Comments on Panel 22

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Commentary on Session Entitled:
"New Perspectives on Early Globalization"
Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations
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Panel 22: "New Perspectives on Early Globalization"

Chair: **Edward Crapol**, College of William and Mary

"Asiatic Cholera and Peruvian Bark: American Physicians and the World, 1800-1840" by **Elizabeth Kelly Gray**, Towson University

"Globalization and Extraterritoriality in American Foreign Relations from American Banana to Alcoa" by **Daniel Margolies**, Virginia Wesleyan College

"Applauding the Opium War: John Quincy Adams and Britain's Global War vs. Slavery" by **Heath Mitton**, St. Lawrence University

Commentator: **Joseph Fry**, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Joseph A. Fry, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

First, it is interesting to note that this is the only panel of the fifty-four at this year's SHAFR that actually concentrates on events prior to the twentieth century—and, in fact, we may have to extend **Dan Margolies** an honorary membership in the Nineteenth Century Club, since the bulk of his paper focuses on materials after 1900. Obviously, this is graphic, but hardly surprising, evidence of where historians of U.S. foreign relations are currently directing their efforts.

It may also provide insight into why these bright young people ended up with **Ed Crapol** and me (how should I best phrase it? -- two more senior scholars) as the chair and commentator. The truth is Ed and I are among a select group of historians who have worked on the pre-1900 period and are still alive [with as my wife commented the critical aid of medical intervention and many stout libations] to chair and comment on sessions. And, before someone notes my apostasy, let me add that Ed has kept the faith through his excellent work on John Tyler while I have defected to studying Vietnam.

Second, while reading these provocative papers, I was reminded of a commentary I delivered at the 1987 SHAFR at Annapolis. It was a session entitled "The United States and Spain: Three Perspectives" which included papers by **John Offner** and **Richard Salisbury**, both of whom focused primarily on Spanish policy formation and

implementation. When I had completed my comments, a man jumped up in the back of the room and shouted, "You don't know a damn thing about Spanish policy." Of course, he was right. And, I feel somewhat that way this afternoon regarding medicine, constitutional analysis, and British anti-slavery calculations. So, if that man or anyone else with similar inclinations is here, let me save you the trouble. You don't need to jump up and offer a similar assessment.

Before turning to the papers more specifically, I would note that discussing the extension of the concept of globalization back into the nineteenth century is a useful exercise. In their previous work, as well as with these papers, all of these presenters have contributed to this discussion. Acknowledging the numerous definitions of "globalization," let me offer the one that **Alfred Eckes** and **Tom Zeiler** have employed in *Globalization and the American Century*: "The process of integrating nations and peoples—politically, economically, and culturally—into larger communities." They continue, "Globalization is also dynamic, transformational, and synergistic. The focus. . . . is not on nations but the entire globe." And, finally, they suggest that "a more sophisticated definition might emphasize that contemporary [that is early twenty-first century] globalization is a complex, controversial, and synergistic process in which improvements in technology (especially in communications and transportation) combine with the deregulation of markets and open borders to bring about vastly expanded flows of people, money, goods, services, and information. This process integrates people, businesses, nongovernmental organizations, and nations into larger networks." Eckes and Zeiler further contend that the history of twentieth century American foreign relations can "productively be viewed within the context of globalization"-- that globalization so defined and applied incorporates all of the traditional issues or themes in the scholarship: "such as advancing national security, promoting national ideals, pursuing humanitarianism, and expanding markets."[1]

Perhaps as we turn to discussion, it might be useful to consider whether the Eckes-Zeiler definition can be applied to the early and mid-nineteenth centuries. If not, how should it be amended? Does the concept afford an equally viable interpretative framework for all of these papers? If not, to which of the topics is it most applicable? Does the concept of globalization truly encompass the facets of U.S. foreign relations cited above? Do students of nineteenth and early twentieth century U.S. foreign relations advance our understanding of this history by viewing it via the lens of globalization or would the old framework of U.S. imperialism (as much of the world would describe contemporary globalization) work just as well? In short, perhaps we should take the title of the session seriously and grapple with the concept of globalization and its application to these topics.

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[1] Alfred E. Eckes, Jr. and Thomas W. Zeiler, *Globalization and the American Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-3, 5.

In our first paper, **Kelly Gray** has done excellent research and argued cogently and persuasively that U.S. medical culture and medically-related international involvements should be included as an important facet of American foreign relations. This paper embodies an appropriate and informative example of the "cultural turn" in the study of U.S. foreign relations. Kelly has effectively tied medical culture and practice to American nationalism, and fruitfully examined how immigrants and foreign commerce could both spread disease and facilitate the acquisition of important medical knowledge and drugs. My most fundamental question is how these medical developments can be connected to policy formation. Did policymakers take medical considerations into account while formulating policy? Were interactions with particular countries substantively effected by such considerations? And, I think it is interesting to compare Kelly's depiction of U.S. medical perspectives during the early nineteenth century to those at the turn of the twentieth century when the United States was expanding its empire beyond the North American continent and the dissemination of western medicine had become one of the "tools of empire." On a practical level, Americans instituted measures for improved sanitation to protect their administrators and soldiers in Cuba, Mexico, and the Philippines and to help prevent the spread of disease from the Caribbean to the mainland. But Americans also viewed medicine as a "superior form of propaganda for the benefits of western civilization and capitalism." Missionaries perceived medicine as an instrument for doing good while simultaneously acquiring influence over indigenous populations. Medicine, contends **David Arnold**, was a "celebration of empire itself," since it often involved massive exercises in state and military intervention and the reordering of indigenous societies along western lines.[2]

