkins, who in 1993 authored a volume in the 'old' version of this series. Seeking a new volume necessarily entails anointing a 'next' pre-eminent scholar, someone who can follow in the considerable footsteps of Perkins, a man who was not only a great scholar but a generous and encouraging presence to junior people in the field. In tapping William Earl Weeks for this assignment, the editors have made a worthy choice. Weeks has long been active and prolific, has produced many significant works of scholarship, and is a widely-acknowledged leader in the field. He can certainly stake as good a claim as any to follow Perkins, and Cohen makes that case for Weeks's authorship of this volume.

Weeks's work has consistently focused on the causes and effects of expansionism, a staple of his scholarly output since his 1992 book on John Quincy Adams, and it is that theme that undergirds this volume and forms the interpretive lens through which Weeks views this period.¹ Without forcing the issue, Weeks has identified the expansionism he linked to Adams as being, in retrospect, the dominant theme of the first century or more of American history. He begins with a convincing argument for why 'empire' is justified as the descriptive term for this period and then lays out ten key components of imperialism, each of which is unpacked and developed in the text, fully justifying its inclusion. For Weeks these ten crucial dimensions are: a desire for expansion to aid security, a favorable geography, a 'redeemer nation' ideology that included a messianic component, a centralizing Constitution of 1787, the popularity of expansion with Americans as individuals and as a nation, a strong army and navy, commitment to freedom of the seas, the creation of an American market economy, major technological innovations, and the fundamental disagreement regarding the future of slavery (pp. xx-xxv.).

It is a credit to the author that the book never degenerates into a mere laundry list of generalized topics as it might have. Rather, Weeks succeeds in showing how these dimensions played out in specific events, how they were often intertwined, and how they developed over more than a century through a mix of thought and ideology, concerted and deliberate actions, as well as contingent events. Far more than a simple textbook-style overview, this volume makes an important interpretive argument in addition to surveying and synthesizing more than a century of North American foreign policy and its related scholarship.

Weeks identifies the presence of expansionist thinking during the colonial period and cites George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine as being key exemplars whose actions and writings pushed Americans to seize the opportunities to create their own

¹ Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992). A personal note: I was a graduate student working on my dissertation when I reviewed this book for *The Journal of Mississippi History* 54 (November 1992), 387-88.

unique empire. He also reads the Declaration of Independence broadly and highlights it as a state-making document. It was Washington and the Federalists in the 1790s who utilized the consolidationist potential of the Constitution and built the necessary components of a modern nation-state: a powerful, centralized fiscal system with a bank and taxing capabilities, a strong military, and the centralizing control of foreign policy by the executive branch. One of the key hallmarks of Federalist policy was a simultaneous commitment to avoiding war with the British and making war on the Indians. The combined effects of the Neutrality Proclamation and the Jay Treaty kept the peace abroad while General “Mad” Anthony Wayne’s defeat of the Miami Confederacy pacified the western frontier. In addition to building the apparatus necessary for an expansionist state, the Federalists also bolstered the national government by squashing internal opposition, as in the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794.

In 1801, despite their political defeats, the Federalists handed over a sound ship of state to the Jeffersonians. Although they did not believe in the Federalists’ consolidated and centralized state, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were expansionists in their own right, both helping to further Jefferson’s vaunted ‘empire of liberty’ toward the Pacific. They were far less concerned with keeping the peace with the British; as a result, a second war in 1812 became almost inevitable but resulted in a peace settlement that marked the definitive end of an era.

One of the two heroes of Weeks’s account is James Monroe, who is often relegated to secondary status as Jefferson’s and Madison’s successor. In Weeks’s hands, however, Monroe proves to be indispensable, mostly by subtly rejecting much of the foreign policy of his predecessors and, , aided by his Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, adopting a neo-Federalist program that furthered the expansionist tendencies of the young nation. Less ideological and less doctrinaire than Jefferson or Madison, and also more comfortable with centralization and the skillful, hidden-hand use of presidential power, Monroe comes off here as a key figure on the road to empire. Monroe (and Adams) grasped and took advantage of the insight, formed during the Seminole War crisis, “that framing foreign policy crises in ultranationalist terms could trump facts contrary to the official story and cast dissenters as unpatriotic” (119). Adams in particular understood that “the rhetoric of American empire would trump rational discourse in the theater of American politics” (108). He was not the last American leader to recognize this point.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the book is the way that it deepens, complicates, and extends our understanding of Manifest Destiny, an ideology of expansionism that easily predated the 1840s conflict over Texas with which it is usually identified. Weeks makes two critical points. First, that the ideology and the label describes the entire era from 1815 until at least 1861; actually, as he nicely phrases it, “the existence of the ideology predates the most commonly used term to describe it” (121). Second, Weeks writes of “Manifest Destinies” in the *plural*, not the singular (125). This is intentional, for, as chapter five makes clear, the ideology encompassed so many strands, impulses, and dimensions (and embraced not only actions but ways of thinking and of being) as to render any narrow, finite definition inadequate to the task. Not only did Manifest Destinies extend to Texas, California, and Oregon but also—in terms of the capitalist market economy—to Hawaii, the

Pacific, and China. Beyond geography, the term described a way of being and an *approach* to foreign policy generally that went beyond particular actions.

