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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 Kathleen Burk, University College London	8
Review by Robert Dean, Eastern Washington University.....	12
Review by Wilson D. (Bill) Miscamble, University of Notre Dame	20
Review by Joseph M. Siracusa, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology	24
Author's Response by Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, San Diego State University.....	29

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Introduction by Jerald A. Combs, Emeritus San Francisco State

Three of the four reviewers in this roundtable praise this book effusively. Kathleen Burk says that “the book is so good that it really deserves an article-length review.” Wilson (Bill) Miscamble calls it “a broad, sweeping interpretation of American foreign relations” that “makes an important contribution to the field.” And Joseph Siracusa regards it as a “bravura performance.” None of the reviewers, however agrees with Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman’s basic thesis that the United States is not and generally has not been an “empire” but instead has been an international “umpire.”

For most of America’s history, defenders of America’s foreign policy have agreed with Cobbs Hoffman that the United States was not an empire. Samuel Flagg Bemis set the template for scholarly defenders of America’s historical foreign policy in the 1950s and early 1960s.¹ He argued that for most of its history the United States had been not an empire but an anti-imperial power that had successfully blended democratic ideals and national interest in expanding across the North American continent and intervening abroad against hostile empires. The only imperial blemish on America’s record for Bemis occurred between 1898 and 1946 when it held the Philippines as a colony. He saw U.S. expansion in North America as taking place in a relatively empty continent where other empires would have conquered the territory if the United States had not. He thought United States intervention in Latin America did not involve significant territorial acquisition and was justified by the threats to U.S. security and prosperity that emanated from that quarter.² American intervention in Europe and Asia in the twentieth century, which Bemis had denounced before World War II, now seemed to him to have been necessary to prevent hostile and tyrannical empires from threatening America’s ideals and national security.

As the Cold War progressed, however, Bemis’s views came under relentless attack. William Appleman Williams and the revisionists who came after him built their entire viewpoint around the idea that the United States was an empire and a vicious one at that. For revisionists, America had followed an imperialist policy from its beginning, motivated not by ideals or security interests but by the capitalist need for expanding markets reinforced by racist and paternalistic prejudices. Continental expansion was not justified by the territory’s supposed emptiness but was a genocidal conquest of weaker peoples. Intervention abroad was an imperialistic and often rapacious domination of other peoples by economic means if possible and military force if not.³

¹ Samuel Flagg Bemis, *A Diplomatic History of the United States*, 5th ed. (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1965).

² Bemis, *The Latin American Policy of the United States: An Historical Interpretation* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1943)

³ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Co, 1961) Williams and other members of his so-called Wisconsin School like Lloyd Gardner and Walter LaFeber emphasized economic motives for American imperialism, but more recently revisionists have given greater emphasis to cultural factors without diminishing their harsh critique of American empire. See for example Lloyd Gardner, *A Covenant with Power: America and World Order from Wilson to Reagan* (New York: Oxford

Realist critics of American foreign policy, following the lead of George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, and Walter Lippmann, rejected the revisionist argument that the United States had followed a consistent imperialistic policy motivated by economics.⁴ They believed instead that the United States had vacillated between foolish isolationism and excessive intervention. This vacillation had been caused by the pursuit of ideals rather than a prudent analysis of power and national interest and by a failure to balance goals pragmatically with the power available to achieve them. While realists thus spoke more often of American interventionism than of empire, they were willing to accept the word imperialism to describe much of U.S. foreign policy, including the conquest of Indians and Mexicans. They simply argued that the vacuum of power in the West made such expansion inevitable, and they complained only that it could have been done with greater restraint and more concern for its victims.⁵ They also were willing to describe most pre-World War II interventions in Latin America and Asia as imperialism and argued that such interventions had been unnecessary because no great national or security interests were involved there. On the other hand, intervention in Europe against Germany and then the Soviet Union had been essential to maintain the balance of power so that no hostile power could acquire the resources of a united Europe to threaten the security of the United States and the Western Hemisphere. Realists divided over how much intervention and how much restraint the United States needed to exercise during the Cold War and after, but they increasingly accepted the idea that even justified intervention had made the United States an empire.⁶

University Press, 1984); Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-2006*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006). For cultural and social emphases, see Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁴ George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); Hans Morgenthau, *In Defense of the National Interest: A Critical Examination of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1951); Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1947).

⁵ Richard W. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Norman Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1955).

⁶ For examples of those on the interventionist side of the realist spectrum, see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005); *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); and perhaps more pertinent to this roundtable, see Wilson D. Miscamble, *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992). On the restrained side of the spectrum, see Norman Graebner, Richard D. Burns, and Joseph Siracusa, *America and the Cold War: A Realist Interpretation, 1941-1991* (Santa Barbara, Praeger, 2010). Restrained realists have been especially prominent in writing recent books that incorporate the idea of American empire. Many of them claim almost as much paternity from William Appleman Williams as from George Kennan, See George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U. S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Michael H. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007). I think there is still a line between restrained realists and moderate revisionists having to do with the realist belief that some intervention to contain the Soviet Union was

Under this barrage of claims that the United States was an empire, even defenders of American policy began to accept the idea. They simply argued that America's empire was different and better than most other empires in that it opposed aggressive, war-like, and tyrannical regimes in its support of liberty, democracy, free enterprise, and human rights as well as its own security and economic interests. Some defenders reveled in America's imperial record while others mitigated it by arguing that the United States was an informal empire, a republican empire, an empire by invitation, a democratic empire that brought peace because democracies did not fight one another, or a mere hegemony.⁷ In any case, I think Robert Dean actually understates the situation when he writes in his review that "the acceptance of what was in decades past a distinctly minority position among historians has lately moved into the mainstream; i.e., that the history of the United States can be understood as the history of empire."

Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, however, swims boldly against this tide. Her narrative echoes Bemis's denial of American empire except for the Philippine interlude, but adds a modern and provocative gloss. She argues that the United States is a nation state rather than an empire, built both internally and externally on the federal principle of having an umpire as the central authority presiding over largely consenting polities that operate with a good deal of local autonomy.

She insists that there is a difference between nation states that expand and consolidate their territory, vis-à-vis empires that hold distant areas as colonies. She argues that although the United States did expand by conquest against the Indians and Mexico, westward expansion was not particularly violent in that most other U.S. expansion was by purchase and diplomacy. "Consider Chile, which elbowed aside the Spanish empire and then used its army to expand northward as the expense of Peru and Bolivia and southward at the expense of native peoples. Was Chile an empire?" (15)

She also denies that the United States has been an empire abroad. Instead, she argues, it has been more of an umpire "to compel acquiescence as necessary with rules that had earned broad legitimacy," a role welcomed by most of the world. (17) Those rules included access to opportunity, arbitration of disputes, and transparency in government and

necessary, but I am not sure that all agree with me. See George Herring's response to my review of his book in H-Diplo Roundtable, Vol. X, No. 19 (June 2009) <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-X-19.pdf>.

⁷ Embracing America's imperial record were historians such as Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005) and Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Random House, 2007). The concept of "informal empire", as pointed out by Kathleen Burk in her review, was pioneered by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade", *The Economic History Review*, Second Series, vol. 6, no. 1 (1953), 1-15. For empire by invitation, see Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

business. The four reviewers do an excellent job of summarizing Cobbs Hoffman's argument, so I will leave further elaboration of it to them

Robert Dean's review provides a strong critique of *American Umpire* from a revisionist perspective. "Informal empire turns out to be a useful conception after all, to understand the eventual emergence of a global power with an enormous military establishment, hundreds of foreign bases, a vast apparatus of intelligence, surveillance, propaganda, and covert 'action,' and the ability to wield crippling economic pressure against those states that resist American 'leadership,'" he argues. He points out that Cobbs Hoffman omits or glosses over many instances of American imperial conduct that cannot be dismissed simply as minor errors or exceptions, including the overthrow of President Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, the 1954 Guatemalan coup to force out Jacobo Arbenz and its aftermath, the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, the atrocities in El Salvador in the 1980s, and U.S. support of the massacres in Indonesia in 1965. He insists that along with the celebratory narratives of American contributions to international peace and progress, Cobbs Hoffman should have devoted more time "to narratives of the genesis and persistence of racism, political exclusion, the brutalities and oppressions of market relations, and the systematic and ongoing use of overt and covert violence in American relations with large areas of the world in the context of global power seeking." It is telling, he thinks, that Cobbs Hoffman concludes her book with the U.S. intervention in Serbia rather than the war in Iraq. He is particularly disturbed by Cobbs Hoffman's assertions that historians who emphasize American empire encourage America's enemies and sap American morale. In conclusion, he says, "A book that aspires to a comprehensive synthesis must fully engage and interpret the evidence on both sides of that equation. *American Umpire* does not."

