

2010

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Roundtable Review

www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables

Volume XI, No. 34 (2010)

16 July 2010

Roundtable Editors: Thomas Maddux and Diane Labrosse

Roundtable Web/Production Editor: George Fujii

Bruce Cumings. *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 672 pp. ISBN: 9780300111880 (cloth, \$38.00).

Stable URL: <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-34.pdf>

Contents

Introduction by Akira Iriye, Harvard University	2
Review by Jerald A. Combs, San Francisco State University (Emeritus)	6
Review by Walter Hixson, University of Akron	9
Review by Emily S. Rosenberg, University of California, Irvine	13
Review by Anders Stephanson, Columbia University	17

Copyright © 2010 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online.

H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for non-profit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author(s), web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses, contact the H-Diplo editorial staff at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.

Introduction by Akira Iriye, Harvard University

[Professor Cumings was unable to respond to the reviews in this roundtable due to a recent and sudden tragic accident in his family. The H-Diplo Editorial Board and Editors extend our condolences to Bruce and his family. —The Editors]

If I remember accurately, when, about ten years ago, Bruce Cumings started reading widely in U.S. history with a view to writing a new book, he used the term “Pacific America” as a short-hand expression of his project. The book has now been completed, but “Pacific America” has disappeared and replaced by “Pacific Ascendancy and American Power,” which is the volume’s subtitle. By that he means “a Pacific perspective on America’s relationship to the world” (p. ix). The ten-year gestation coincided with the presidency of George W. Bush, of whose foreign policy Cumings was extremely critical, and so it is no accident that he links it with what he calls the “Pacificist” (unilateral, militaristic) orientation of the nation’s international relations in contrast to the cooperative and “soft power” propelled (“Atlanticist”) orientation. The book offers a re-examination of the history of the United States’ rise to, and behavior as, the global hegemon by linking it to the story of the development of the Pacific states (which, not surprisingly, includes Texas). But this important study is much more than a critique of recent U.S. foreign policy. It also seeks to rectify what the author considers a still predominantly “Atlanticist” perspective on the history of the United States and to bring the Pacific states into the picture as major players. A dialectical relationship between the “Atlanticist” and “Pacificist” perspectives on the nation’s destiny and its world role is described. Cumings sees the former as Anglo-Saxon and European oriented, fitting national history into modern Western history, whereas the latter is characterized as more power-centric and, at the same time, propelled by ethnic diversity. There are, in essence, two Americas, Cumings seems to argue, and to understand the United States, past and present, both perspectives are necessary.

But the book is not just about the United States. It is also about the rest of the world as it has been shaped by the reach of U.S. power, goods, and ideas. In particular, it is about the Pacific. Cumings is pushing for a Pacific history as an appropriate framework in which to conceptualize the histories of China, Korea, Japan, the United States, and other countries in and bordering on the Pacific as they developed, not in isolation, but as members of the wider geographical space. Much as Atlantic history has been developed as a more plausible way of understanding U.S. and world history, Cumings proposes to put all these countries, including the United States, in the context of the Pacific region. World history, then, would consist of Atlantic history, Pacific history, and the histories of other regions. Historians from China and other countries are being invited to join in this effort, for only through the participation of Pacific historians can there be a truly Pacific history.

Of these two broad themes and aims of the book, one domestic and the other multinational, the four reviewers mostly focus on the first, namely, how Cumings’ perspective helps enrich our understanding of U.S. history. Perhaps the author’s clear, accessible, and at times ironic and humorous writing style has rubbed off on the reviewers, all of whom write with verve and sometimes even light-heartedness. But there is little disagreement among them