The key figure in this vigorous expansion of empire was James K. Polk, who built on Monroe's activist model but did so more openly. There was nothing hidden-hand about Polk's leadership. He was more aggressive than Monroe or the others had been. He was willing to threaten force and then negotiate to obtain Oregon from the British. Then, he did just the reverse in Texas, proffering diplomacy but moving toward war to gain territory. While Polk is often portrayed as a tool of southern slaveowners and their interests, Weeks argues that he was, even more, a committed expansionist whose "audacity and recklessness" secured tremendous territorial gains for the nation but at the steep cost of inflamed sectional tensions over the spread of slavery (188). Weeks does not dispute the racial dimension present in a war that presumed Mexican inferiority and that served to extend the borders of black slavery in the United States. However, by linking the Mexican War backwards in time to a long train of expansionist Manifest Destinies, he argues that U.S. expansion into California, Texas, and Oregon was simply "the next logical step in its expansionist process" (189). Furthermore, he contends that while the presumed racial and cultural inferiority of Mexicans may have been a justification for the war, it was not the primary motive. "Had the coveted lands been held by Great Britain (as was the case in Oregon)," Weeks states, "one can assume that nonracial justifications would have been duly trotted out" (189). In other words, racial justifications lent force, but the ambitions and impulses of a deeply-ingrained, long-held ideology of expansionism drove policies.

Of course, all this came at a steep price and ultimately threatened the union of the Constitution in 1861. However, Weeks shows how the rise of disunion and the divisive sectionalism over slavery in the 1850s was linked to the foreign policy of expansion as much as to the debates over slavery and abolitionism. The two matters fused to create the crisis of the union. Again, Weeks offers a fresh perspective on the Civil War, suggesting that while the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 might be seen as civil wars, the 1861-1865 conflict "is best understood as a foreign war against a breakaway confederation" (249). President Abraham Lincoln's leadership helped secure the union and the empire it had long been creating, on the continent and overseas. The idea of America, Weeks writes, was "made transcendent.... The vision of a permanent Union, conceived by Franklin and fought for by Washington, had been finally realized by Lincoln. Destiny had been fulfilled" (271).

Weeks achieves much in this volume in addition to providing a sound, thematically integrated narrative overview. He establishes very clearly that empire and union, imperialism and democracy, grew up side by side in the nation and that the impulse predated the nation itself. Furthermore, he shows at each stage how the growth of each of those impulses threatened the other; specifically, how the spread of empire both aided and undermined the union. He also makes a good case for seeing the interconnectedness of foreign policy and domestic events, and for seeing the foreign-relations aspects present not only in westward expansion but also in the Declaration of Independence and the Civil War.

I will conclude with two brief observations by way of further analysis. While Weeks does not make the connections explicit, one cannot help but assume that his discussion of Polk's use of an ultranationalist rhetoric of patriotism to build support for the Mexican War offers an implied and striking correspondence to the George W. Bush administration's use of similar tactics to gin up support for the Iraq War in 2003. Compare, for example, Polk's casting Mexico as an aggressive and dangerous rogue state with similar assertions made about Iraq (183). The alleged but highly dubious and frequently repeated assertion that Mexico had spilled American blood on American soil was perhaps the 1846 equivalent of the dubious and oft-repeated 2003 assertion of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (184). Likewise, opposition to the Mexican War was soon overwhelmed by "reflexive support for soldiers under fire...and a burgeoning national media market in which daily reports from the front were...widely and affordably available" (192). So, too, in the Iraq War. Opposition to the war became problematic once there were 'boots on the ground' in March 2003, even more so since those soldiers were accompanied by a bevy of embedded reporters serving up daily (even hourly) updates of battlefield heroics. Finally, Weeks notes that calls to claim 'All of Mexico' through the war stemmed from the teeming confidence "that Yankees would be greeted as liberators by the masses of Mexican people and that the United States had it within its power to absorb and transform an entire nation, rebirthing it in its own image" (201). The parallels with expectations for what the Bush administration claimed would happen in Iraq need hardly be mentioned, so eerie are the similarities.

Second, if I had to raise a criticism of this book it would be posed as a question that I hope the author and the other roundtable participants might address: does Weeks show favoritism toward those figures who advanced the cause of imperialism (Washington, the Federalists, Monroe, Polk) and a corresponding, if subtle, bias against those who opposed it or did less to pursue it (the Jeffersonians, John C. Calhoun)? Consider the use of these loaded words to describe the Jeffersonians: Weeks writes that Jefferson and Madison "harbored an almost Oedipal rage against their former compatriots" (55); he observes that, in the Jay Treaty debate, "members of the Jeffersonian clique...whipped themselves into a fever pitch" in their efforts to stop the measure (60); and he concludes that the treaty's "vociferous critics...for the most part either did not understand or did not want to acknowledge the critical role that maintaining peace with Britain" played (61). All this may be true and fair. I have made very similar points in print myself. But it might also be said that these perspectives—not to mention the use of phrases like "Oedipal rage" and "cliques" and "fever pitch" and "did not want to acknowledge"—almost perfectly reflect the partisan perspectives voiced in the 1790s by the Hamiltonian Federalist empire builders themselves with whom Weeks clearly sympathizes (perhaps too much?). Likewise, his praise for Monroe comes because the fifth President rejected Jeffersonian doctrines and adopted a neo-Federalist foreign policy. And Weeks elevates Polk because he outdid even Monroe in his tenacity and audaciousness in service to the single-minded pursuit of expansionism.

That said, though, this is a superb book that summarizes events and synthesizes scholarship. It succeeds wonderfully in meeting the author's stated goal of producing a text that "stimulates thought, encourages discussion, and suggests possibilities for further study of the antebellum American empire" (xxv). Bradford Perkins would have been proud.

Empire is dirty word to most Americans. It conjures up subordination, tyranny, and corruption, the very things that the United States is meant to stand against in global affairs as the leader of the free world. William Earl Weeks reminds us, however, that contemporary anti-imperial assumptions, whether directed against the evil empire of the Soviet Union or the intergalactic tyranny of Darth Vader, originated with the Founding. What most Americans misunderstand is that their forbearers did not object to empire per se, but to other people's empires.

