

Hampf, M. Michaela: *Empire of Liberty. Die Vereinigten Staaten von der Reconstruction zum Spanisch-Amerikanischen Krieg*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg 2019. ISBN: 978-3-11-065364-9; XII, 580 S.

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Based on published primary and secondary sources, Michaela Hampf offers an encyclopedic account of the development of the United States from the end of the Civil War to the turn of the century and evaluates the impact of this transformation on the „imperialist turn“ after the Spanish-American War. Hampf argues that the seminal changes in U.S. society, politics, culture, and economy determined the nation's aggressive and acquisitive foreign policy by the end of the century.

Hampf follows in the footsteps of German historians, such as Eckart Kehr who had first argued about the „primacy of domestic politics“ in nineteenth-century German foreign policy, and later Hans-Ulrich Wehler, and revisionist U.S. historians of the Wisconsin School, among them William Appleman Williams and Walter LaFeber, who emphasized that the United States' fin-de-siècle wars and annexations were primarily driven by the perceived necessities of an economy in boom and bust cycles.¹ But she is equally indebted to a more recent focus on domestic cultural beliefs and practices as preparing the ground for overseas expansion. This school of thought has concentrated especially on the role of racism (although revisionists have done that as well) and the treatment of domestic minorities – African Americans, Native Americans, etc. – as an incubation chamber for similar attitudes that legitimized ruling over non-white populations abroad.²

Expanding on such studies and taking the idea of the „primacy of domestic politics“ to its logical conclusion, Hampf argues that virtually all developments of the last thirty-five years of the nineteenth century – Reconstruction and racial politics, immigration and urbanization, industrialization and its discontents – created a climate in which Americans were willing to embark on a foreign policy

departure that was contrary to the country's democratic principles. Hampf sees this as the culmination of a process of internal colonization, especially the settlement imperialism imposed on Native Americans, in the Gilded Age. The more the American empire expanded – at home and eventually abroad – the more necessary it became to curtail the rights of minority groups. In this reading, territorial expansion was not mirrored by an expansion of freedom, but by its limitation to hegemonic groups (pp. 11–12).

In order to make her argument and to connect the developments of the post-Civil War period to fin-de-siècle imperialism, Hampf uses the concept of „path dependence“, borrowed from the social sciences. Proponents of this theory argue that processes are not pre-determined, but chaotic at specific „critical junctures“. Any path chosen at those junctures, however, reduces available options and leads to a „lock-in“, which then determines subsequent choices. Hampf considers this theory and methodology particularly apt for historical processes because it emphasizes their open-endedness, but also interprets any given outcome as a result of its own history. Concretely turned, path dependence helps Hampf visualize the imperialist end point as the result of nine critical junctures and lock-ins, which mutually reinforce one another.

Hampf discusses these developments in five thematic chapters, beginning with Reconstruction in the American South. She emphasizes how the initially ambitious effort to restructure race and political relations in the South ended with a compromise between the industrial North and the agricultural South at the expense of the recently emancipated freedmen. Through political and economic legal instruments, including the Black Codes and sharecropping, the South was able to per-

¹ Eckart Kehr / Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Der Primat der Innenpolitik. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur preußisch-deutschen Sozialgeschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1970; Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, Cleveland 1959; Walter F. LaFeber, *The New Empire. An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860–1893*, Ithaca (New York) 1963.

² Although Hampf does not mention this particular book, an early protagonist of this school is Amy Kaplan / Donald Pease (eds.), *Cultures of United States Imperialism* Durham 1993.

petuate the oppression and disenfranchisement of African Americans. Hampf considers this outcome as an essential lock-in on the road to imperialism because the historical bond between territorial expansion and the claim to civil rights had been dissolved by this sectional compromise.