about the book's merits, and they seem prepared to accept its "Pacificist" reinterpretation of U.S. history. (Both the author and the reviewers refer to the movie *Chinatown* as emblematic of the American West, but I have not seen the film myself and so may be a poor judge of their writings on this topic.) Jerald Combs gives perhaps the most succinct summary of the book's main thrust, its interpretation of the West's development (urbanization, industrialization) in tandem with, indeed made possible by, the big government on one hand and multi-ethnic labor on the other. From these roots developed U.S. colonies, military bases, and wars in the Pacific region, and Combs seems to agree with Cumings' call for reduction of U.S. forces abroad as a way to re-orient the "Pacificist" nature of the nation's foreign affairs. Likewise, Anders Stephanson, viewing the book as being primarily concerned with "a region, even a part of a region, in the United States," especially applauds its description in colorful detail of the ways in which the state (i.e. the federal government) has been involved in the economic development of the Pacific states. Emily Rosenberg likewise thinks that "this book will challenge the Eastern-centered perspective of many historical narratives." She agrees that the rise of California and other Western states was a key part of the nation's "postwar militarization." Walter Hixon focuses on the same theme, militarization, and agrees with Cumings that this phenomenon has been inexorably linked to the history of the West, with the implication that if ever the "archipelago of empire" reduces its size, it will release the region's (and the nation's) "soft power" to bring the Pacific countries into even closer proximity to one another.

Such an observation leads to consideration of the book's contribution to the study of U.S. foreign relations. The four reviewers have written extensively on the subject, and they all seem to applaud Cumings' attempt at bringing local history into the picture. They do not question the book's argument that U.S. foreign policy has swung between an "Atlanticist" and a "Pacificist" orientation. This dualist perspective was anticipated by the late Norman Graebner's *Empire on the Pacific*, but it is developed further in Cumings' book. Recent books like Kenneth Weisbrode's *The Atlantic Century* and James Fichter's *American Enterprise, British Empire* may add further nuances to the picture. The former traces the Atlantic orientation of U.S. diplomatists throughout the twentieth century and will complement, rather than dispute, Cumings' "Pacificist" interpretation. The latter stresses New England merchants' contribution to establishing global networks of trade around 1800 in which Asia provided the key. Of course, at that time there was no American West, so the Pacific was connected to the United States via the Atlantic. Historians of U.S.-East Asian relations have long been aware that in the mid-nineteenth century Americans in the Eastern part of the country played important "Pacificist" roles. An obscure president from Pennsylvania (James Buchanan, mentioned casually in two places in the Cumings book) was arguably the key political leader linking the antebellum United States to the countries of East Asia; he approved military action along with British and French forces in the Peking-Tientsin region during the *Arrow* incident of 1858 and received the first Japanese embassy ever to cross the Pacific in 1860. If Anson Burlingame of Illinois (originally of New York and Harvard educated), U.S. minister in Peking during and in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, had had his way, the entire United States, not just the West, might have been inundated by Asian workers. Like William Seward (frequently cited by Cumings), Burlingame (not mentioned in the book) seems to have foreseen the time when the East coast and Midwestern cities as well as the Western states would develop large enclaves of Korean,

Chinese, Vietnamese, and other Asian immigrants, significantly altering the demographic outlook of the American people. They will remain and increase in number even if U.S. foreign policy sheds some of its “Pacifist” (unilateral and military power oriented) orientation. How these “new” Americans would play a role in that transformation remains to be seen.

There is another aspect of the Cumings book that is not noted by any of the reviewers. That aspect is more implicit than explicit in the book but is nevertheless there. I refer to the theme of interdependence between the United States (in particular its Western states) and various other countries on, in, or beyond the Pacific. “American destiny,” he writes, “is finally and thoroughly intertwined with Mexico, China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and again finally, India.” (p. xiv) Actually, the book is based on the assumption that these countries’ fates have always been intertwined with that of the United States. It follows that in order to understand fully the history of the Western states (and by extension the history of the nation), it is important to put it in the context of the histories of these other countries. Cumings has already written authoritatively about the intertwining of U.S. and Korean history, but he seems to be arguing that these other countries must also be kept in mind when we examine national or regional developments in the United States. Although the book is not about any of them, its overarching framework is not just Pacific regional history of the United States but also Pacific history. If so, such a perspective fits into the emerging trend in the scholarly literature that is keen on transnationalizing, and at the same time subnationalizing, the nation state. Borderland studies have inspired a cross-national perspective in looking at communities on both sides of an international boundary, while cultural and post-colonial studies have pointed to non-national, non-imperial ways of examining modern history. (A book like *Asia as Method* by Kuan-Hsing Chen is an excellent recent example.) In my view, one of the significant contributions Cumings makes in his new book is to situate the western United States in the wider Pacific region so that developments in that part of the nation becomes intelligible only when put in the context of those taking place in China, Korea, Japan, and other countries.