Weeks places the creation of American Empire at the center of his updated narrative of American foreign relations from the beginning of the Great War for Empire in 1754 to the end of the American Civil War in 1865. He presents three arguments in favor of 'American Empire.' First, the Founders used the phrase, viewing themselves as part of an historic imperial tradition that connected them with Rome. Second, recovering American imperial ambitions helps to situate the United States in the broader geopolitical contest among the European empires of the Atlantic World. Third, thinking in terms of empire also allows the narrative to incorporate the expanding territory of the United States that was not yet admitted as part of a state in the Union. Above all, Weeks argues, the concept of empire helps to break down the false divide between foreign and domestic affairs in the history of the early United States.

So far, so good. Weeks's approach reflects a growing trend among historians, who attempt to break down the narrow barriers of national histories by placing the American Revolution and the Founding in an international context.¹ The United States did not look to reject empire in 1776, but rather to acquire an empire of its own. As the recent work of Leonard J. Sadosky, Eliga H. Gould, and others has shown, the United States declared Independence to deepen its engagement with the European world and advance its imperial ambitions in North America by securing the equal status of an American nation with the other powers of the earth.²

At first glance, the theme of American Empire appears a promising update for the first volume of *The New Cambridge History of Foreign Relations* series. But the question remains

¹ See, Peter Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776-1814* (Madison, Wisc.: Madison House, 1993); James E. Lewis, Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, & Indian Allies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

² Leonard J. Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations: Indians, Empires, and Diplomats in the Founding of America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

as to how far the lens of empire changes the way we think about early American diplomatic history. Is this simply old wine in new bottles? Weeks fleshes out his concept of antebellum American Empire by identifying its ten “dimensions:” expansionism, geography, the ‘redeemer nation’ (republicanism), the Federal Constitution, the popularity of expansion (Manifest Destiny), military power, ‘freedom of the seas’ (Free Trade and Sailors’ Rights), market empire (the Market Revolution), technological innovations (the Communications Revolution), and disagreement over slavery (the Civil War) (xx-xxiv). Weeks’s dimensions of empire connect with many of the staple themes found in the American history survey classes taught in schools and colleges across the country. What, then, does the overarching theme of empire do to change the way the average reader might think about early American history?

A comparison of Weeks’s work with the late Bradford Perkins’s volume in the original *Cambridge History of Foreign Relations* series, published in 1993, promises to offer a fair assessment of the interpretative power of American Empire.³ While empire is central to the interpretative framework adopted by both Perkins and Weeks, their work is divided by this common phrase. Perkins viewed American foreign relations through the lens of “republican empire.” Republican ideology, he argued, was the driving force behind U.S. continental expansion. Republicanism infused early American cultural values, which, in turn, shaped the way that policymakers perceived national self-interest and global events. Consequently, republican ideology shaped the American form of empire.⁴ For Perkins, republicanism was also closely tied to isolationism and, by extension, American exceptionalism. To be sure, Perkins was not presenting a jingoistic argument for American cultural superiority; he was not afraid to highlight the arrogance of republican policymakers. Despite his caveat that “no nations are clones of one another,” however, Perkins ultimately concluded that “America, certainly nineteenth-century America, may properly be described as truly ‘exceptional.’”⁵

Weeks’s American empire, by contrast, looks remarkably similar to its rival European counterparts. Eschewing the increasingly tired emphasis on republicanism, he still recognizes the importance of early Americans’ sense of themselves as living in a “redeemer nation” (xxi). Still, American empire was ultimately about conquest. This is one reason why Weeks begins his new volume in 1754, rather than 1776. The transcontinental ambitions of British-Americans, such as Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, predated the republican revolution of 1776 by several decades. Weeks’s emphasis on conquest over republicanism also leads him to devote more space in his volume to the decades following 1815, the most aggressive years of U.S. territorial expansion. By contrast, Perkins’ focus on

³ Bradford Perkins, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, vol. 1: The Creation of a Republican Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴ Perkins, *Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, xi, 6-15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 233.

republican empire leads him to dedicate the vast majority of his volume to the critical period of the founding between the American Revolution and the War of 1812.

The difference between Weeks's American empire and Perkins's republican empire is an important one. Weeks's new volume reflects the 'global turn,' beginning in the 1990s, which encouraged scholars to look beyond national boundaries.⁶ This is one of the most significant shifts in the scholarship of the last 25 years, and it marks an important revision to the Cambridge series. Diplomatic historians are particularly well-placed to take advantage of this rich new vein of enquiry, oriented, as they are, to look outwards. I certainly sympathize with Weeks's hope of igniting a broader discussion about the nature of American empire.

For all the differences between the two Cambridge series, I am less convinced that Weeks's new volume marks a full generational shift from that of Perkins. They share a common high-policy perspective on American foreign relations. Presidents, and to a lesser extent Secretaries of States, are the actors in these dramas of high diplomacy. To more convincingly reframe American empire as a process of territorial conquest, we need to understand how this process played out on the ground. American imperialism, like that of the European and Asiatic empires, was a multilayered process. It involved both formal, high diplomacy and what Peter J. Kastor has termed "local diplomacy." Focusing on the Orleans Territory, Kastor shows how federal agents played a critical role in shaping federal policy to fit local conditions and in enacting policy innovations, which the government in Washington could choose to embrace or reject.⁷ Non-state actors also shaped American empire. Patrick Griffin's *American Leviathan* reveals how the security demands of white settlers in the Ohio country shaped American imperialism in the trans-Appalachian West. The ability of the federal state to bring its power to bear on native peoples was critical to securing the allegiance of Euro-American settlers to the American national state.⁸ While Weeks does include military power as one of his dimensions of empire, he retains a rather outdated understanding of the role that individual entrepreneurship played in driving westward expansion that is at odds with his discussion of the problem of Union. If western separatism was a problem in the early years of the republic, as Weeks rightly says, then Euro-American settlement cannot be synonymous with U.S. territorial expansion. Moreover, as Alan Taylor has shown, the ability of the federal government to guarantee individual land titles through prior surveying and centralized land sales was essential to

⁶ C.A. Bayly, "The Age of Revolutions in a Global Context: An Afterword," in David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, eds., *The Age of Revolutions in a Global Context, c.1760-1840* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 209.