Joseph Siracusa's review offers a realist perspective on this book. While he calls it "a brilliant meditation on the story of American foreign relations from 1776 to the present," he regrets Cobbs Hoffman's refusal to accept the many historians who "have meticulously documented America's rise as the most powerful hegemon the world has ever seen" and her failure to discuss "the millions of people who hate the United States for its imperial ways, not to mention the significance of the millions of peoples it has laid in their graves." He believes a more accurate history of American foreign policy "should give the Americans pause – and perhaps some modesty and restraint – in dealing with the world around them." An accurate picture such as this would be characterized "by the permanent tension inherent in America's desire to engage the world, on the one hand, and the equally powerful determination to avoid undue 'entanglement' in the world's troubles, on the other hand, a thread that runs like a straight line through the history of U.S. foreign relations, from the Founding Fathers to the present." He goes on to present a short history in which he sees a major contrast between the restrained realistic policies of early American leaders and the role the United States took upon itself after World War II, although he clearly sympathizes with some aspects of American intervention in the modern era. Thus, he denies both the consistent imperial U.S. role the revisionists see and the consistent "umperial" role Cobbs Hoffman describes.

Kathleen Burk's review is more sympathetic than Dean's or Siracusa's. Not only does she regard Cobbs Hoffman's book as "wonderfully thought-provoking and original," she believes that "Much of what Cobbs Hoffman has to say seems true." This includes the idea that America's imperial actions came in waves rather than in linear fashion and that the United States did bring acquired territories into the union as equal states. However, she says, while the United States did not normally hold acquired territories as colonies, it is just as important to acknowledge how they were acquired – "By killing or driving out the indigenous populations, the latter not necessarily in a peaceful manner." Thus, she asserts, "whilst it may be debatable as to whether or not the U.S. is currently an empire, it is rather less debatable that, for most of its history, it was." Burk implies in the body of her review that the U.S. role in Europe during the Cold War was empire by invitation and is best characterized in the rest of the modern era as an informal empire.

Wilson Miscamble's review is the most sympathetic. But he too argues that Cobbs Hoffman's concept of umpire does not accurately describe America's role in the latter part of the twentieth century in that the United States was more a player-manager than a referee. Moreover, he (along with Burk) believes that Cobbs Hoffman does not sufficiently acknowledge that Great Britain played the supposedly "umperial" role rather than the United States for most of America's history.

Miscamble concentrates his analysis on the Cold War era and does not regard as terribly important the question of whether America's player-manager role constituted imperialism. He implies that if America was an empire in Europe it was by invitation and that whether or not one calls the U.S. role in the Third World imperialistic, it was terribly destructive. He also dissents from Cobbs Hoffman's equation of the Soviet empire with previous colonial empires because the Soviet empire was "a murderous and ugly one in its domination of 100 million East Europeans for half a century" that "represented an alternate and ghastly vision for ordering the world and one that intended to dominate as much of the world as it could." Thus, he agrees with Cobbs Hoffman that however America's role in the modern era is described, its victory in the Cold War and subsequent interventionist policies, however flawed, have been crucial "in guaranteeing the semblance of world order and international stability," and he warns that there would be "high costs in a world where such practices as access, arbitration, and transparency were not supported."

Participants:

Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman (Ph.D. Stanford University, 1988) is the Dwight E. Stanford Chair in U.S. Foreign Relations. She is a historian and novelist, and the author of several books, including *The Rich Neighbor Policy: Rockefeller and Kaiser in Brazil* (Yale, 1992), which won the Allan Nevins Prize and the Stuart Bernath Award, and *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s* (Harvard, 1998). She is co-editor of *Major Problems in American History* with Edward Blum. Her recent novel, *Broken Promises: A Novel of the Civil War*, won the 2009 San Diego Book Award for "Best Historical Fiction" and Director's Mention for the Langum Prize in American Historical Fiction. Her research interests include U.S., European, Third World, and Latin American history. She was a National Fellow, Hoover Institution (2013) Stanford University.

Jerald A. Combs (Ph.D. UCLA 1964) is Professor of History Emeritus at San Francisco State. He has recently 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 *American Diplomatic History: Two Centuries of Changing Interpretations* (University of California Press, 1983).

Kathleen Burk was born in California and educated at Berkeley and Oxford, where she was the Rhodes Research Fellow for North America and the Caribbean, and where her dissertation was supervised by A.J.P. Taylor. She is currently the Professor Emerita of Modern and Contemporary History at University College London. She is the author or editor of eleven books, including *Britain, America and the Sinews of War 1914-1918* (Allen & Unwin 1985), *“Good-bye, Great Britain”: the 1976 IMF Crisis* (Yale 1992), *Troublemaker: the Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor* (Yale 2000), and *Old World, New World: The Story of Britain and America* (Little, Brown, 2007). She is currently writing a book on the interactions of the British and American empires from 1783 to the present; this will be followed by a book on wine and diplomacy.

Wilson D. (Bill) Miscamble, C.S.C., teaches U.S. diplomatic history at the University of Notre Dame. His books include *George F. Kennan and the Making of American Foreign Policy, 1947-1950* (1992), *From Roosevelt to Truman: Potsdam, Hiroshima and the Cold War* (2007), and *The Most Controversial Decision: Truman, the Atomic Bombs and the Defeat of Japan* (2011).

Joseph M. Siracusa is Professor of human security and international diplomacy and Associate Dean of international studies at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Australia. He is the author and co-author of numerous works, including: *Globalization & Human Security* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009); *Diplomacy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010); *Crime Wars: The Global Intersection of Crime, Violence, and International Law* (Praeger, 2011); *America and the Cold War, 1941-1991: A Realist Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Praeger, 2010); *Foreign Affairs and the Founding Fathers: From Confederation to Constitution, 1776-1787*, (Praeger, 2011); *A Global History of the Nuclear Arms Race: Weapons, Strategy, and Politics*, 2 vols. (Praeger, 2013); and *American Foreign Relations since Independence* (Praeger, 2013). His interests include American diplomacy, the Cold War, the nuclear arms race, and globalization.

This is a wonderfully thought-provoking and original book. It is fundamentally about American self-identity, and it purposely takes issue with the arguments of some of the many books and articles about an imperial America which have been published in the past generation.¹ For Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, the United States (U.S.) is *not* an empire: rather, it is the city upon the hill, lighting the way for the rest of the world to follow its journey to a more peaceful and equitable world. The nature of American growth is of overwhelming importance to the author. Unlike acquisitions by empires, when territory was normally acquired by force and remained in a subordinate position with regard to the metropole, when territories entered the U.S. as states, they entered on terms of equality with the other states. This is undeniable. What does not seem of equal relevance is how they got there.

To accept Cobbs Hoffman's arguments in their entirety, it is necessary to accept her premises. The most important one is that the U.S. was not, except for a mere half-century (1898-1946, a relatively insignificant period for the author), an imperial power. Rather, the U.S. was an 'umperial' power, one that tried to convince others to accept 'Western values', whether through argument, Thomas Jefferson's 'peaceable coercion', or plain coercion, including violence. The U.S. was motored by the beliefs that people should have access to equality of opportunity, that arbitration and negotiation are better than fighting to settle disputes (Winston Churchill's comment that jaw-jaw was better than war-war comes to mind), and that transparency in political and economic dealings was desirable. With these as political and even cultural goals, the U.S. could not possibly be an empire: "one of the most commonly held scholarly assumptions of our day – that the United States is a kind of empire – is not simply improbable but false" (5). One argument of this review is that whilst it may be debatable as to whether or not the U.S. is currently an empire, it is rather less debatable that, for most of its history, it was.

Cobbs Hoffman's arguments with regard to American continental expansion are unusual. An important one supporting her denial of American imperial intentions is that unlike empires, which rely on forced association, nation-states, such as the U.S., rely on the allegiance of the majority population. Furthermore, the plan was always that new territories would be admitted on equal terms, a principle dating back to the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. But how were these territories to be acquired, and how was a majority population which wanted to join the U.S. to grow? By killing or driving out the indigenous populations, the latter not necessarily in a peaceful manner.

¹ One could list hundreds. A representative sample from the last decade or so might include Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), although Maier in the end hedges his bet. For Cobbs Hoffman's own list of the competition, see her footnote 22 (357).

In some cases, treaties were written and signed by both American and Indian authorities; a treaty implies that both sides are independent and can carry out their promises, and this must require structures of authority with powers of implementation. If the Americans recognised the authority of their co-signers, the territories were *not* empty and just waiting to be filled (what might be called the doctrine of unfilled spaces dates back at least to the seventeenth century and John Locke), and were therefore conquered. In Cobbs Hoffman's own terms, the U.S. was a repeating empire/nation-state, as, for example, Indian Territory became Indiana Territory and thus able to be admitted to the Union on equal terms, followed by other Indian lands turned into named territories and in due course admitted. Only by stripping actions from intentions can this argument stand. Calling it American nationalism rather than imperialism does not strengthen the argument.