It would be interesting to see how historians in these countries, as well as those in Australia and New Zealand (which, Cumings frankly admits, lie outside of his scholarly interest) will review the book. My hunch is that they would welcome Cumings’ initiative in bringing these counties into consideration as important factors in the development of the U.S. West. Historians in East Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific appear to be increasingly keen on integrating their respective perspectives and to establish links between local, national, and transnational histories. Walter MacDougal’s *Let the Sea Make a Noise* (1993) pioneered this approach, and recent publications such as Marilyn Lake’s, *Globalizing the Color Line* and Xu Guoqi’s, *Olympic Dreams* confirm the trend. It is to be hoped that *Dominion from Sea to Sea* will inspire many more transnational studies of national histories written by scholars of all countries.

Participants:

Bruce Cumings (Ph.D. Columbia University, 1975) is chair of the Department of History at the University of Chicago. His research and teaching focus on modern Korean history, 20th

century international history, U.S.-East Asian relations, East Asian political economy, and American foreign relations. His first book, *The Origins of the Korean War*, won the John King Fairbank Book Award of the American Historical Association, and the second volume of this study won the Quincy Wright Book Award of the International Studies Association. His other works include *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations* (1999). He is the editor of the modern volume of the Cambridge History of Korea (forthcoming). He is working on a synoptic single-volume study of the origins of the Korean War, and a book on the Northeast Asian political economy.

Jerald A. Combs (PhD UCLA 1964) is Professor of History Emeritus at San Francisco State. He is the author of *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers* (University of Calif. Press, 1970); *American Diplomatic History: Two Centuries of Changing Interpretations* (University of California Press, 1983); and *The History of American Foreign Policy* (3d ed., M.E. Sharpe, 2008). His latest publication is "A Missed Chance for Peace? Opportunities for Détente in Europe," in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* edited by Klaus Larres and Kenneth Osgood (Rowman and Littlefield, 2006).

Walter L. Hixson is distinguished professor history at the University of Akron and author most recently of *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Yale University Press, 2008).

Akira Iriye (Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1961) is professor of history emeritus, Harvard University. He is author of *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (1967), *Global Community: The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World*, and other books. Most recently, he co-edited with Pierre Yves Saunier *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*. He is currently writing a history of the world since 1945 and a history of the United States since 1945.

Emily S. Rosenberg is professor of history at the University of California, Irvine. She has published *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930*, and *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (also translated into Japanese). She has served as president of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR); an editor of the *Oxford Companion to United States History*; and co-edits the "American Encounters, Global Interactions" book series for Duke University Press.

Anders Stephanson is the Andrew and Virginia Rudd Professor of History at Columbia University. He is forever trying to write a conceptual history of the U.S. project known as 'the cold war.' Among his recent interventions is an article on Hegel and Haiti (new left review, Jan-Feb 2010), a critique of Susan Buck-Morss's book on that subject.

This is a book that will turn your head around. Literally. It is not primarily a book about American relations with Asia and the Pacific, as one might have expected from Bruce Cumings' previous work. Neither is it primarily a book about American expansionism on the model of Richard Van Alstyne's *The Rising American Empire*. It is instead a history of the American West, and especially the Pacific Coast. But it is more than that. It is a history of the United States and U.S. foreign relations written from West to East, thus reversing the usual approach to American history.

Written almost entirely from secondary sources, this is a broad and ambitious reinterpretation of American history. Yet for all of its ambition, this book is written in a very informal and anecdotal manner. It is full of personal asides, pop cultural references, and sardonic quips. For instance, Cumings uses the movie *Chinatown* as a trope throughout the book to stand for the kind of power, ruthlessness, and cynicism that lay behind much of the idealistic mythology that has surrounded the history of the West.

Cumings argues that American history and foreign policy have been dominated by a Western outlook since Washington's Farewell Address. He dismisses the Atlanticist outlook as one held by a tiny elite and which predominated only in the period between 1941 and the end of the Cold War. Instead of looking across the Atlantic for allies and models, even most Easterners in the period prior to 1941 hated England, despised European mores, and concentrated on continental expansion and internal markets.