⁷ Peter J. Kastor, *The Nation's Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 36-42.

⁸ Patrick Griffin, *American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007).

mobilizing individual settlers as American colonists.⁹ As such, Richard White is right: “the government did not pursue pioneers west; it more often led them there.”¹⁰

Weeks’s American empire is a welcome successor to the republican empire of Bradford Perkins. One would hope, though, that historians of American foreign relations will help to recover the synergy of local, national, and international policymaking and diplomacy that underlay the process of American imperialism.

⁹ Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred K. Knopf, 2006).

¹⁰ Richard White, *“It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 58.

Review by Timothy Mason Roberts, Western Illinois University

In this overview of diplomacy, war-making, and internal development of the early United States, William Earl Weeks introduces “ten key dimensions of the antebellum American Empire,” which the book then traces from the Seven Years War through the Civil War (xx). According to Weeks, a colonial-era desire for expansion and security encouraged creation of the Union. Abundant and relatively open land, remote from Europe, offered conditions for building a prosperous society. Belief that the United States had a mission to redeem the world underlay American nationalism, justified expansion, and rationalized U.S. efforts to make the world’s oceans safe for travel and commerce. Innovations of early American industry -- the railroad, the telegraph, and the revolver, for example -- were hailed as symbols of American genius and were essential to national growth. Expansion occurred as a result of responses by individuals to emerging economic opportunities, which the government protected via the deployment of a strong army and navy. International trade, said John Quincy Adams on the occasion of the British use of force to open China to foreign goods (especially opium) was among “the rights and duties of mankind” – although trade fostering an American market empire was deemed particularly civilizing (xxiii). The Constitution of 1787 centralized diplomatic and war-making authority and put new territories under direct federal authority, cultivating the frontier’s national loyalty. The only hindrance to all of this was “profound disagreement that existed over the role and future of slavery” (xxiv).

Weeks then traces his perception of Americans’ relentless pursuit of empire. Several insights on presidents are particularly noteworthy. He considers Thomas Jefferson as “doctrinaire,” yet illuminates Jefferson’s pragmatic resort to executive power, not only in acquiring Louisiana but also in rationalizing the Embargo Act of 1807 (102). Sounding surprisingly Hamiltonian, Jefferson wrote Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin that “Congress must legalize all means that may be necessary to obtain its end” (82). Weeks also reinterprets the impact of James Monroe, who, “as the original ‘hidden hand’ president,” appeared at once above partisanship and below intellectual prowess, yet meanwhile shifted U.S. policy towards Federalist prescriptions for protectionism, internal improvements, and rapprochement with Great Britain (101). And if Monroe was a prototype of Dwight Eisenhower, was James Polk’s intervention in Mexico not a forerunner to Operation Iraqi Freedom? Presidential comparisons often seem facile. But from the perspective of a decade since the U.S. intervention in Iraq, Polk’s deception in the run-up to the Mexican War, and Congress’s declaration of war as a reaction to the White House’s “stampede tactics,” suggests a recurring challenge to the Constitution’s separation of the war power presented by public hysteria arising when foreigners shed American blood and American troops are deployed (184).

Most of the book’s nine chapters indeed focus on a particular presidential administration, an approach reiterating “the persistent effort of presidents to dominate policy,” as the series editor Warren Cohen notes (xii). Nonetheless, Weeks’s best material explores the role of private individuals, not government officials, in developing America’s first contact

with the world. This approach also reflects newer trends in study of U.S. foreign relations.¹ Chapter 1, for example, “Origins of the American Empire and Union,” highlights the roles of George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Paine in the colonial break with Britain. No surprise there. But Weeks emphasizes Washington’s and Franklin’s interest as private investors in western land speculation, whose riches would be ensured by freedom from British regulations. Paine meanwhile condemned monarchy in *Common Sense*, not only for its danger to American liberty, but its restraint on American empire. His argument for independence portrayed freedom as a fugitive “hunted round the globe,” and America as a defensive “asylum for mankind.”² But Paine implied the success of the asylum depended on its expansion.

Likewise, Chapter 5, “Freedom’s Empire, at Home and Abroad,” shows how diverse American citizens shared a common interest in gaining access to foreign places and peoples. Noting the premium the Founders put on state sovereignty, Weeks points out that in *Federalist #10* James Madison argued that “the Union is greater than the mere sum of the particularistic interests” of factions and states (49). On the other hand, this chapter’s focus on American cotton planters, missionaries, whalers, fur traders, and maritime explorers and merchants reveals the fulfillment of Madison’s more familiar recommendation that a liberal American society “extend the sphere” by encouraging pursuit of individual interests within and beyond territorial boundaries.³

