

David Prior, ed.. *Reconstruction in a Globalizing World*. Reconstructing America Series. New York: Fordham University Press, 2018. 232 pp. \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8232-7831-2.

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Published on H-Diplo (April, 2019)

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Amid a concerted effort in the past several years to investigate the international dimensions of the American Civil War, various historians have issued rallying cries to expand the geography of scholarship on postwar Reconstruction as well by exploring processes that extended beyond the South. The initial results are on display in a flurry of essay collections, including *Civil War Wests: Testing the Limits of the United States* (edited by Adam Arenson and Andrew R. Graybill, 2015), *The World the Civil War Made* (edited by Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, 2015), and *Remembering Reconstruction: Struggles over the Meaning of America's Most Turbulent Era* (edited by Carole Emberton and Bruce E. Baker, 2017), and will appear in a planned volume based on a 2018 conference, *Freedoms Gained and Lost: Reinterpreting Reconstruction in the Atlantic World*, held at the College of Charleston. Many of the essays in these volumes and other works over the past fifteen years have turned to the American West, making strides toward incorporating the region in the story of Reconstruction. Although the place of the West within this narrative is far from settled, we have gained a sense of the people, ideologies, and events that connected the federal government's administration of the former Confederacy with its conquest of the West in the post-war period.

In contrast, exploring the international—not just continental—aspects of Reconstruction has remained in a more preliminary stage. The new collection of essays *Reconstruction in a Globalizing World*, edited by David Prior, seeks to jumpstart the process. It aims to justify the use of transnational methods in studying Reconstruction, provide examples of the benefits, and identify areas for further research. As Ian Tyrrell observes in his foreword, the volume presents “signs of empirical work to give substance to such historiographical generalizations” as scholars have made about the broad patterns of nation-state formation in the mid- to late nineteenth century (p. xiii). A foray into “empirical work” is most welcome, given that the majority of works that have addressed international aspects or consequences of Reconstruction (dating back to W. E. B. Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* in 1935) have offered more suggestive and sweeping insights than evidence on these points.

Prior’s introduction tackles thorny questions about this relative lack of transnational scholarship on Reconstruction, while making a convincing case for the advantages such work affords. In a forthright assessment, he examines reasons, both “incidental” and “intrinsic,” that have accounted for a gap between transnational scholars and historians of Reconstruction (p. 3). In particu-

lar, Prior remarks on the divergent preoccupations of these two camps. Transnational historians often track “macro-level processes and abstractions” across borders and have expressed skepticism about the nation as a “reliable unit of analysis” (p. 4). In contrast, the core subjects of Reconstruction scholarship include the local, bloody struggles throughout the South and the position of former slaves within the national polity.

Prior hopes to square the circle. Arguing that “writing a transnational history of freedpeople’s experiences” is both possible and fruitful, he contends that it would make clear how former slaves were subject to larger structures and participated in global networks of commerce and transatlantic political discourse, even while remaining highly isolated (p. 7). He asserts that this approach would inform us about experiences of globalization more generally in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the collection as a whole does not outline the particular transnational history of Reconstruction, focused on freedpeople, that Prior envisions and advocates. The essays do address topics “obviously relevant to freedpeople’s lives,” including “education, racial ideologies, grassroots political culture, intellectual currents,” yet immigrants and itinerant reformers, not former slaves, occupy the center stage throughout the book (p. 6). It remains to be seen what Prior’s proposed “way forward” might yield (pp. 7, 9).

In addition to Prior’s thorough introduction and the stimulating prefatory and concluding comments by Tyrrell and Frank Towers, the book consists of seven essays by scholars with a range of interests. Though not focused on the experiences of former slaves, several of the essays deftly balance attention to both local circumstances and international connections. A particularly successful example is Julia Brookins’s chapter on German Texans and their participation in both Reconstruction politics and the conquest of the West. Brookins traces German Texans’ historical ties to

the US Army, their support for the Union during the Civil War, and the political opportunities they gained during Reconstruction. Their long-standing commitment to US territorial expansion kept them in step with the federal government as its priorities shifted from protecting freedpeople in the South back to asserting control in the West. German immigrants contributed extensive technical knowledge and labor, helping to project federal power into Texas and the Southwest. Brookins heeds both the highly local influences, such as German Texans’ business transactions and social encounters with army men, and the intellectual movements and German education system that shaped their participation in Reconstruction. Their involvement in “nation-building,” in turn, ushered them into “mainstream” politics and “full American citizenship” (pp. 163, 164).

Caleb Richardson’s chapter on Irish American nationalism similarly tracks the assimilation of an immigrant group as it gained a new foothold in a national political culture increasingly consolidated during Reconstruction. Richardson explains why enthusiasm for Fenian organizations and gatherings in the United States did not yield the high turnout of men that Fenian leaders expected for their military raids against Canada between 1866 and 1871. Richardson finds that “for thousands of Irish-Americans, Fenianism had as much to do with American citizenship, and participation in American civic and associational life more generally, as with Irish nationalism” (p. 126). Richardson’s work conveys the “rich associational life” of the period and probes the interplay of different strands of nationalism gaining traction within the United States (p. 122). Among Irish Americans, aspirations for inclusion in their adopted nation converged with, but also at times checked, the expression of their Irish nationalism.

Richardson’s and Brookins’s chapters, in light of Tyrrell’s and Prior’s comments, demonstrate an additional reason to apply transnational approaches to the study of Reconstruction. In the

book's opening pages, Tyrrell underscores that Reconstruction unfolded in "a world of nations in the making," and Richardson and Brookins take up aspects of this development in the United States (p. xi). The "ambivalence about the nation" as a focus of study that Prior attributes to transnational historians, then, seems a promising quality to share with scholars of Reconstruction, a common ground for the two camps (p. 4). Questioning how significant, discrete, and stable nation-states actually were (and are) reminds us that people participated in their making. For historians of Reconstruction, the events of the 1860s and 1870s show that the nation in which some groups demanded membership, and from which others at times sought autonomy, was inchoate and changing. Scholars of Reconstruction can benefit from the admonition, emanating from transnational history, not to take for granted the emergence of a strong and fixed nation-state, even following the wartime expansion of the federal government and decisive Union victory.

