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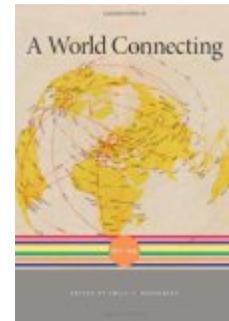
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Emily Rosenberg, ed. *A World Connecting, 1870—1945*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012. 1168 S. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-04721-1.

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A Shrinking World in the Age of Empires and Extremes, 1870-1945

It has become a cliché to state that we live in a connected world, and it is becoming common to acknowledge that this connectivity has had a long history. Globalization did not begin yesterday. Nevertheless, historical depth and complexity to these statements remains lacking across broad swathes of historiography. We are still coming to terms with the theorization and documentation of this connectivity, its unevenness, and its contradictions. For historians of the United States, the links between global history and national history remain a key scholarly problem. The historiography of the Gilded Age and Progressivism has in recent years seen an awakening of interest in the transnational context of that period in U.S. national development, but existing global histories rarely have the specificity necessary to be useful. *A World Connecting* should be of interest to American specialists precisely because of the rich empirical data marshaled, the fruitful hypotheses embedded in the arguments, and the myriad of scholarly works cited and included in the bibliography. This book should become a standard reference tool not only for global history, but also for supplying the wider contexts for conceptualizing American history from a transnational angle.

Covering the years of imperial globalization from 1870 to 1914 as well as its tumultuous aftermath of global war, economic depression, and more war, the theme is the networking of institutions, movements of peoples, goods, and ideas across national, imperial, and cultural boundaries in these years, and the seemingly contradictory creation and intensification of national boundaries

in the same period. The book makes a genuine attempt to encompass the major developments and in all regions of the world. It is the work of multiple authors, with editor Emily Rosenberg contributing a synoptic and synthesizing introduction that explains the purposes and structure of the volume.

Not surprisingly, the result is a very large book of over a thousand pages, and each of the five sections could well command a detailed review in itself. In many ways, the individual chapters qualify as tour-de-force achievements in the agendas they have set. Not only is the material handled in a magisterial fashion, but arresting interpretations also appear at almost every turn. Historians of specific periods of national history like the American Gilded Age will profit from consulting this work.

The choice of a thematic presentation rather than a chronological one is theoretically justified as underlining the multiperspectival view of the book. There is no single pathway to modernity, and the five sections chosen certainly amount to a consideration of the most important issues requiring treatment in any history of the world's global connectivity in the modern era. These are the growth of modern statehood; communications networking in the context of empires; migration systems; economic development; and transnational organizations, institutions, movements, and related popular mass cultural phenomena. Though fragmented across several different chapters, the material on communications and their accelerating impacts over time is close to being the de

facto underlying theme, and the chapters by Tony Ballantyne/Antoinette Burton and Steven Topik/Allen Wells are especially insightful on these questions.

Of the individual sections, Rosenberg's study of social movements and organizations is particularly impressive for its comprehensiveness and informative bibliography. In turn international organizations, reform and other social networks, the phenomenon of international exhibitions, the rising role of experts, and activities in travel, adventure, and popular culture, including film, are carefully considered in their pervasiveness and variety. Rosenberg's concept of transnational connectivity as circuitry will deserve reflection as a way of thinking about these problems of transnational processes. This is the section that will be most familiar to Americanists, but it is but no means the only helpful one. In their discussion of trade, commerce, and economic development, Steven Topik and Allen Wells give excellent coverage to the non-western world, particularly Latin America. Their "Commodity Chains in a Global Economy" takes key cases such as sugar, rubber, and coffee and builds upon the best of recent scholarship to show how producers, manufacturers, middlemen, and consumers became linked in transactional webs across the globe, even as these connections across the commodity chains were not necessarily apparent to all participants. The linkages outlined are as pertinent to late nineteenth-century grain farmers on the Great Plains as to Brazilian rubber tappers. The authors make plain that while markets were and are transformative of global and transnational relations, the history of markets must be understood in the specifics of commodities and their utilization. There was no one unified global market.