Weeks maintains that Americans’ consensus for empire generally strengthened their confidence that the world, if it did not become *part* of the United States could become *like* the United States – “that is, republican politically and capitalist economically” (71). He highlights the enthusiasm of “apostles of Manifest Destiny” like the explorer and politician William Gilpin and the newspaper editor Moses Y. Beach to “liberate and ennoble” Mexicans and more broadly to “regenerate superannuated nations” (131, 200). But others doubted whether American-style republicanism was exportable. Washington’s warning against entanglement in Old World controversies concludes the first chapter, and the novelist Herman Melville’s doubts about Manifest Destiny in the Pacific Ocean appear in another, but there were other voices Weeks might have considered. For example, my own

¹ For example, Cornell University Press’s *The United States in the World* series includes Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (2007); and Aims McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush* (2007). And examples of newer scholarship that ‘decenter’ the study of early American foreign relations by incorporating non-American historiography include Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Brian DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and scholarship presented at a conference September 15-17, 2011, at Friedrich-Schiller-University, Jena, Germany. See Katharina Wagner, “Review of *The Transnational Significance of the American Civil War: A Global History*,” H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews, February, 2012, online at <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=35299>.

² Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* [1776] (Mineola, NY:Dover, 1997), pp. 33.

³ James Madison, “Federalist No. 10,” [New York] *Daily Advertiser* 22 November 1787, *The Constitution Society*, online at <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>.

work shows that many Americans did *not* understand the 1848 Revolutions “as another step on the way to universal emancipation” (211).⁴

Instead, the setback to liberal democracy in Europe in the short-term suggested America’s political isolation, and in the longer term helped precipitate the sectional crisis. In other words, an additional key dimension of the antebellum American Empire Weeks might have explored was defensive, or conservative national, exceptionalism.

Concerning the Civil War era, Weeks asserts that in the post-1850 period there were already “de facto dual unions,” i.e., North and South, and therefore “the most accurate name for the [Civil War] is the War of Southern Independence” (249). This approach links the South – as white Southerners themselves asserted – at least rhetorically to the independence movement of 1776, and will trouble Civil War historians who see black slavery, not white freedom, as the war’s central impulse. On the other hand, Weeks belittles the Confederacy’s diplomacy as “incompetent” and salutes the extreme measures for the Union of President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of State William Seward, and General William T. Sherman (255). Indeed, through its victory the Union “reestablished itself as the leading champion of freedom in the modern world.... Destiny had been fulfilled” (271). This conclusion sounds a little too Whiggish – the Union ultimately won via its superior industrial power, but in the process was hardly an exemplar of small government and international free trade, and decades lay between the freed people and their ‘redemption’ by America’s ‘mission’ into full citizenship.

But particularly in a book focused on the dimensions of early American imperialism, Weeks is right to point out that the Civil War, while fought mainly on the ground between northern Virginia and New Orleans, was, in fact, a showdown between two prospective empires, one, free and based on wage labor, intent to consolidate territory from the Mississippi to the Pacific; one, proslavery, intent to acquire living space in the Caribbean and, possibly, what was left of Mexico. In the guerrilla warfare of the 1850s, was John Brown in Kansas and Virginia no less the filibusterer than Narciso López in Cuba or William Walker in Nicaragua? And Weeks cites compelling evidence that Lincoln’s war policies, despite rhetoric denying the existence of the Confederate States of America, treated the South like a sovereign belligerent power. While his characterization of an independent South as “the ultimate violation of the Monroe Doctrine” is odd, his larger portrayal of America’s imperial crisis helps to locate it in the context of other wars of unification of the nineteenth century (242).⁵

⁴ Timothy Roberts, *Distant Revolutions: 1848 and the Challenge to American Exceptionalism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009).

⁵ See, for example, Thomas Bender, *Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); and Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754-1865, in short, accomplishes the New Cambridge History's purpose to synthesize traditional scholarship in American diplomatic history. Although the book might have incorporated more perspectives from emerging work in American transnational and comparative history, William Weeks makes a compelling case for 'empire' as an ideology that linked in meaningful ways the domestic and foreign strands of early American foreign relations.

William Earl Weeks will be well known to readers of this roundtable for his previous work on John Quincy Adams and early American imperialism, not to mention his many contributions to H-Diplo reviews. In the not-so-long-ago days in which the early nineteenth century was labelled the ‘great American desert’ of U.S. historiography, Weeks was one of the key players who kept the field going.¹ He thus was the obvious choice to write the opening volume of *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, which replaces the volume written by Bradford Perkins in the ‘old’ Cambridge history.²

Though I like the Perkins book and have used it in the classroom before, its thematic organization at times makes it difficult for undergraduate students who lack a clear narrative of nineteenth-century statecraft. One of the many strengths of Weeks’s book is its clear organization and structure, with key episodes and themes being given their own sub-heading within the chapters. Nearly all of the key moments of early American statecraft are discussed in a multi-dimensional manner that provides readers with an introduction to the key historical and historiographical issues.

Weeks advances several arguments in this book. The one that is most assertively argued concerns how and why we should consider early America to be an empire. Weeks’s introduction makes this case both by attempting to recapture how Americans at the time thought (“the Founders themselves used [empire] to describe their creation,” xvii), as well as establishing how the early Union functioned in imperialist ways. Weeks may not need to convince many on this point: ‘empire deniers’ are certainly in the minority of those writing about this period, and I’d venture to say have been so for some time – after all, Perkins’s twenty-year-old volume is entitled *The Creation of a Republican Empire*. Nonetheless, Weeks is certainly correct in suggesting that the concept of empire is one that promises to open new avenues of scholarship on this period. Indeed, this work will help us move from proving the existence of American empire to the next challenge of understanding the formation and operation of this empire in an era of world history characterized by the interlinked processes of imperial expansion and national formation.