Dan Margolies has also identified and developed an innovative topic, and he has skillfully examined the constitutional acrobatics practiced in the pursuit of American empire during the first half of the twentieth century. In ten pages of text, and I must add another seven of single-spaced, 10 point notes, Dan has traced the evolving constitutional interpretations that accompanied the U.S. rise from its days of hitch-hiking imperialism and consular courts in the nineteenth century to undisputed global economic predominance in 1945. Despite repeated assertions that U.S. sovereignty and legal authority were territorially restricted, the Supreme Court consistently found ways to skirt such restrictions when U.S. economic advancement beckoned or simply to cite power rather than law as the ultimate currency in international relations. With the Alcoa decision, Dan argues, "Territoriality cleared a space in the law for unilateral, interventionist, and imperialist action abroad." This conclusion and language, together with the Court's 1891 Ross pronouncement that the "Constitution can have no operation in another country" and Justice Hand's 1922 Western Maid interpretation that "the only laws the United States could consider itself bound by were laws it chose to follow," all sound distressingly familiar and contemporary. Are we to conclude that **John Gaddis**'s

[2] Arnold quoted in Joseph A. Fry, "Imperialism, American style, 1890-1916," in *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890-1993*, ed. Gordon Martel (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 64.

assertion that the Bush II abominations are not so unprecedented after all?[3] Should we forward these citations to the attorney general, who clearly could use some help, since we are in the neighborhood?

Moving beyond such considerations, I think Dan has identified a highly significant topic, and I am excited to have an historian, and especially one with an acute feel for U.S. imperial behavior, addressing it. The principal challenge will be to make this material accessible to a broader audience within the academy and preferably beyond—an audience not steeped in the language and technical niceties of constitutional interpretation. And, perhaps, the key question will be just how important these constitutional developments were to U.S. foreign policy and empire. Dan, himself, refers to "legal fictions" and suggests that power, rather than law, ultimately holds sway in the international realm. Here again, I would like to see the connection to policymakers and the conscious construction of the empire.

And in our third paper, **Heath Mitton** has engaged one of the principal global economic and moral issues of the mid-nineteenth century in assessing the British anti-slavery campaign. Drawing on his own research and the most current scholarship, he argues that Adams was correct in depicting British efforts as part of a larger global struggle between slavery and freedom; however, the cantankerous Massachusetts senator was off the mark in asserting that the British had gained an economic advantage through the "Great Experiment" of abolishing slavery in the West Indies. To the contrary, they had incurred a distinct, comparative disadvantage—which motivated them to promote the abolition of slavery internationally.

Interestingly, Mitton contends that pro-slavery southerners recognized the British dilemma more clearly than Adams. In that regard, one might quote Duff Green, a person not normally credited by historians with great insight. In March 1842 the bombastic South Carolinian wrote: England had "laboured to render the slave-trade more odious, because her purpose is to abolish slavery; not that England has any sympathy for the slave; but because England believes that, but for slave-labour in the United States, in Cuba, and Brazil she could produce cotton, rice, coffee, and sugar cheaper in India than it can be produced in the United States, Cuba, or Brazil. Her war upon the slave-trade . . . is a movement to compel the whole world to pay her tribute."[4] Were southerners, such as Green, simply more discerning than Adams, or were they also making arguments based primarily upon ideology—in this case the brief for slave rather than free labor? Was this southern recognition the immediate stimulus for Tyler's move to annex Texas—as Heath implies, or did the Virginia president and his lieutenants act from far more diverse

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[3] John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security, and the American Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[4] Don E. Fehrenbacher, [completed and edited by Ward M. McAfee] *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relation to Slavery* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 168.

motives and calculations? Finally, how did other northerners, such as Lydia Marie Child or William Jay, who were formulating and propounding what **Edward Crapol** has called "the foreign policy of anti-slavery," respond to Adams' speech and the fiscal implications of the Great Experiment?[5]

In summary, then, I would like to compliment each of these scholars for thinking creatively and informatively about U.S. cultural, economic, legal, political, and racial, involvement abroad and in so doing probing features of early globalization, or—at the risk of further dating myself—of American empire.

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[5] Edward P. Crapol, "The Foreign Policy of Antislavery, 1833-1846," in *Redefining the Past: Essays on Diplomatic History in Honor of William Appleman Williams*, ed. Lloyd C. Gardner (Corvallis, Oregon State University Press, 1986), 85-103.