An important point, of course, is the fear of turbulent, violent borders. Violence was used to quell violence, and the American political authorities followed, establishing or validating legal systems and political and economic processes. But this is precisely what the Russians spent the nineteenth century doing, fighting nomadic tribes who raided border settlements, conquering them, and steadily pushing the state eastwards. This was called the Russian Empire, and its activities were analogous in this context to American activities. Perhaps the Russians should have proclaimed their drive to the east their Manifest Destiny.

The author dislikes the concept of 'informal empire', which many historians, particularly of the British Empire, find useful. Rather, she blames misconceptions by historians about British policy in part for charges of American informal imperialism. Indeed, she appears to dismiss the concept entirely, or at least to relegate it to the status of a compensatory argument: "In the modern era, when England first began to lose large portions of its formal empire, historians John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson articulated their extraordinarily influential thesis of 'informal empire'."² A short-cut definition of imperial methodology for the British Empire in this context was economic hegemony with political and military back-up only when required. Indeed, Cobbs Hoffman refers to Great Britain as "cleverer" because of this technique (192). It certainly worked in Latin America. As early as 1823 a French agent in Colombia wrote that "The power of England is without rival in America; no fleets but hers to be seen; her merchandises are bought almost exclusively; her commercial agents, her clerks and brokers, are everywhere to be met with."³ Nearly a century later, as Emily S. Rosenberg has pointed out,

"British banking interests held most of Brazil's national debt; British citizens, who owned the majority of Brazil's state and municipal bonds, provided much of the capital to finance railways, municipal transport systems, and public utilities. British ships comprised nearly 60 percent of the tonnage engaged in Brazil's coastal and overseas

² The Ur-text is John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade", *The Economic History Review*, Second Series, vol. 6, no. 1 (1953), 1-15.

³ Quoted in Wendy Hinde, *George Canning* (London: Collins, 1973), 345.

trade. Great Britain also supplied the largest share – almost half – of Brazil’s imports, selling huge quantities of textiles and providing the coal and railway equipment upon which this export-oriented economy depended to move its goods to coastal ports. Although the United States was the largest purchaser of Brazil’s major export, coffee, the bills of exchange were drawn in pound sterling, and the trade was financed and carried by British or German – not American – bankers and shippers. A British company monopolised Brazil’s telegraph lines and Brazilian newspapers relied heavily on British news services.”⁴

If this is not informal empire, it is difficult to imagine what is.

Yet this was also the period when Great Britain was embracing free trade, so the conclusion must be that if there was no such thing as ‘informal empire’, this was not an imperial process. When disentangled, perhaps not, but the other imperial powers certainly tended to view it as such. As did Americans, who thought that Latin America should be their own domain: it was not unknown for politicians to argue that that was one implication of the Monroe Doctrine.

In the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s, many Europeans believed that the U.S. was treating the Continent as an informal American empire. The period after 1945 is indeed problematic. Charges of ‘Americanization’ were widespread, but in many respects, it could be argued that it was ‘modernization’, and this works only if the two are conflated. There is the United States’ almost unimaginable military power, with over 700 military bases on foreign soils. Yet if these bases equal imperialism, Cobbs Hoffman asks (16), why do so many countries welcome them? She cites NATO, asking why the Europeans do not kick the Americans out if they do not trust them? The response to that is obvious: in the shadow of the Soviet Empire, Europeans tended to prefer the protection of the American one. One might argue that Europeans invoked the Belloc Doctrine:

“And always keep a-hold of Nurse

For fear of finding something worse.”⁵

Uniquely in human history, one empire voluntarily handed the baton to another without a battle between them having been fought. But what Great Britain also handed over to the U.S. was a healthy dose of self-righteousness. After all, what is there to choose between the British claim - in the nineteenth century to be bringing the benefits of civilisation to the benighted and the American claim in the twentieth century to be - bringing the benefits of

⁴ Emily S. Rosenberg, “Anglo-American Economic Rivalry in Brazil during World War I”, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring 1978), 131.

⁵ Jim, “Who ran away from his Nurse and was eaten by a Lion” by Hilaire Belloc in his *Cautionary Tales for Children* (1907).

capitalism and democracy to the benighted-? Varying measures of force have been used by both.

It must be said that one of the very many virtues of this book is that the author looks beyond the U.S. and American history – who knows America who only America knows? She brings Britain into the discussion and points out when Great Britain led the way, such as with free trade or a league of nations, or worked jointly with the U.S., as in what Cobbs Hoffman cites as the first example of arbitration, John Jay’s Treaty of 1794. The incorporation of British evidence gives the book a breadth and depth that many others in the field notably lack.

This book is so good that it really deserves an article-length review. It is pretty clear that this reviewer sees it as fraught with fertile error, but it is so thought-provoking as well as so thoughtful that it should be considered a necessary read for anyone in the fields of both imperial and plain American history. Much of what Cobbs Hoffman has to say seems true, and her attention to the complexity of the subject means that her emphasis on the wave as opposed to the linear theory of imperial, or non-imperial, development is compelling. It is a very enjoyable book. But: if you accept her premises, you’ll accept her conclusions; if you don’t, you won’t.

Review by Robert Dean, Eastern Washington University

In the last decade and a half historians and other scholars of American foreign policy have produced a variety of interpretive arguments that put the notion of empire at the center of their narratives. Perhaps in part spurred on by concerns arising out of the post-2001 'global war on terror,' what was in decades past a distinctly minority position among historians has lately moved into the mainstream; i.e., that the history of the United States can be understood as the history of empire. Soon after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade center and the Pentagon, a value-laden discourse of 'American empire' even became a part of mainstream punditry, and the unofficial pronouncements of the Bush administration. Conservative commentators anticipated a 'Pax Americana' to follow in the wake of the 'creative destruction' generated by the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2002, flush with confidence about the coming conflicts, a high administration official lectured a journalist: "we are an empire now, and when we act we create our own reality."¹ A scholarly discourse paralleled the simpler debate in the mass media. Scholars on both the left and the right deployed 'empire' as a conceptual framework to understand the history of the U.S., either as stinging critique or as a celebration of the march of progress and civilization. A decade later, in the wake of the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan, there seems to be less imperial chest thumping from the right, but a critical historiography of American empire continues to develop.

The new work is not monolithic, emphasizing a variety of approaches to the analysis of the imperial dimensions of American history. Collectively, this new historiographic trend has enriched diplomatic history and the history of the United States.² Professor Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, however, is having none of it. There is much at stake, she writes; historical "misdiagnosis" of empire threatens not only the health of the historical profession, but of the nation and perhaps even the whole of human endeavor (336).

The United States, Cobbs Hoffman argues, is not an empire, because ". . . the nation and the world system in which it fits are simply not structured that way" (336). Instead, the U.S. is the global "umpire," sole "enforcer of what is, most of the time, the collective will: the maintenance of a world system with relatively open trade borders, in which arbitration and

¹ A 'senior adviser' to President G. W. Bush (later identified as Karl Rove) quoted in Ron Susskind, "Faith, Certainty and the Presidency of George W. Bush," *The New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 17, 2004, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/17/magazine/17BUSH.html? r=0>

² A small sample: Paul Kramer *Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), Alfred McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison, WI, 2009), Chalmers Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York, 2004), Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy*, (Cambridge, MA, 2002), Richard H. Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton, NJ, 2010), Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York, 2013), Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop, Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York, 2006), John Lamberton Harper, *The Cold War*, (New York, 2009), Niall Ferguson, *Colossus The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* New York, 2003).

economic sanctions are the preferred method of keeping the peace and greater and greater numbers of people have at least some political rights” (337). The collective will should, according to Cobbs Hoffman, be understood as a global phenomenon driven by the inexorable spread of “democratic capitalism.”

This supranational, progressive social order follows from “three goals or practices” pushing the U.S. and the world, haltingly, and with occasional missteps, toward their intertwined historical destiny. (6) “Access to opportunity, *arbitration* of disputes, and *transparency* in government and business” drive the narrative toward its apparent *telos*, a hoped-for universal triumph of “democratic capitalism” (6, emphasis in original). The U.S. does exert global “leadership,” but is nonetheless untainted by any variety of imperialism because of its longstanding embrace of access, arbitration, and transparency: “Washington sometimes exerts a unique, controversial, and (probably) temporary authority that arises from America’s particular historical experience, but in defense of values that have become common” (6). Thus America *is* exceptional, and aside from a few regrettable lapses, it serves the interests of all humanity. No other nation has the wealth and power to “shoulder the load” of global leadership. (338) As “umpire,” the U.S. has taken on the thankless task of enforcing universal values of free markets and human liberty.