The empire theme is central to every chapter. Weeks doesn’t pull his punches in describing the United States as an “imperial juggernaut” that engaged in “ethnic cleansing” of native populations (163, 170). Empire proves a useful organizational and interpretive device. It allows Weeks to begin his story before the national story kicks off in 1776; instead Weeks opens with the pre-Revolutionary struggle for control of the Ohio Valley. Empire brings Anglo-American relations with Native Americans, which are rightly emphasized in the early

¹ Kinley Brauer, “The Great American Desert Revisited: Recent Literature and Prospects for the Study of American Foreign Relations, 1815-1861,” *Diplomatic History*, 13:3 (July 1989): 395-416.

² Bradford Perkins, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Volume 1: The Creation of a Republican Empire, 1776-1865* (Cambridge, 1993).

chapters of the volume, onto center stage. Furthermore, the concept of empire enables Weeks to connect and bring into the same frame the story of continental expansion and overseas commercial expansion: “The growth of the imperial republic during this period is best understood as an undifferentiated process that occurred on the world’s oceans and islands as well as its continents and was commercial, oceanic, and ideological as much as it was territorial” (150). The chapter I most enjoyed was the one that deals with the overseas activities of the United States and private Americans in the 1815-61 period. Weeks here discusses not only formal diplomacy, but also commercial connections, whaling, missionaries, and the significance of technological innovation.

Empire is entwined with Weeks’s second line of argument, which concerns the internal politics of union in early America. Weeks picks up here on his earlier work on John Quincy Adams, as well as recent scholarship by, among others, Peter Onuf, David Hendrickson, and James Lewis, which has made clear the many ways in which early America’s encounter with the wider world was conditioned by the de-centralized political structure of its federal union of states.³ Empire-building, in other words, was not simply a matter of territorial or commercial expansion; it also concerned the internal politics of a protean and by no means secure federal union. Weeks’s agenda is to establish the chief agency of empire in the formation and politics of the Union: “a pre-existing expansionist tendency (and concomitant concerns regarding security) necessitated a union in order to be realized, and... the nation was invented in order to solidify the political union” (xx). A complementary perspective, which is present in this book (if not particularly emphasized), concerns the persistent agency of anti-imperialism, which manifested itself not only in the visceral Anglophobia of the era, but also in the anti-colonial political structures of the union that paradoxically enabled its imperial expansion – the 1787 Northwest Ordinance, the limits placed on the central state (which, for example, could not have prohibited settler colonization of native or foreign territories even had it wanted to), and the persistent power of the internal politics of ‘home rule.’

Weeks’s focus on union at times alters the standard narrative of U.S. foreign relations. This should be welcomed. The book discusses at length episodes that for far too long have been treated as domestic political history. A striking example is the Missouri crisis, which is given its own sub-section (by means of comparison, it does not even feature in the index of Bradford Perkins’s volume). Weeks’s interpretation of James Monroe as a ‘hidden hand’ president is both interesting and persuasive, not least because of what we are learning about his behind the scenes role in the Missouri crisis.⁴ Another example is Weeks’s extensive discussion of President Abraham Lincoln, who in most overviews of U.S. foreign

³ William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington, 1992); Peter Onuf, “A Declaration of Independence for Diplomatic Historians,” *Diplomatic History*, 22:1 (January 1998), pp. 5-80; David Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789-1941* (Lawrence, 2008); James E. Lewis Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire, 1783-1829* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

⁴ Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill, 2007).

relations is relegated to a supporting role to Secretary of State William H. Seward. In Weeks's account, Lincoln is the key figure of the mid-nineteenth century, "the imperial war president" who crushed a "War of Southern Independence" in a "total war" and issued an anti-slavery "corollary to the Declaration of Independence" (248, 249, 259, 264).

In sum, this is an important book that both synthesizes existing interpretations and points the way forward for future researchers. I have two minor points to raise, which mainly concern points of emphasis. The first relates to Weeks's assessment of American power: "By conventional assessments – the size of its standing military force – the United States did not pose much of a threat on the world stage. However, considering how quickly and effectively that small force could be expanded and deployed, and how minimal annual military expenditures meant huge savings related to costs associated with maintaining a large force in readiness, even in the 1840s the United States ranked as a first-rate military power" (197-8). This point is made in the chapter on the Mexican War. It merits the consideration of future scholars, for Weeks is on to something when he suggests that U.S. national power in this period hinged upon the ability of national political elites to harness the agency of economic interests, state leaders, as well as the broader population. This seems like a particularly useful way of thinking about the realization of U.S. power in this period. But I wonder if more emphasis should be given to British power, as well as the geopolitical context conducive to U.S. interests that it fostered. For example, Weeks writes of "an American empire of the seas" in the 1815-61 period (132). But the great maritime empire of the period was that of the British. To be fair, Weeks notes that "in China Americans rode on the coattails of the British Empire" (146) and that the Monroe Doctrine created "a de facto Anglo-American condominium... in the Western Hemisphere" (118). I wonder how these and other examples related to Weeks's conception of American empire that is outlined in the introduction. Should we see the early American empire – and here I'm speaking of it in its overseas, informal form – as being connected to that of the British?

The second issue to raise concerns the sectional crisis and Civil War. As mentioned above, it is refreshing to see a discussion of this in a book on U.S. foreign relations. Indeed, the Civil War can be seen as the formative moment in the history of U.S. empire, for it was once both the culmination of the American Revolution and the beginning of the modern American empire. In the final two chapters, Weeks's emphasis is on the antislavery of the Republican Party and Lincoln in particular. He presents Lincoln as boldly moving against slavery earlier than do those historians who view him as a cautious, if not hesitant, emancipator. I wonder if more could be said concerning Lincoln's engagement with concepts and practices of American empire in this critical period – I was intrigued by this possibility given how conditioned we are to think of Lincoln in national, as opposed to imperial, terms. Also, I wondered about a dog that doesn't bark in the Civil War chapter: the economic transformations unleashed by the Civil War, which have been identified as key developments to the emergence of the 'new' US empire after 1865, but are not emphasized in this book.⁵

⁵ Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, 1963).