Reconstruction in a Globalizing World conveys how connected the United States was with other "nations in the making" in these years. The book successfully refutes the idea that Reconstruction represented a unique interval of American isolation—a break between transatlantic political movements, particularly abolitionism, in the antebellum period and the imperial ventures and reform networks of the late nineteenth century. Instead, the book depicts circuits of reformers, traveling among different countries and seeking to emulate practices from abroad within their own nations.

Such attempts to imitate transnational models can be seen in Evan C. Rothra's chapter, which follows the career of Argentine diplomat and president Domingo F. Sarmiento. Having developed ideas about education through his contact with Horace and Mary Mann and his observations about schools for former slaves in the American South, Sarmiento eventually attempted to recruit

white Protestant women from New England to teach in Argentina. In addition to analyzing Sarmiento's place within "an international group of racial theorists," Rothra casts Sarmiento's selective imitation of US practices as part of a pan-American moment and evidence of a liberal milieu that spanned the hemisphere, rather than simply looked to Europe (p. 32). The resonance between developments in American education during Reconstruction and debates abroad is also the subject of Matthew J. Hetrick's chapter on the leaders of Liberia College. Hetrick finds that their discussions foreshadowed questions that arose in the United States about the purpose and methods of educating freedpeople. The chapter follows three African American faculty members, highlighting the different motivations that led them to the college.

Chapters by Mitchell Snay and Alison Clark Efford turn to the political discourse and reform efforts that connected the United States to Europe, and they uncover differing American attitudes toward the Old World during Reconstruction. Snay tracks how the Radical Republican press presented the British Reform Act of 1867 as part of a battle between aristocracy and democracy. These publications contrasted American democracy, fully realized through the abolition of slavery, with a British government still in the grip of the aristocracy despite its steps toward "Americanization" (p. 81). Snay concludes that the "sentiments of self-righteous exceptionalism, forged in the crucible of Reconstruction and the British Reform Bill of 1867, would help create the ideological foundation for American imperialism in the late nineteenth century" (p. 85). While intriguing, this argument hits some obstacles. Radical Republican discourse about the Reform Act may have simply showcased, rather than "forged," a mindset rooted in traditions of Anglophobia and republicanism that long predated this moment. As Snay briefly acknowledges, restoration of the Union and Republicans' resentment of Confederate sympathy in Britain breathed new life into these

ideas. The connection between the exceptionalism rhetoric Snay studies and late nineteenth-century American imperialism is also tenuous given that the United States embarked on an imperial agenda overseas amid an Anglo-American rapprochement touting shared Anglo-Saxonism. Nevertheless, Snay's chapter raises fascinating questions about how international events influenced Americans' perceptions of their own nation and, as a consequence, affected its trajectory.

In her chapter examining a scandal over American arms sales to France during the Franco-Prussian War, Efford focuses on Liberal Republican opponents of the Grant administration, complementing Snay's emphasis on the earlier Radical faction of the party. Among the German American Liberal Republicans who decried the arms sales and charged the government with corruption, Efford detects a "reform ethos" that "heralded a new style of transnational comparison in which Americans became more comfortable drawing political inspiration from European sources" (p. 96). Unlike the Radical Republicans of Snay's account, these immigrants looked to Europe not for evidence of American superiority but rather for inspiration. Advocating the professionalization of the US civil service, they extolled British and Prussian models. Efford concludes that Reconstruction marked a transition between "an era of transatlantic radicals and nationalists who criticized Europe's governments and an era of interconnected reformers and experts who were open to the lessons of Europe" (p. 112).

Efford's chapter makes explicit an idea that runs through several of the essays—the conviction that the intensive transatlantic exchange of the Progressive Era, the world of Daniel T. Rodgers's *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (2000), had its origins in Reconstruction politics. With this emphasis on exchanges and convergences among liberal movements, however, we should remain wary of how the term "transnational liberalism" obscures im-

portant distinctions. Towers's afterword includes an instructive point about the different forms and valences that liberalism assumed in the United States and abroad.

Attention to language is at the core of Prior's concluding chapter, in which he scrutinizes nineteenth-century meanings of the term "reconstruction." As in his introduction, Prior has done yeoman's work, distilling an expansive historiography and surveying new works. He argues that before the Civil War, Europeans and Americans used the word "reconstruction" to describe both the "resurrection of individual polities and the transformation of society." These two connotations "laid the foundation for two loosely formed approaches to narrating Reconstruction": one emphasizing national reunification and the other focusing on developments in the South (p. 174). Prior rightly admits that the two meanings did not beget two distinct "rival methods or schools of thought" (p. 179). Nevertheless, his attention to the tension between the two definitions and his commitment to tracing its historical and historiographical manifestations make for a provocative and productive overview.

On the whole, the volume convincingly anticipates many rewards that developing a transnational perspective on Reconstruction will bring, while also demonstrating the challenges this task will entail. The collection imparts a valuable understanding of Reconstruction as a period of acceleration—a time when the defeat of the Confederacy, destruction of slavery, and possibility of transforming the South and West hastened the consolidation of the nation already underway and renewed a powerful impetus for exchanges among American reformers and their counterparts abroad.

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Citation: Brooks T. Swett. Review of Prior, David, ed. *Reconstruction in a Globalizing World*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. April, 2019.

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