Beyond its implicit free-market utopianism, Cobbs Hoffman’s argument, it seems, also serves a larger purpose in a grandly heroic nationalist project. Her book is a small part of a larger “human endeavor requiring supreme effort” (336). It attacks interpretations that examine U.S. history as a history of empire. “If citizens are uncertain about their own or their government’s motivation they will find it difficult to prevail against enemies, inertia, pessimism, and all the other forces that continuously complicate human achievement.” (336) Indeed, even to assert that the concept of empire might usefully be applied to an analysis of American history and its conduct of foreign policy is, according to the book’s arguments, reprehensible; such a “flawed characterization merely saps morale.” (336)

Beyond the demoralizing effects produced by what we might call the empire thesis, the book suggests that employing such ideas makes one a witting or unwitting dupe of foreign enemies, and represents a tangible danger to Americans. The author argues that scholars or journalists who advance such a critique of national policy are implicated in the deaths of U.S. citizens:

In 1979, for example, the chief Iranian interrogator of imprisoned American hostages had studied at the University of California Berkeley, where he encountered the fiery hometown rhetoric that denounced the U.S. government as “tyrannical,” “racist,” and “imperialist.” . . . Since the time of the 1979 hostage crisis, doctors, soldiers, diplomats, tourists, businessmen, and journalists have been kidnapped, disappeared, tortured, shot, and even decapitated, partly because their irate captors believed all Americans to be part of a malignant imperialist plot. Heads have literally rolled. The ivory tower overlooks the street, and American academics have a sober responsibility to make sure that incriminations of their country and fellow citizens are made only to the extent warranted. (19)

This calls for a draconian scholarly self-censorship; *American Umpire* argues that an analytical language that frames the U.S. as an imperial power figuratively arms its enemies in ways that lead to actual terrorist attacks upon the nation. “Indeed, the events of 9/11 teach that words must be as precise as possible, for they can become like slippery knives. An umpire accused of being an empire may bleed out, to everyone’s detriment” (19).

If this were true, it would be alarming. The implications are clear: a number of diplomatic historians (myself included) have, at least metaphorically, blood on their hands, inasmuch as many have advanced interpretations suggesting that the history of the U.S. might usefully be understood as, in some sense, ‘imperial.’ But the book here shows a reticence that is puzzling, given the apparent urgency of the threat represented by those decapitated rolling heads. William Appleman Williams, long dead, comes in for disapprobation because of the morale-destroying historiographic mischief produced by his Open Door empire notion, but the book shows more circumspection in naming living historians who offer equally subversive arguments. Other scholars and journalists, though, already *bêtes noires* of the contemporary right-wing noise machine, come directly under the gun.³ The author writes that the “linguist Noam Chomsky,” for example, has produced “three decades of pseudo-scholarly diatribes on topics outside his discipline,” asserting that the U.S. itself has employed terror as a weapon of policy (335-336). Let us note, however, that the book fails to address any of the many specific, empirically detailed arguments about the employment of state terror that Chomsky has advanced in his “datribes” of the past decades.

That omission is characteristic of the book as a whole. There is much of the history of the U.S. and its relations with the world that is simply missing from this account. Cobbs Hoffman’s book has defined the problem of American empire out of existence, and then told a story of the march of universal values and benign intentions, albeit occasionally marred by unfortunate missteps and ‘bad calls’ by the ‘umpire.’ “Washington has sometimes acted like a bully,” but these episodes are, it seems, isolated instances produced by flawed “human nature,” and not to be confused with the real thrust of U.S. policy in its relentless striving to bring access, arbitration, and transparency to those people sitting in darkness around the globe (19-20).

Cobbs Hoffman’s solution to the ideological problem of empire is to strictly limit the meaning of the term: empires are those formal political entities which resemble either the historical example of the “contiguous” territorial empire, Rome, or the Mongols, Ottomans, Aztecs, or more recently, the U.S.S.R.; or “salt water empires” like those of the British, Dutch, French and Spanish, or more recently (and very briefly), the United States between 1898-1946 (12). According to the author, with the ‘independence’ of the Philippines the only period of American empire ended. The problem with this line of argument is that it does not address the full range of historical evidence in any way that explains what the U. S. might be if it is *not* an empire. The inspiring story of access, arbitration, and transparency is not necessarily completely wrong, because those trends, of course, are a part of the last couple of hundred years of world history. Human rights have grown, the desire of many

³ These include Chalmers Johnson, Ward Churchill, Joan Didion, and Michael Moore.

governments to resort to arbitration has been a visible part of international diplomacy, and transparency in government and in capitalist markets has grown in some ways, in some places, and at some times. (It has perhaps shrunk dramatically in others, examples being the case of the National Security Agency secretly spying on the communications of the entire world, and in the growth of an out-of-control national security surveillance state, a campaign of assassinations by Predator drones, etc., or in the massively fraudulent practices of the mortgage securities market that collapsed in 2008, severely damaging the world economy.) The U.S. has certainly contributed to those outcomes. Other empires, and other states have acted aggressively and produced their share of misery, and frequently the U.S. has acted constructively given the existing possibilities. But ‘umpire’ is an awkward and unpersuasive analogy, and does not meet the ‘sober responsibility’ of accurately representing the historical role of the U. S. in the world. The ‘Umpire thesis’ is profoundly flawed because umpires, in any sense that I am familiar with, do not play the game at the same time that they enforce the rules of the game. Enforcing rules while playing the game does, however, sound a lot like empire, or the behavior of a ‘hegemonic’ power.⁴

The definition of empire, however, is not a matter of scholarly consensus, even among those who are quite sanguine about America’s global role. G. John Ikenberry offers an alternative:

The term ‘empire’ refers to the political control by a dominant country of the domestic and foreign policies of weaker countries. The European colonial empires of the late nineteenth century were the most direct, formal kind. The Soviet ‘sphere of influence’ in Eastern Europe entailed an equally coercive but less direct form of control. The British Empire included both direct colonial rule and ‘informal empire.’ If empire is defined loosely, as a hierarchical system of political relationships in which the most powerful state exercises decisive influence, then the United States today indeed qualifies. If the United States is an empire, however, it is like no other before it. To be sure, it has a long tradition of pursuing crude imperial policies, most notably in Latin America and the Middle East. But for most countries, the U.S.-led order is a negotiated system wherein the United States has sought participation by other states on terms that are mutually agreeable.⁵

The problem that any historian of the U.S. must engage is that along with celebratory narratives of “progress” toward racial justice, political inclusion, democratically capitalist markets promoting economic development, or the growth of “arbitration” in international relations, space must also be devoted to narratives of the genesis and persistence of racism,

⁴ The author provides a belated and puzzling qualification of this notion of the U.S. as umpire in the closing paragraphs of the book with yet another extended baseball analogy, one that rather undermines the original argument: “the United States bears more similarity to a player-umpire: a member of a contending team drawn into the role on an impromptu basis, as when amateur players on a community field don’t have the resources for a ‘real’ ump.” (352).

⁵ Ikenberry, “Illusions of Empire: Defining the New American Order” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2004, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/59727/g-john-ikenberry/illusions-of-empire-defining-the-new-american-order>.

political exclusion, the brutalities and oppressions of market relations, and the systematic and ongoing use of overt and covert violence in American relations with large areas of the world in the context of global power seeking. The trick is to take account of all the evidence, and to advance meaningful interpretations.

Much of the evidence that undermines Cobbs Hoffman's argument is simply absent from the narrative; it has disappeared down the memory hole. One searches in vain for accounts of the prolonged, systematic, and repeated interventions, overt and covert, that have for many decades characterized U.S. relations with Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. The author has adopted a sort of 'containment' strategy of her own. The book discusses a few egregious and inescapable examples of interventions gone disastrously wrong, and deplores their obviously destructive results, but interprets them as the exceptions that prove the rule of benign intentions and renunciation of imperial ambitions. Missing though is any argument that might provide an analysis linking its central examples, Vietnam or the 1953 CIA coup in Iran (which was mostly the work of the British, we are told) to fundamental policies and patterns that wreaked havoc around the world. (303-308) We learn in a few sentences that the CIA did stage another coup in Guatemala the year after Mohammed Mossadeq was toppled, and that it "flagrantly violated America's claim to support national self-determination and local sovereignty," but we do not learn that the subsequent "series of military dictatorships," with U.S. support, carried out policies of state terror that killed roughly 200,000 Guatemalan peasants over the next thirty-five years, a prolonged violation of national self-determination and local sovereignty (306). Nor do we learn that Guatemala was in no sense an isolated case, that the U.S. has a long and consistent history of support for violently repressive dictators around the world, as long as they could be construed as reliable 'friends' of the U.S. in the face of some other perceived threat to American global ambitions: communist revolution, or styles of economic nationalism that seemed to threaten American investment or access to vital material resources.