Despite the old American exceptionalist narrative of "immigration" and "a nation of immigrants," it is easy to make a case for the importance of migration, rather than simply immigration, in U.S. history. Dirk Hoerder, a pioneer in the field of migration studies, authoritatively analyzes multiple migration systems in comparative perspective. Historians of the Progressive Era and the Gilded Age are becoming more and more aware of the reciprocal and complex nature of systems of migration, and Hoerder's detailed analysis will provide further backing for this approach. Surprisingly, migrant remittances and repatriation, topics that should be of great importance for the period 1870-1924 in U.S. history, are only briefly and episodically mentioned. These phenomena needed integration with the chapters on economics.[1]

Charles Maier's "Leviathan 2.0" on nation-states

builds upon his earlier work on territorialization processes.[2] It will especially interest scholars of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, a period when stronger American state structures were erected slightly later than in some parts of Europe. Here there is the curious and apparent contradiction of the reproduction of the nation-state as the principal building block of the organization of a connected international system. According to Maier's concluding comments, the nation-state has in the end produced the most satisfactory way of organizing people in manageable units, despite current historiographic tilts against "nation," and despite the twentieth-century record regarding authoritarian "states of exception" of the Soviet and Nazi variety. It seems we cannot do without the nation-state. Maier astutely contests the common invocation of James C. Scott and Michel Foucault, who see the state in various ways as repressive (pp. 161, 166). Given the inevitable complexities of dealing not with state-building processes in isolation but with actually existing states in all of their peculiarity and idiosyncrasy, Maier handles his theme smoothly. His story shows how the development of global history is part of changing regimes of territorialization, not an abandonment of the latter.[3]

The late nineteenth-century state is interpreted as coming to grips with the problems of population and economic growth as technological change accelerated. This quasi-Weberian aspect in Maier's work, with the underlying idea of bureaucratization and the consolidation of territoriality-processes to which there are various passing states of exception-will need to be considered by historians of early twentieth-century nation-state development alongside more negative interpretations. Recent American historiography is tending to produce a less benign interpretation, stressing the impacts on a weak state of external threats (from alien races and ideologies), politically constructed and unequal relations of trade, and the nexus between American imperialism and war-making post-1898 on the one hand and state building on the other, as in the case of Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. Such studies highlight the contingent and uneven integration of the United States into the world economy, the importance of party and elites rather than bureaucratic accretions, and the peculiarities of the American state.[4]

Another theme of great interest for American history concerns the development of transnational and indeed global communications systems that drew the world closer together. More than any other essay in the book, Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton's "Empires and

the Reach of the Global” highlights the technologies of communication systems. Western imperialism was strengthened by the improvement of technology, particularly the telegraph that wired the world by 1902-03, but in the authors’ opinion steamships and railroads were even more important. From Topik and Wells’s chapter the role of railroads in the export economies of the periphery of Europe is made equally clear. Yet it would seem that the key to a connected world was not railroads alone but the interlinking of the different types of communication, rather than of geographical spaces. Authorities since the time of Stephen Kern have argued for the speeding up of time and the changing conception of space, but the essays in this volume show how unevenly this process was implemented, how unequally, and how communications created contradictory effects in strengthening empire but also facilitating resistance.[5] The attention to cross-colonial anti-imperialism within this context is welcome. Ballantyne and Burton recall for us the vital point that “technologies were not free-floating and their use was directed and determined by human choice and agency” (p. 351). Culture shaped technology and exploited or adapted technologies as imperial space was defined and renegotiated. The illuminating section on the Hajj pilgrimage’s development is illustrative of these points.