While the dominance of the Atlanticist view throughout American history was a myth, so also was the Arcadian image of the frontier West, according to Cumings. The supposedly democratic egalitarian frontier farmer so beloved of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Frederick Jackson Turner was in reality a quick casualty of urbanization, industrialization, and ethnic diversity emanating first from Chicago and then from the urban centers of the Pacific Coast, particularly Los Angeles and San Francisco, but also Seattle, Portland, and San Diego. The heart of this book is a series of capsule histories of the cities and states bordering the Pacific Ocean, along with the contrasting history of the other emblematic state of the West, Texas. In these capsule histories, Cumings portrays the white immigrants to the West not as the virtuous democrats of mythology but energetic entrepreneurs who were also narrow, rapacious, racist, and often Christian fundamentalists. For these frontier immigrants, land was not so much a sacred fount of economic and political independence as it was an economic commodity – real estate. The keys to the wealth of that real estate were water and railroads, the domination of which created fabulous fortunes for the few. Meanwhile, that wealth made possible for the middle class the urban and suburban consumer culture that came to be the model not only for the United States but for the world.

The energy and adventurousness of these immigrants, an energy that Cumings much admires, was also a key to the wealth of the West. Starting with the gold miners, these entrepreneurs turned to farming crops, especially citrus, that could be exported to the East

in refrigerated railroad cars, just as Chicago had made use the same railroads to become the hub of meat production in the United States. By the time of World War II, however, the West drew much of its wealth from industry and technology, especially the industry and technology supported by defense spending on aircraft, high-tech weaponry, and military bases.

The irony of the sources of Western wealth for Cumings, however, is how much the supposedly individualistic frontier entrepreneurs relied on the big government they scorned in their political rhetoric. The railroad fortunes depended on government land grants. The real estate fortunes depended on government organization and control of water and other infrastructure. And the great fortunes built upon defense expenditures depended on Pentagon contracts. Moreover, the labor on which these wealthy titans depended was a multi-ethnic mix of Mexicans, Chinese, and Japanese whom they disdained as inferior peoples. Such irony with regard to the West's dependence on the federal government and ethnic diversity was lost on Western Republicans, represented especially by Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, who came to dominate the Republican Party while destroying its moderate Atlanticist wing.

Cumings is particularly interested in the impact of the West on U.S. foreign policy. He characterizes the Western approach as turning its back on Europe, expanding westward, acting unilaterally, and crushing those people who stood in the way of American expansion. Interestingly, Cumings rather approves of the first three of those principles. He admires Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams, who tried to avoid European entanglements and expanded westward, but did so, according to Cumings, without resort to the force of arms and with some respect for Indian and Mexican inhabitants of the territories. He detests James K. Polk because Polk relied heavily on military force to expand westward and had complete disdain for the Indians and Mexicans who stood in the way. Unfortunately, Cumings maintains, it was Polk rather than Jefferson and J. Q. Adams who became the exemplar of Western-facing American foreign policy. Thus, American policy in the Pacific, including the acquiring of Hawaii and the Philippines and the devastation of their peoples in the late 1800s, the subsequent treatment of China, Japan, Korea, and especially the treatment of Asians in the United States, partook more of Polk, the use of armed force, and colonial territorial domination rather than the patient expansionism of Jefferson and Adams or the later William Seward. The alternative to such militaristic Pacific colonialism offered by elite Atlanticists like John Hay, Theodore Roosevelt, Elihu Root, and Woodrow Wilson was no better. If the Atlanticists were somewhat more restrained in Asia and toward Asians, it was because they wanted to rejoin the Old World of Europe and remake it in America's image, meanwhile holding on to America's colonies and spheres of influence in Asia and Latin America.