Because of the very expansive, dare we say 'imperial,' ambitions of the U.S., killing hope was as much a part of American anti-communism during the Cold War as was promoting 'free markets,' although of course the two went hand-in-hand. *American Umpire* is silent on U.S. support for the 1973 right-wing coup against Salvador Allende's socialist government that ushered in the nearly two decades of 'free' markets and brutal political repression of Augusto Pinochet's Chile. A quick look at easily accessible documents posted by the National Security Archive helps clarify the motivations of the Nixon administration. Although "Allende was elected legally," the "example of a successful elected Marxist government" would have a "precedent value" for "other parts of the world," thus posing a "painful dilemma."⁶ Secretary of State Henry Kissinger conceded that the Allende regime had "legitimacy in the eyes of Chileans and most of the world," and predicted that it would

⁶ Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Memorandum for the President, November 5 1970, at <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/docs/Doc%204%20-%20Kissinger%20to%20Nixon%20re%20Nov%206%20NSC%20meeting.pdf>. All the quotations that follow in this paragraph are found in this document.

“move cautiously and pragmatically; avoid immediate confrontations with us; and move slowly in formalizing relations with Cuba and other Socialist countries.” Nonetheless, were Chile to succeed with a democratically legitimate socialist state it would produce an “insidious” “model effect.” The very moderation of the Allende government was a threat. The damage that Kissinger envisioned is instructive. Although it would be “very costly” to the reputation of the U.S. to “violate principles” of “non-intervention” it would be more dangerous to allow the perception to take hold “in Latin America and Europe” of American policy as one of “indifference or impotence in the face of clearly adverse developments in a region long considered our sphere of influence.” In the short term, economic concerns loomed: “US investments (totaling some one billion dollars) may be lost, at least in part; Chile may default on debts (about \$1.5 billion) owed the U.S. government and private U.S. banks.” In the longer term he feared the elimination of “US influence in from Chile and the hemisphere,” and resultant damage to the U.S. “position” in the world. Were the Chileans able to let the democratic process play out without American intervention to thwart the electoral will of the people, the Secretary of State believed that it might well ultimately undermine “our conception of what our role in the world is.”

That conception was imperial, in its reach, ambition, sense of entitlement and destiny, cultural chauvinism, and in its willingness and capacity to use force to shape outcomes in ostensibly ‘sovereign’ foreign nations, even if not in the establishment of formal political control along the lines outlined in *American Umpire*. This is a history that ignores the shaping effects of the culture of American expansionism, from the ‘herrenvolk democracy’ and Manifest Destiny of the first half of the nineteenth century, to the fevered ‘Anglo-Saxon’ imperialism of the turn of the century, to the anti-communist ‘empire by invitation’ of the Cold War. Informal empire turns out to be a useful conception after all, to understand the eventual emergence of a global power with an enormous military establishment, hundreds of foreign bases, a vast apparatus of intelligence, surveillance, propaganda, and covert ‘action,’ and the ability to wield crippling economic pressure against those states that resist American ‘leadership.’

American Umpire concludes its celebratory account of the U.S. as ‘umpire’ with an account of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the Serbian war against Bosnian Muslims, to illustrate the indispensability of American intervention in ending the killing, ‘ethnic cleansing,’ and rape. It provides a relatively detailed retelling of the brutal Serbian atrocities at Srebrenica 1995 which involved the murder of 8,000 Bosnian men, thus finally prompting the Clinton administration to pressure the UN and NATO to approve U.S. airstrikes against the Serb militias. Unable to “convince the European governments to take over Europe’s leadership,”⁷ America finally stepped in as “umpire” to end the atrocities (349). Why though, do we not get any account of the 1981 El Mozote massacre, or the 1982 El Calabozo massacre in El Salvador, perpetrated by the Atlacatl Battalion, a “Rapid Deployment Infantry Battalion” counterinsurgency unit of the Salvadoran Army, conceived, trained, and

⁷ William Pfaff quoted in *American Umpire*.

equipped by the U.S. government? ⁸ A significant part of American ‘leadership’ under the Reagan Administration consisted of supporting counterrevolutionary wars of state terror against civilian populations—torture, rape, and murder perpetrated against men, women, children and infants.

While the relatively small scale of the horror at El Mozote (700-900 victims) perhaps accounts for its absence, one wonders why there is no mention of Indonesia, another example of the very many choices a historian might make to evaluate the ‘imperial vs. umperial’ theses. Cobbs Hoffman does not discuss the fact that the U.S. staged a failed covert intervention in Indonesia in 1957-1958, or that the U.S. began a program of assistance to General Suharto, as he began a kind of political genocide against the largely unarmed peasants of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) in 1965-1966 that murdered something on the order of one half million Indonesian civilians. Beyond material support, the Johnson administration provided lists of names for the death squads, in order to ensure that the mass killings accomplished the hoped-for political goal of completely eliminating the PKI. As Bradley Simpson put it in his brilliant and chilling *Economists with Guns*, “the Johnson Administration was a direct and willing accomplice to one of the great bloodbaths of twentieth-century history—the Cold War equivalent of aiding and abetting the Hutu genocide in Rwanda.”⁹ Likewise, we hear nothing about the U.S. support during the Ford Administration of Suharto’s 1975 invasion of East Timor, with its eventual death toll of 200,000 or so Timorese.

It is hard to see where ‘access, arbitration, or transparency’ describes these aspects of U.S. involvement in the world. Policies resembling these were not simply intermittent and aberrant “bad calls,” they have been an ongoing feature of U.S. foreign relations since at least 1898. After the era of formal empire ended, the U.S., like other empires before and since, has often used proxies to achieve its imperial aims. But for space limitations, one could continue in this vein at great length, with discussion of U.S. intervention and violations of self-determination and sovereignty in Central and South America, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. ‘Empire by proxy’ was a game played by others as well; the point is that arguments for American exceptionalism do not hold up well under careful scrutiny.¹⁰

Along with the missing accounts there are also many conceptual lacunae that enable the denialism of the book. The whole argument is characterized by a kind of myopic literalism

⁸ *Report of the UN Truth Commission on El Salvador* (United Nations Security Council, 1993), 29-30, 114-126 at <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/salvador/informes/truth.html>; see also Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop*, 89-120 on the history of U.S. support for Latin American counterrevolutionary state terror since the nineteen-sixties.

⁹ Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S. Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968* (Stanford University Press, 2008), 194. On U.S. material support for the slaughter and lists of PKI leaders delivered to Suharto and the Indonesian military, see 186-191.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

that forecloses the possibility that new imperial formations might rise to replace the territorial or salt-water empires of the past. Many very talented scholars are fruitfully at work on these historical problems; *American Umpire* is unlikely to end that conversation. The dynamics of American history have always pulled in different directions simultaneously—gradual, uneven, and sometimes reversible movement toward broader political and economic inclusion, while clinging to the oppressions of race, class, market, and imperial aggrandizement. These often-bitter divisions among Americans are also reflected and expressed in complex ways in U.S. relations with the rest of the world. A book that aspires to a comprehensive synthesis must fully engage and interpret the evidence on both sides of that equation. *American Umpire* does not.

Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman provides a broad, sweeping interpretation of American foreign relations in her *American Umpire* and makes an important contribution to the field. Her ambitious book is assuredly provocative and stimulating, while simultaneously proving somewhat frustrating in its limited coverage of the postwar era and partly unconvincing in assigning an umpire's role to the United States.

Cobbs Hoffman is on a very clear mission to challenge the use of various theories of 'empire' as an interpretive framework for understanding U.S. foreign policy. She presents most of these theories as deeply flawed, including even some of the more nuanced formulations such as the 'empire by invitation' thesis of Geir Lundestad.¹ Her challenge is mounted forcefully and her persuasive arguments deserve serious consideration. She presents her case with commendable frankness and is quite unafraid to pronounce the arguments of 'American Empire' proponents as simply wrong. Her candor is quite refreshing.

So too is Cobbs Hoffman's unabashed willingness to emphasize the successes in the American foreign policy record over the failures. She holds that "William Appleman Williams viewed world history through the wrong end of the telescope. On balance, American diplomacy in the twentieth century has been far more triumphant than tragic" (339). She provides plenty of evidence to support her position, noting, for example, the quick reincorporation of defeated rivals like Germany and Japan back into the society of nations as well as the crucial American role in the economic revival of Western Europe and Japan. In her assessment the "instrumental role" of the United States "in curbing the ambition of totalitarian Russia in the second half of the twentieth century and in facilitating world wide economic growth" more than compensates for the undoubted American mistakes and failures incurred during the period (339). This is a perspective that might be placed before students with real benefit.

But Cobbs Hoffman moves beyond her challenge to what she deems flawed interpretations and offers "an alternative hypothesis: that the United States acted not as an empire in modern foreign relations, but as a kind of *umpire*, to compel acquiescence as necessary with rules that had earned broad legitimacy" (17). These rules or practices were at a fundamental level "*access to opportunity, arbitration of disputes, and transparency in government and business*" (6). The adoption of them by the U.S. and various other nations helped bring the world to the prevailing system of democratic capitalism that effectively ended the old imperial system. Thus, as Cobbs Hoffman portrays it, far from being an empire itself, the U.S. has helped shape the modes and mechanisms that largely eliminated empires, especially in the period after World War II.