The next chapter focuses on the development of the land and its population, analyzing the connections between settler imperialism and westward expansion, the transformation of family farming into agribusiness, as well as the related processes of immigration and urbanization. Hampf sees some of the most important connections between these dynamic processes in the rise in racism and social Darwinism, which were used to justify expropriation and annihilation of Native Americans and discrimination of Gilded Age immigrants. The same ideological constructs, Hampf concludes, facilitated overseas expansion.

Hampf then analyzes the economic dimensions of the Gilded Age transformation. Like many authors, she considers the railroads as essential, even a lock-in in themselves, because they drove not only economic expansion, but also continental expansion, concentration of capital and speculation. Railroads were an early example of the monopolistic practices of the era, which went hand in hand with political corruption. These impressive, but also negative developments fueled demands for reform and governmental intervention.

The ensuing social and political upheaval is the focus of the sixth chapter. Hampf describes the disastrous working and living conditions of the working class and argues that the lock-in in this context was the failure of the nascent labor movement to be inclusive. Instead, especially the American Federation of Labor (AFL) fought for the rights of white male skilled workers. Racism, sexism, social Darwinism and anti-immigrant fervor were being deployed to keep the working class divided and to prepare the ground for imperialism. The AFL was ultimately prepared to accept overseas expansion, even though it remained vigorously opposed to territorial expansions that opened the domestic labor market to more immigration (p. 375).

The last substantive chapter continues the focus on social upheaval and defines the subsequent expansionist phase as social imperialism, a distraction from social problems at home and an attempt to solve the economic discontents of the age by conquering overseas markets. The election of 1896 and the demise of the Populists, Hampf argues, symbolized the end of domestic reform and the redirection of energies toward the outside world. Jingoism facilitated the Spanish-American War, Hampf's last lock-in towards overseas expansion, the intervention in Cuba, and the cession of the Philippines. In her conclusion, Hampf reiterates the seven lock-ins that led to American imperialism, concluding with the central importance of racism, honed in domestic discrimination of Native Americans and African Americans, before being turned outwards, especially in the brutal colonial wars the United States waged in the Philippines. Hampf implies that racism remains important in U.S. foreign policy up to this day.

If there is one issue that I have with this richly detailed book, it is that Hampf sometimes engages with the Gilded Age developments too much on their own merit rather than demonstrating their concrete link to subsequent foreign policy decisions. The book details segregation's impact on African Americans, how transcontinental expansion and settler imperialism doomed Native Americans, and how a rapidly transforming economy influenced the lives of workers and the politics of the age. Nevertheless, the impact of these developments on foreign policy is formulated more as an assumption than as a concrete demonstration of how these forces shaped foreign policy.

Take the impact of racism, for example, an ideology that Hampf rightly underlines as crucial at home and abroad. Yet, while she details its impact on African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants she does not address the significance of racism in overseas expansion at great length. While racism is presented as a lock-in that facilitated overseas expansion, Hampf only briefly acknowledges that racism had long acted as much as a deterrent to overseas expansion as it had as an incentive. Many Americans feared the consequences of a close encounter with non-white

populations abroad (p. 408).³ It would have been interesting to hear Hampf's take on why this deterrent effect of racism was apparently overcome by the end of the nineteenth century. While she is right in postulating that even Americans with those racist convictions did not oppose the subsequent practice of informal empire, this transformation of imperial practice was not apparent immediately before and after the Spanish-American War.

Perhaps, the decision not to discuss the connections between the transformation of the United States in the Gilded Age and the eventual decisions for overseas expansion in detail is owed to the methodology Hampf employed. If decisions and developments are classified as critical junctures and lock-ins, they appear linked to the eventual foreign policy departure by definition and it might seem superfluous to discuss the connection in depth.

Nevertheless, these critical points shall not detract from the overall achievement of the book – an impressive study of the seminal transformations of the United States during the Gilded Age, which co-determined and facilitated the country's launch towards world power status in the twentieth century.

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³This point has been made particularly by Eric T. Love in *Race over Empire. Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865–1900*, Chapel Hill 2004.