These are less criticisms than invitations for further elaboration. In sum, *Dimensions of the Early American Empire* is a welcome addition to our understanding of nineteenth-century U.S. foreign relations. Weeks has produced an important book that deserves a wide readership.

My thanks to the roundtable participants for their kind words and thoughtful comments. My response to some of those comments is as follows:

Todd Estes asks if I “show favoritism toward those figures who advanced the cause of imperialism,” including Presidents George Washington, James K. Polk and James Monroe. I hope the answer to that question is ‘no,’ as I tried throughout the text (perhaps not always successfully) to resist making political and moral judgments regarding the actions of the architects of American Empire. In a larger sense, I also sought to resist judging the American Empire itself, being at this point in my career more interested in chronicling its growth and development than in rendering a verdict on it. My aim was not to demonstrate that the American Empire was a Good Thing or a Bad Thing but rather to suggest its nature and world historic significance, be it good or bad. To the extent to which I have rendered judgments of specific historical figures, they (for the most part) have not been based on my own personal predilections but rather on the relative success of those figures as empire-builders. While the acquisitions of James K. Polk’s presidency arguably set the stage for civil war, even his critics must acknowledge the ambitiousness of his policies and the audacity with which he implemented them.

That said, Estes is correct to discern my skepticism regarding Thomas Jefferson and the Republicans. Time and scholarship have confirmed that, from the perspective of American nationalism, the Federalists had both a clearer sense of the national interest (most notably, ensuring the nation’s survival) and a more realistic view of the U.S. role in the world in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century than did the Jeffersonians. The necessity of the Jay Treaty and the wrong-headedness of those who opposed it seem no longer subject to debate.¹ The gap between Jefferson’s ideology of limited government and the reality of his policies is too great to ignore. Can anyone read accounts of Jefferson’s embargo and not be stunned by the naïve, ill-informed faith in economic coercion that lay behind it and the relentless zeal with which it was implemented? Has there ever in U.S. history been a more egregious example of governmental overreach?

Lawrence B.A. Hatter rightfully observes that *Dimensions of the Early American Empire* seeks to situate the American founding in an international context as a critical factor in the struggle to control North America. The colonists’ desire for expansion, security, and prosperity in North America was the primary motive for Union. Opposition to European monarchical empires did not preclude the creation of American republican empire.

He is also right to note that my work does not mark “a full generational shift” from Bradford Perkins’s original volume one of the series. Perkins’s notion of ‘the creation of a republican empire’ remains valuable; I sought not so much to totally abandon his emphasis

¹ Todd Estes does a marvelous job of illustrating this in *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst, MA, 2006).

on republicanism as to incorporate it as part of a larger 'redeemer nation ideology' that suggests the messianic dimension of American nationalism. *Dimensions of the Early American Empire* is, in part, 'old wine in new bottles,' combining the work of previous academic winemakers along with that of more recent vintage, to make what I hope is a satisfying blend of the old and the new.

Also true is Hatter's observation of the narrative's tilt toward high-policy and high-policymakers rather than toward the exploits of local actors. The focus on high-diplomacy runs counter to the current direction of the field and I anticipate it to be the most serious criticism made of the book. I wanted to include more local vignettes but felt constricted in my choices, given that I had but 100,000 words to address over 100 years of American foreign relations. Agreeing with series editor Warren I. Cohen's observation regarding "the persistent effort of presidents to dominate policy," I felt compelled to place primary focus on those who, after all, had their hands most directly on the tillers of power, and to leave it to others to fill in the blanks on my very large and but partially painted canvas.

I do take issue with Hatter's assertion, quoting Richard White, that "the government did not pursue pioneers west; it more often led them there." This may be true for the post-Civil War era, but it is not true for the antebellum, in which the activities of fur traders, merchants, speculators, and farmers defined the nation's expansionist agenda, even as the federal government provided indispensable assistance to their efforts. It was not the government that led Americans to West Florida, or to Oregon, or to California, or to China for that matter. Nevertheless, I share Hatter's hope that scholars will build on my work "to recover the synergy of local, national, and international policymaking and diplomacy that underlay the process of American imperialism."

Timothy Mason Roberts challenges my provocative choice of the term "War of Southern Independence" as the most appropriate name for the Civil War, seeing it as something that will "trouble Civil War historians who see black slavery, not white freedom, as the war's central impulse." Yet my use of the term does not preclude such a formulation. The conflict over slavery (one of the ten dimensions referred to in the title), or more specifically the conflict over its extension is, to this historian, the primary, indeed, the sole reason for the war in that it was the only issue over which disunion was seriously contemplated. It was not President Abraham Lincoln's stand on the tariff that prompted secession. The Confederacy's appeal to the basic right of white Southerners to separate and form a government of their choice drew compellingly on the tradition of the Declaration of Independence even as it denied the right of black Southerners to do the same. This presented a major challenge to the Lincoln administration in its efforts to justify to the world its campaign to quash the War of Southern Independence. Moreover, it has presented a major challenge to historians who have been unsure how to respond Southern claims that secession was a god-given right. Lincoln figured a way out of this box by evolving a de facto corollary to the Declaration of Independence that, in effect, said that one people's freedom could not be built on another people's slavery. It is an important point that, in my view, needs to be amplified.