Because of its topical coverage, this book is best used when one is armed with a pad of page marker notes to cross-reference themes, and a pencil for underlining. Cross-linkages are not always sufficiently illuminated by the index, which is very general. The (long) entries for the United States and other places are not subdivided, and some important topics that cut across themes, such as telegraph cabling or migrant remittances, have not been indexed at all. As this book will be a major reference work for transnational and global history, this is a pity. As yet another result of the topical approach, major events such as World War II and the Great Depression are not treated systematically. The reader will need to make heavy use of the index to compare what the individual authors think about the role of these events. The Great Depression is dealt with only in passing. This is not *histoire événementielle*, and rightly so. But patterns of de-globalization or decelerated globalization cannot be treated in a systematic fashion, since these are closely associated with events, or such events manifest multidirectional trends in globalization.

This book is not organized as an integrated narrative, but it does have such a narrative implied in the concept of a “shrinking” world. The questions of war,

nationalism, and hypernationalism of this epoch of empires and extremes are able to be interpreted within this framework. As peoples got to know one another more through the compression of time and space, the results were not necessarily ones of cooperation, but conflict, fracture, the hardening of certain xenophobic currents, and nationalism. The mastering of the earth and its resources also intensified opportunities to kill other people through improved weaponry and technologies that aided colonial surveillance. All of these ideas are applicable to the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, and are compatible with the simultaneous development of strong nation-states and intensified transnational connections.

So stimulating is this book that I am spurred to ask questions about the overall interpretation. First, what is the impact of changing non-human forces on these patterns? For example, do so-called natural disasters affect the growth of connectivity, and have these patterns changed over time? Also, when humans alter the earth, a topic discussed in more than one essay regarding forests, rivers, and other natural resources, what is the impact of “natural” feedback mechanisms in promoting common problems and a common history across borders? For the period in question the effects might be regional or cross-imperial rather than global. Second, how does the changing use of energy—implied in the strong interpretive place given to rail and ship communications—affect our understanding of connectivity, for example through trans-border pollution or struggles over control of vital strategic materials? The issue of oil is treated effectively as commodity, but coal (especially) and oil take up a surprisingly small space in this study, despite their importance in the discourse over the future of empires that emerged by 1914. A third set of questions, one briefly addressed at the end of Topik/Wells’s essay, is the role of economic cycles: do the processes of global connectivity override cyclical fluctuations or long-wave theories, and to what extent does economic fluctuation promote or reduce global connectivity? A fourth set of questions would ask about the impact of global war, an important feature of the years 1914-45.

These questions imply a desire on the part of this reviewer to know not only how the five different approaches complement one another (an issue well handled in Rosenberg’s introduction), but also how a narrative of global connectivity is to be constructed. To be sure, scattered through the book are interesting answers to some of these questions. Maier’s discussion of states of exception is interwoven with the course of the twentieth century’s total wars, while Hoerder deals with war in a

more systematic fashion than others because of its impact on displaced peoples (pp. 563-586). Topik and Wells “cannot not fully agree” with Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey Williamson’s influential judgment on globalization’s regression in the decades from 1914 to 1945, because, on a global rather than North Atlantic level, the “the sinews” of globalization deposited earlier remained, despite depression and war (p. 808; see also p. 594). [6] Rosenberg wisely concludes: “In the terrain of the transnational, historical trajectory is not a single but a plural thing” (p. 850). True, but for interpretation of the history of particular nation-states that had changing global connections to—and uneven integration with—the international system, these questions will remain. The history of the U.S. Gilded Age and Progressive Era is apposite to this point.

Notes

[1]. Cf. Gary B. Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods, and Capital in the British World, c. 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[2]. Charles Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 807-831; and “Transformations of Territoriality, 1600-2000,” in *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen und Theorien*, ed. Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad, and Oliver Janz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 32-56.

[3]. Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, “Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization,” *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010): 149-170.

[4]. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Erika Lee, *At America’s Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano, eds., *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009). Marc-William Palen, “The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism” (unpublished paper, U.S. Studies Centre, University of Sydney, 2011), attacks the free trade imperialism theme for U.S. history. The role of expertise in the extension of the Rooseveltian state is a concept in retreat. See, e.g., Brian Balogh, “Scientific Forestry and the Roots of the Modern American State,” *Environmental History* 7 (April 2002): 98-225.

[5]. Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

[6]. Kevin O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

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