¹ Geir Lundestad, *Empire by Integration: The United States and European Integration, 1945-199* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Ultimately, I found this alternative key to unlocking and evaluating American foreign policy less than compelling. It simply doesn't explain as much as Cobbs Hoffman suggests. For a broad swath of the period she considers, Great Britain played more of the essential 'umpire' roles that she ascribes to the U.S. It would have been helpful to have had Cobbs Hoffman place her work in direct conversation with Walter Russell Mead's *God and Gold: Britain, America and the Making of the Modern World*.² Mead presents the United States as succeeding Britain in shaping and defending a liberal world order. There is much to his argument.

More problematic is her presentation of the United States as 'umpire' during the Cold War period. The weakness of this analogy seems apparent to Cobbs Hoffman herself because of the way she shifts gears in the very last pages of her study and describes the U.S. as bearing "more similarity to a player-umpire" (352). She acknowledges that the United States was never some sort of objective referee but rather more like a player who always pursued his own interests while also helping to set the rules of the game and overseeing them in some sort of fashion. This seems to me to capture more accurately the enormous and constructive American role in shaping the economic and political contours -- access, arbitration, transparency and so forth -- that guided most of the non-communist world in the era after World War II.

While undoubtedly helpful, this revised 'player-umpire' analogy hardly explains all of American foreign policy during the Cold War. In its effort to trace the American responsibility for fashioning the liberal capitalist world order, *American Umpire* significantly downplays the vast conflict that occurred in the period after 1945 between two rival systems. Yet it was participation in this conflict that largely helped define America's role in the world. Perhaps a more appropriate sports metaphor to apply to the U.S. would be as the player-manager of one side in this great and very costly struggle, with the Soviets leading and dominating the opposing side. Cobbs Hoffman pays limited attention to the Soviet Union, mainly presenting it as the last of the old imperial powers whose empire simply collapsed with the end of the Cold War. The Soviet Union was assuredly an empire, and a murderous and ugly one in its domination of 100 million East Europeans for half a century, but it was much more than a replica of European colonial empires. It represented an alternate and ghastly vision for ordering the world and one that intended to dominate as much of the world as it could. American policymakers came to appreciate this well. Dean Acheson astutely captured their thinking when he observed that it slowly dawned on them "that the whole world structure and order that we inherited from the nineteenth century was gone and that the struggle to replace it would be directed from two bitterly opposed and ideologically irreconcilable power centers."³ Europe proved to be the primary initial arena in the Cold War but the contest soon extended to north-east

² Walter Russell Mead, *God and Gold: Britain, America and the Making of the Modern World*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

³ Dean G. Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), p. 726.

Asia. Then, partly through the impact of the Korean War, it moved into a conflict of global dimensions where it brought much anguish and destruction in the Third World, the field on which much of the Cold War 'game' got played out in peripheral battles as Odd Arne Westad has clarified.⁴ The respective 'player-managers' poured enormous energies and resources into the long contest, and while the end-result was by no means always clear, the superior strength of the West in multiple categories allowed it to outlast the Soviet side, which imploded during 1989-1991. This result would never have been achieved if the United States had declined to accept the leadership of the western powers during the years after World War II.

While Cobbs Hoffman does not set out to tell the detailed story of the Cold War, her book's treatment of American foreign policy during it in *American Umpire* is rather breezy and episodic. This is undoubtedly the lament and complaint of a Cold War 'splitter' against a colleague engaged in a major exercise in 'lumping,' but let me try to illustrate the point with but one example—the book's presentation of the Truman Doctrine. Cobbs Hoffman holds that "the self-proclaimed Truman Doctrine made the United States the primary enforcer of the new world system" (271-72). Furthermore it "created the basic framework for American foreign relations after 1947" (293). This analysis is a gross oversimplification. At the time of Truman's speech, the U.S. had no overall plan to respond to the Soviet Union, let alone a schema prepared to implement in its role as a supposed 'world umpire'. The aid program to Greece and Turkey constituted but a first and restrained element of the Truman administration's new postwar foreign policy approach. Much else was still to be formulated. The Truman Doctrine should be read neither as a prescriptive tract that guided subsequent foreign policy nor as a credo having universal application. Lumpers of all persuasions should keep this clear for it helps confirm that much of foreign policymaking is complex, uncertain, and rather messy, and it usually evolves in a disorderly manner that is not susceptible to easy generalization.

In a thoughtful conclusion entitled "Good Calls, Bad Calls, and Rules in Flux: Or, Who Wants to be Ump? 1991-Present," Cobbs Hoffman raises some interesting questions about the role of the United States in the world. She asks if the U.S. should seek to reduce its commitments and responsibilities. Notably she includes in her discussion of this broad question a pointed review of the international efforts to stem the violence and atrocities involved in the break-up of Yugoslavia in the mid-1990s. She records the feckless efforts of the United Nations peacekeepers and European Union negotiators and correctly observes that the atrocities of Serb militias ended only after the launching of NATO air strikes. She concludes with a telling comment that "American hopes that the United States could transfer some of the burden of umpiring had not materialized" (349). However the burden is described, I think it fair to say that there are no nations that can play the same leadership role in guaranteeing the semblance of world order and international stability that the U.S. has secured for well over half a century. Obviously the price in lives and resources paid by the U.S. recently in Iraq and Afghanistan has led some Americans to want to surrender the

⁴ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

crucial world role their nation has played since World War II. This temptation is perhaps understandable, but Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman's work helps clarify that there would be high costs in a world where such practices as access, arbitration, and transparency were not supported. Ultimately she lends support to the conviction that at present there is no worthwhile alternative to continued American international leadership and engagement. And given the American track record that is not such a bad thing.

American *Umpire* is truly a bravura performance. Canny and cannily written, it is a brilliant meditation on the story of American foreign relations from 1776 to the present, from the days of presidents George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Franklin D. Roosevelt, through to George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Within the space of 444 pages and 10 chapters and a conclusion – the remainder of the book turned over to notes, acknowledgements, and an adequate index – Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman “teases out three goals or practices that gradually transcended ancient differences and pushed *both* the United States and the rest of the world in the direction of democratic capitalism. These are *access* to opportunity, *arbitration* of disputes, and *transparency* in government” (6). Admittedly, adds Cobbs Hoffman, these “new trends did not emerge full-blown,” but “can be glimpsed more consistently over time in the welter of events, even though buffeted by countertrends” (6). Eschewing constructs of the United States as an ‘empire’ – whether informal, benign or in denial – Cobbs Hoffman introduces what she calls an “an alternative hypothesis: that the United States acted not as an empire in modern foreign relations, but as a kind of *umpire*, to compel acquiescence as necessary with rules that had earned broad legitimacy” (17). She also concedes that while ‘umpire’ may be an imperfect metaphor, it fits reality more closely than ‘empire.’ Why? Because, she asserts, “It reasonably approximates the ways in which the United States periodically brought action to a halt, exacted a penalty, and then tried to get out of the way to allow competition to resume” (17). This, of course, would be news to William Appleman Williams, Andrew J. Bacevich, and Niall Ferguson,¹ as well as many other serious scholars who have written about the emergence of the national security state and the military industrial complex,² all of whom have meticulously documented America’s rise as the most powerful hegemon the world has ever seen. Nor is there much discussion of the millions of people who hate the United States for its imperial ways, not to mention the significance of the millions of peoples it has laid

¹ See William A. Williams, *Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (rev. and enl.; New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1962); Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U. S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

² See, for example, Norman A. Graebner, ed., *The National Security State: Its Theory and Practice, 1945-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); and Sheldon Ungar, *The Rise and Fall of Nuclearism: Fear and Faith as Determinants of the Arms Race* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

in their graves.³ But Cobbs Hoffman has no interest in this kind of scholarship; in fact, she takes no prisoners.⁴

In any case, according to Cobbs Hoffman, the Founding Fathers, who were the first to use the term ‘umpire,’⁵ were presumably committed to a policy of arbitration over force in international affairs (17), as well as the equality of states, both of which comprised its core values. During the course of the American diplomatic experience, she continues, America’s “core values proved stable” (352). The period between 1945 and 1947 was the key turning point in American foreign relations, making “the United States the primary enforcer of the new world system,” and consequently assuming “a role akin to the one that the nation’s founders had originally envisioned for the federal government: that of an umpire to compel acquiescence” (271-272). Perhaps.