Roberts claims that “...Weeks belittles the Confederacy’s diplomacy as ‘incompetent’ and salutes the extreme measures for the Union of President Abraham Lincoln, Secretary of State William Seward, and General William T. Sherman.” Here again, my assessment of the diplomacy of the two sides represents my reasoned judgment regarding the efficacy of their policies, not my personal opinion about their moral legitimacy. One personal opinion I will offer: the movement to total war in 1864-1865 established the disturbing precedent of the U.S., in the name of freedom, unleashing massive violence against civilians and their property. In other words, the road to Dresden and Hiroshima begins in Georgia and South Carolina. I cannot help but feel (it is only a feeling at this point) that some better, less-violent path to emancipation could have been found. Perhaps it was merely a failure of both the pro-and the anti-slavery forces to imagine another way out of their conflict.

Roberts characterizes as “too whiggish” my conclusion that victory “reestablished” the U.S. “as the leading champion of freedom in the modern world...Destiny had been fulfilled.” This did not mean to imply that the end of the war brought full civil and political equality for blacks. I conclude that “...the centralizing forces that had been unleashed in the name of winning the war conspired after it to ensure that labor remained subordinated to capital and black remained subordinated to white, albeit in a free-labor context” (272). Yet defeat of the Confederacy and the slave system on which it was built reinvigorated American pretensions to being the leading proponent of freedom, at least rhetorically and ideologically. Lincoln’s subsequent global renown as the Great Emancipator is evidence of that.

Roberts rightly characterizes my view on the Civil War as “a showdown between two prospective empires, one, free and based on wage labor, intent to consolidate territory from the Mississippi to the Pacific; one proslavery, intent to acquire living space in the Caribbean and, possibly, what was left in Mexico.” He agrees with me that Lincoln, whatever his rhetoric to the contrary, “treated the South like a sovereign belligerent power.” Thus, I am not sure why he describes as “odd” my view of an independent Confederate States of America as “the ultimate violation of the Monroe Doctrine.” An independent Southern Confederacy represented the creation of a new major power at the nation’s doorstep—exactly what the Monroe Doctrine aimed to prevent.

Jay Sexton may be right that “‘empire deniers’” are a minority of those writing on this period, but they are by no means gone from the profession and seem to be undergoing something of a rebirth, although the question may no longer be of interest in the minds of some.² I share with him the hope that we may (finally) move beyond arguing about the existence of an American Empire and get down to the “next challenge of understanding the formation and operation of this empire in an era of world history... .” It is a complex scholarly task, and my hope is that the book under review will suggest new ways of conceiving of that empire and new avenues of inquiry regarding it.

² A proposed roundtable at next year’s AHA Convention featuring myself and Richard Immerman debating the idea of an American Empire with Lisa Cobbs Hoffman and Jeremi Suri was deemed not worthy of inclusion by the AHA Program Committee.

Sexton observes that my emphasis on U.S. naval power and the advancement of the principle of Freedom of the Seas fails adequately to note the preeminent global importance of British maritime power during this period. I have to concede this point, although I will stand by my more limited claim that within the favorable geography of North America, antebellum American military power was far more formidable than is usually thought.

Along the same lines, I wholeheartedly agree with Sexton's suggestion that "we see the early American empire—and here I'm speaking of it in its overseas, informal form—as being connected to that of the British." Perhaps there should even arise an Anglo-American Imperial school, one that explores the commonalities and differences of two empires that, more than any others, dominated the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. My sense is that the trend of current scholarship is to see the British Empire as less imperial than is usually thought and the American Empire as more so.

Sexton comments that he was "intrigued" by my casting of Lincoln in imperial terms, and wonders if more could be said about it. In a word, 'yes.' Seeing Lincoln and the war in an imperial context highlights the extent to which the domestic opposition to slavery was part of an international emancipationist movement that was putting increasing pressure on the slave institution. Along the same lines, my sense is that historians, to use employ George W. Bush's useful neologism, have significantly underestimated the 16th president. They have misunderstood him in terms of the intensity with which Lincoln viewed slavery as a threat to the idea and prestige of America internationally and underestimated him in regards to the consistency with which he strove, within the limits of the Constitution, to put 'slavery back on a path to its ultimate extinction.' Lincoln was neither cautious nor hesitant in confronting slavery, though he grasped that political realities required that he proceed with great subtlety in advancing his agenda. Lincoln understood that, using the power of the federal government over external affairs, slavery could first be contained and then attacked from the outside in. The doctrine of non-extension was a death sentence for slavery; Southerners were correct in seeing it as such. To me it is odd why more historians have not grasped its significance.

One final comment on Lincoln: Two of the respondents noted that Polk's manipulation of public opinion and the Congress in starting the Mexican-American War bore a startling similarity to George W. Bush's path in initiating the Second Iraq War. I did not make that observation, although there may indeed be some good comparisons to be made. Rather, my point is that Polk's actions were very important in teaching Abraham Lincoln how American wars begin. As a first-term congressman, the failure of his "spot resolutions" to gain traction taught Lincoln about the necessity and effectiveness of casting the other side as the aggressor, no matter how flimsy the evidence, if one wished to enlist the support of the American people. Second, the evolution of the Mexican-American War from an act of self-defense to a campaign to acquire territory taught him the lesson of how wars can be started for one reason and then continued for quite another. He put both of these lessons to good use as Commander-in-Chief, baiting the South into firing the first shot at Fort Sumter and then morphing what began as a war to defend federal property into a crusade for black freedom and the preservation of the Union.

Again, my thanks to the panelists and to H-Diplo roundtable editor Thomas Maddux.

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