In a poll taken in 2007, 72 per cent of respondents told Pew researchers that they completely agree with the statement, “If the Founding Fathers came back today, they would be disappointed by the way America turned out.”⁶ This strikes me as an understatement. They would be astounded to learn of an American empire – or whatever one would like to call it – that boasts 750 military installations in two thirds of the world’s counties, led by military chiefs who routinely draw comparisons with the Roman empire, inspired by books with such titles as *Empires of Trust: How Rome Built – and America is Building – a New World*.⁷ Immersed in the perspective of eighteenth-century political realism, putting national interest and security over ideology and moral concerns, the Founding Fathers would have had great difficulty coming to grips with concepts such as ‘wars of choice,’ which have driven national foreign policy in the twenty-first century to the ends of the earth. What doubtless would have impressed them, however, would have been the discovery that the United States is now considered the most powerful nation on the planet, in contrast with their own era, the last two decades of the eighteenth century, in which the Republic struggled to establish its sovereignty in a hostile world dominated by European

³ For the tip of the iceberg, see Brendon O’Connor and Martin Griffiths, co-eds., *The Rise of anti-Americanism* (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁴ Hoffman’s casual dismissal of Andrew Bacevich’s case for the existence of an American empire is typical (412, footnote 44). See Andrew J. Bacevich, ed., *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 236.

⁵ The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests the first use of the word circa 1400, by John Lydgate, poet and prior of Hatfield Regis.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/208894?rskey=J0v1ta&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

⁶ CBS News, June 26, 2007. http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/pdf/CBS_poll_4July.pdf

⁷ Thomas F. Madden (New York: Dutton/Penguin, 2008).

monarchies. It was a very near thing and should give the Americans pause – and perhaps some modesty and restraint – in dealing with the world around them.⁸

Contemporary public debate about the nature of U.S. foreign policy often reveals an inability – or, sometimes, even an unwillingness – to remember what has happened in the past. The issues currently faced by the United States, in its attempts to further American national interests and guarantee U.S. security in the twenty-first century, can best be understood, I submit, as simply the latest manifestation of perennial foreign policy challenges, rather than as unique to the present age. The tale of American foreign relations may be characterized, *inter alia*, by the permanent tension inherent in America's desire to engage the world, on the one hand, and the equally powerful determination to avoid undue 'entanglement' in the world's troubles, on the other hand, a thread that runs like a straight line through the history of U.S. foreign relations, from the Founding Fathers to the present. I have great difficulty envisaging the Founding Fathers, whose true genius lay in their balancing of practical and philosophical objections to central government by sharing treaty powers between the executive and legislative branches, locked in unseemly debate over, 'Who lost China?' or 'Who lost Vietnam?' or 'Who lost Iraq?' or 'Who lost Afghanistan?' Above all else, the revolutionary generation that made up the ranks of the Founding Fathers thought and acted in terms of power and diplomacy. For America's Founding Fathers the European state system was never a mystery, nor were the brilliant seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers who described the system and defined the rules that governed it. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), with its recognition of the sovereignty of nations and the optimum conditions for their security and survival, had reorganized the European system.⁹ The Founding Fathers became masters of the game. I am not so sure what they might have said about America becoming the World's Umpire.

As late as 1895, Secretary of State Richard Olney declaimed to his British counterpart that "If all Europe were to suddenly fly to arms over the fate of Turkey, would it not be preposterous that any American state should find itself inextricably involved in the miseries and burdens of the contest?"¹⁰ That the United States should find itself inextricably involved in the very miseries and burdens of such a contest – this time in response to the Soviet Union's unilateral attempt to revise the Montreux Straits Convention with Turkey in 1946 – suggests the nature and character of the American diplomatic revolution that occurred in the aftermath of World War II. For, in the years since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, which was in a true sense the midwife of the triumph of American internationalism, the United States had moved from its post-

⁸ See Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, and Joseph M. Siracusa, *Foreign Affairs and the Founding Fathers: From Confederation to Constitution, 1776-1787* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), ix-x, 174-154.

⁹ Richard Dean Burns, Joseph M. Siracusa, and Jason C. Flanagan, *American Foreign Relations since Independence* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), ix-x.

¹⁰ Quoted in Joseph M. Siracusa, ed., *The American Diplomatic Revolution: A Documentary History of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (Sydney, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1976), 217.

Versailles posture of political non-interference in the endless, time-honored struggles of Europe (a fiction supposedly enshrined in the neutrality legislation of the 1930s) to a posture of standard bearer of international collective security.

In this sense, Cobbs Hoffman is on firm ground when she says that the self-proclaimed 1947 Truman Doctrine changed everything. Still, it is impossible to comprehend, in Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s felicitous expression, "the brave and essential response of free men to Communist aggression,"¹¹ without understanding the intellectual world of the Americans who articulated this view. With all due respect to the vision and core values of the Founding Fathers, who would have had their hands full keeping the Republic afloat, the Cold War politicians, policymakers and diplomats were different people, in a different time, the product of their own unique climate of opinion,¹² with deeply-rooted shared experiences. An entire generation had lived through the disillusionment of the Versailles system and the folly of isolation; had struggled through the Great Depression which had reduced half of America's citizens to penury; had witnessed the rise of Communism, Fascism, and Nazism; had recoiled from the West's abandonment of Czechoslovakia to Adolf Hitler under the aegis of appeasement; and were dragged into a second world war in their lifetime, the death toll this time reaching sixty million, a figure which includes six million murdered because they were Jewish. They also perceived a shrinking world in which war and peace were judged indivisible, the hard lessons of Munich learned on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and the analogy that shaped a generation of diplomacy.¹³ Moreover, modern warfare, with its awful weapons of mass death and destruction and the equally awful realization that those weapons could be delivered anywhere with impunity, caused the majority of Americans to rethink past policies and their role in the world. Pushed and pulled by history, Americans placed their faith in the collective security of the fledgling United Nations. The fact that the UN could not and would not play this promised role became the moment of truth: whether or not the United States would play the keeper of the balance of power. That the answer would be in the affirmative is what Walter W. Rostow once described as "The American Diplomatic Revolution" to an Oxford audience in 1946.¹⁴

Understanding the role the United States has played from that time to the present, whatever one's perspective, is critical and rightly commands center stage in the academy, as scholars, especially, have an obligation to remember and learn, as agreed upon conclusions, as to why events played out the way they did, particularly as they are likely to shape current public discourse, as well as serve as future foreign policy axioms. For those

¹¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs*, 46 (October 1967), 22-52.

¹² I am referring here to the fundamental assumptions and attitudes shared by significant elements of a population at a given time. See Robert Allen Skotheim, ed., *The Historian and the Climate of Opinion* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

¹³ Surprisingly, Hoffman has only one reference either to Munich or appeasement (238).

¹⁴ Walter W. Rostow, *The American Diplomatic Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), 6.

already involved in this conversation, *American Umpire* serves as a constructive counterpoint; for those embarking, it serves as an excellent introduction. In any case, this first-rate study is an essential acquisition for academic and public libraries.

Author's Response by Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, San Diego State University

My mother used to read Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* to us on dark winter evenings, and I can still hear the long intake of breath that preceded the paragraph describing the picnic that Ratty prepared for his new friend Mole one sunny afternoon on the River Bank. Ratty's bottomless basket of delectable morsels put Harrods to shame, and Mole's nearsighted eyes grew bigger and bigger.

I feel the same delight in reading the varied critiques offered by these generous reviewers. Some tastes are sharper, others sweeter, but together they are a feast. My goal in writing *American Umpire* was to prompt debate about a matter of immense importance on which consensus has become nearly, and in my opinion dangerously, monolithic across the political spectrum: namely, that the U.S. is a 'kind of empire.' It appears we have such a conversation. Thank you.

The reviewers focus on very different aspects of the book, but since none landed on a central piece of my argument I'd like to sketch that briefly before attending to their points. Of course, as I tell my students, if a reader does not hear an author's thesis, he or she hasn't been loud enough. Let me be clearer.

American Umpire asserts that the role of 'umpire' is built into the nation's internal political structure. In *The Federalist*, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay all used the term to describe the function they believed essential to the survival of a union of states. They worried that neighbors would otherwise come to blows over resources, in time, if there was not a superior power 'to compel acquiescence' to general rules. My book plumbs the evolution of the federal government's role as umpire since 1776, and the ways in which this deeply contested function acquired—somewhat inadvertently—an international dimension after 1945 that explains U.S. interventionism despite the country's longstanding aversion to foreign 'entanglements.' The book traces global historical trends over the same period to show that America was far from exceptional. Rather, it participated in three trends much larger than itself: the gradual worldwide movement towards access, arbitration, and transparency that coincided with the substitution of nation-states for empires as the primary form of human government. The nation's foreign and domestic policy was imbued (mostly) with these three values, though greed, ambition, racism, sexism, and just plain cussedness constantly warred with its best intentions.

This developmental process was often terribly brutal. As Joseph Siracusa accurately notes, the United States "laid millions of people . . . in their graves." I like to think that *American Umpire* acknowledges these very real consequences, though obviously it doesn't do so enough by Siracusa's standards. The nation's worst war, if one counts only American casualties, was the Civil War. North invaded South to impose order at a cost of 700,000 men. The federal umpire finally withdrew after a twelve-year occupation. In World War II, far many more died, primarily non-Americans, mostly at the hands of others. Nonetheless, the U.S. bombed and occupied Italy, Germany, and Japan to compel the restructuring of these nations in accord with new global norms as established by signed treaties. It subsequently "held the line" against

Communist expansion in places like West Berlin, South Korea, and South Vietnam—with some positive consequences (depending on one’s point of view) and some absolutely disastrous ones. Hatred for the U.S. was one result. This isn’t surprising. Ask Southerners who still resent Yankee guns and carpetbags.

I agree with Joseph Siracusa that the Founding Fathers could not anticipate and would likely shudder at the extraordinary expansion of *umperial* authority. Indeed, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison—not to mention Jefferson Davis—rued the amplification of federal power as early as 1798, and proposed alternative doctrines of Westphalian sovereignty that would allow states to cancel any national law they didn’t like. Siracusa is absolutely correct that the yearning for autonomy and non-entanglement “runs like a straight line through the history of U.S. foreign relations.” But, when one explores conflicts like the Whiskey Rebellion, the Nullification Crisis, the Civil War, and the Little Rock integration fight, one sees a parallel commitment to intervention across sovereign borders *in extremis*—accompanied by an eagerness to get out once the battle is over. Umperialism is not imperialism, though the short-term consequences can be nearly as devastating.

It’s not that I have “no interest” in the arguments made by William A. Williams, Niall Ferguson, or Andrew Bacevich. I just think they’re wrong. After World War II, precisely because the United Nations (UN) could not immediately play “its promised role,” as Siracusa notes, the United States took up the lion’s share of the burden of global security. After virtually every subsequent conflict, it withdrew as soon as possible—though in many cases stayed at the request of local actors, such as Britain, Belgium, and Japan. Countries like France, the Philippines, and Saudi Arabia simply kicked out U.S. military installations for which they had no further use. As controversial as America’s behavior was, it was not the behavior of any empire.

I agree with Robert Dean that the United States nonetheless made some absolutely benighted decisions in its performance of this ad hoc, unauthorized role after World War II. I appreciate his careful cataloguing of some of the incidents that space constraints prohibited me from dealing with at length, or at all. In a book of 440 pages that begins with the year 1776—and in which only 60 pages concern the period from 1947 to 2013—some events get short shrift. But I think that Iran and Guatemala, which I do examine, are good examples of precisely the kinds of covert intervention that the U.S. perpetrated and many fine authors have adequately chronicled elsewhere.¹ As in Chile and Indonesia, to mention two locales to which Dean draws attention, the interventions in Iran and Guatemala were mostly unnecessary and ultimately backfired. Their consequences were toxic for international amity and the countries in

¹ There are many examples, but some important ones would include: Tanya Harmer, *Allende’s Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (North Carolina, 2011); Michael Grow, *U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions: Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War* (Kansas, 2008); Kenneth Conboy and James Morrison, *Feet to the Fire: CIA Covert Operations in Indonesia, 1957-1958* (U.S. Naval Press, 1999); Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States* (Princeton, 1991); Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iran* (Columbia, 1997); and, Malcolm Byrne and Mark Gasiorowski, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran* (Syracuse, 2004).

question. To quote Robert McNamara, “we were wrong, terribly wrong.” I appreciate Dean’s drawing attention to consequences I would never wish to downplay—and don’t think I have.

At the same time, I stand by my assessment that, *in toto*, America’s umperial role was demanded by the international community and produced largely positive outcomes. (This is not to say that every action generated approval. Quite the opposite in some cases.) Violence between states declined steadily in *each decade* after the 1947 Truman Doctrine. The international economy flourished. Consider the astounding contrast between the first and second halves of the twentieth century by way of illustration. Indeed, I believe that *American Umpire* far more thoroughly considers ‘evidence on both sides’ of the equation than books that tend to be unalloyed condemnations, such as those by Noam Chomsky, Williams, and Bacevich.² Reading those authors—or even Robert Dean’s review—one is simply unable to explain why the rest of the world, which presumably knows its self-interest, makes little effort to sanction, punish, or topple the ‘empire,’ and instead persistently calls upon an obnoxious but willing Uncle Sam when the going gets rough. Indeed, I argue that the UN’s weakness and the absence of any legitimate, pan-European empire since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, are what consistently prompt calls for America to play a large part on the world stage.

I agree with Wilson Miscamble, however, that Harry Truman had no clue how far America’s new role, prompted by Soviet enmity, would extend. Like the Founders, Truman might well be aghast at some of the consequences—though he’d certainly take joy in the liberation of Eastern Europe and beginnings of democracy in Russia. Many nations under the U.S. security umbrella have a far better balance of payments than the United States does, and provide services to their people of which Americans can only dream. In 1950, U.S. citizens were first in the world in per capita income. Today they are seventeenth. Playing umpire has not been an unsullied good for the United States any more than it has been for the world. Some of America’s interests have been harmed.

Related to this, Miscamble is right that the United States was not exceptional in backstopping new international norms. One implication is that it may be possible to navigate responsibly away from this role in the future, if the U.S. can encourage new leaders. As I show in early chapters, Great Britain undertook this ad hoc function for decades: organizing coalitions against the international slave trade, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Adolf Hitler, and to promote free trade. The United Nations also gradually expanded its enforcement capability, and today 122 countries contribute uniformed personnel to forestall violence in others.³ Nonetheless, the UN still has much in common with America under the rickety Articles of Confederation—and enforcement of international comity still tends to fall to the great powers, despite their lack of authorization, obvious flaws, and imperfect neutrality.

² For some seminal works see: Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Reality Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Harvard, 2002); Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Holt, 2000); William A. Williams, *Empire As a Way of Life* (Oxford, 1980); and, Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance* (Holt, 2003).

³ <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/factsheet.shtml>

Wilson Miscamble fruitfully raises the question of what might be the best, most precise metaphor for America's role. Perhaps "player-manager" is superior to umpire, as he suggests. But it's worth observing that *umpire* is the term that America's founders used. It's a word with ancient provenance in the United States' system of government that might illuminate a cultural predisposition.

Kathleen Burk raises yet other important questions. I appreciate greatly her recognition of my attempt to incorporate evidence from a wide range of countries, especially Britain, many of whose policies the United States copied without acknowledgement. Yet I disagree when Burk suggests that Imperial Russia is the appropriate comparison for America's aggressive, "imperial" expansion across the continent in the nineteenth century. Matching apples with apples, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil seem like far more fitting comparisons. They also expanded opportunistically against indigenous tribes, European monarchies, and other nation-states. Between 1821 and 1935, there were twenty-one border wars between American republics, including the U.S. war against Mexico. Indigenous peoples lost out almost universally. In my book I call this 'flagging' rather than Manifest Destiny, which seems a parochial term. Almost every weakly defended territory on earth became a target in this era, as new nations and old empires competed to plant their flags on an anarchic globe. Yet we don't speak of the Empires of Chile, Australia, or Canada, because in the course of expansion they annexed new territories on a basis of equality—and ultimately cohered as liberal states rather than Ottoman lookalikes. Though empires and nations used some of the same abhorrent tactics, there is a meaningful historical distinction between them. And if this distinction applies to Argentina, whose history of expansion is so similar to America's, then we must apply it equally to the U.S.

Which brings me to my last point. Kathleen Burk notes that some scholars find terms like 'informal empire' useful. Robert Dean takes offense at my observation that America's bitterest enemies call the United States an empire, as do many eminent and honorable scholars (some of whom I admire greatly). Yet it's undeniable that people like Tamarlan Tsarnaev, who smiled as he detonated his bomb at the Boston Marathon, ranted in advance about the American Empire. America's self-definition, if it is to be 'empire,' has the potential to reinforce these violent, vengeful impulses. Loose lips really do sink ships. Of course, if the term genuinely applies, that's a different story. "Empire" should then be proved rigorously and consistently—and Washington should bring American GIs home from wherever they are stationed on the planet, beginning with Australia, Britain, Japan, and Germany. But my own assessment, based on a comparative study of world history, is that 'empire' has become an easy, ill-defined label that obscures far more than it clarifies, despite its popularity. Deconstructing and dispensing with it is not matter of 'draconian' self-censorship, but scholarly precision in the context of a volatile world. As Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote a century ago, "falsely shouting fire in a crowded theatre" is not a matter of free speech but personal responsibility.

There's no greater honor for a scholar than to be read with insight and care. Each of these deft and sophisticated reviewers, from three corners of the globe, has furthered this vital conversation. I am genuinely in their debt.

And goodness. What a cornucopia!

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