Cumings does consider World War II to be the one necessary war America has fought since the Civil War. He even finds some of America's policies toward Europe during the Cold War to be reasonable, especially multilateralism in NATO. But he bemoans the general militarizing of the Cold War. He sees U.S. policies in Asia, especially the wars in Korea and Vietnam, to be a continuation of the unilateral, militaristic, racist, and imperial aspects of the American West's ideology. He considers this the result of the Western Republican

rejection of the peaceful westward-looking outlook of Senator Robert Taft, whose policies harked back to Jefferson and J. Q. Adams. Instead, conservative cold warriors like Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan followed the aggressive example of James K. Polk. There was no NATO and no real multilateralism in America's relations with Pacific nations. Instead, the United States stationed thousands of American troops in Asia and the Pacific, profoundly influencing the politics and independence of the host nations. These military bases, which also abounded in the western United States, created what Cumings calls a "Military Archipelago." This Military Archipelago was not merely a commercial or informal empire, but a real territorial empire based on the unilateral and aggressive foreign policy outlook of the American West.

With the end of the Cold War, Cumings had hopes that "the wide-ranging multilateralism of the Clinton years represented the culmination of the world order that statesmen like Stimson and Acheson had hoped for and helped to build during and after World War II, a *redirection* of Atlanticism toward the rest of the world, and particularly toward East Asia which seemed poised to develop a host of multilateral institutions and new relationships. I wanted to show how radically different our policies had been in that region, and how that past could now be overcome in a wide-ranging accommodation with our historic antagonists since 1945—China, North Korea, and Vietnam. I was particularly interested in internationalist mechanisms that would deepen American engagement with China and enmesh it in a Pacific and world order that would avoid the confrontation that so many saw coming between America and China—to do for China what John Hay had wanted to do for Great Britain, to slowly bring it into an American-defined system in which the United States would be a collegial first among equals." (486)

Instead, he says, George W. Bush and the Republicans abandoned the internationalism of Bush's father and grandfather and began applying the Pacific pattern of unilateralism, the force of arms, and confidence that American good confronted foreign evil. Cumings' solution is not only an increase of multilateralism, a la Stimson and Acheson, but also a withdrawal of American troops abroad, a reduction of U.S. military spending, and a readiness to let other cultures go their own way on the premise that attempts to spread American ideals abroad by force only makes things worse, a la Andrew Bacevich.

Cumings' *Dominion from Sea to Sea* is a lively and thoughtful book. Its tone of amused irony and provocative put-downs sometimes goes too far, as when he cites myths about Pearl Harbor to illustrate the American propensity for inviting enemies to strike the first blow in a war. That tone can also lead to some confusion for the reader. For instance, it is difficult to reconcile some of his derogatory comments about the Atlanticist view with his call to extend aspects of that Atlanticist policy to Asia. But no one will be bored by this text and all readers will profit from wrestling with the facts and ideas Cumings has presented.

Review by Walter Hixson, University of Akron

This is a splendid, sprawling, and important book by a premier scholar operating at the peak of his game. The book is long and in a few respects problematic but its strengths overwhelm any perceived weaknesses. Vast in scope, bold in conceptualization, and steeped in a lifetime of erudition, *Dominion from Sea to Sea* deserves attention and should enjoy a long shelf life. While it may sound counter-intuitive to assert that Cumings has put the Pacific Ocean on the map that is essentially what he has achieved here. Atlantic Worlders look out, a Pacific tsunami is cascading your way and Cumings is surfing at the top of the wave.

Who knew that Cumings--who went to college in Ohio and has long worked in Chicago—was a California boy at heart? It turns out that ever since his parents moved to Palo Alto when he was 18, Cumings has been hooked on the Golden State and the vast ocean that laps its shores. His scholarship has now caught up with his desire and that's a good thing. This has the feel of the book he has always wanted to write; books like that usually bring out the best in the author.

Early on Cumings clearly conveys the essence of his work: "I want to put forth a 'Pacificist' interpretation of America's role and position in the world."(x) This work thus takes on the Atlanticist bias of the contemporary academy, noting, "We say Atlantic World, but Pacific World is a concept just now gaining traction."(5) Over the course of American history the Ivy League colleges, the State Department, and Eurocentric realists oriented American diplomacy toward the East. The irony of this situation, however, as Cumings points out drawing on the title of Richard Drinnon's classic book, is that American expansion for centuries was "facing West" rather than East. As Cumings argues persuasively, "Empire grew out of the western thrust across the continent by expansionists who disdained Europe, its power politics, and its colonies, desiring instead maximum, unhindered American freedom in the world."(391)

Cumings achieves something important in this book that others of us have been working on in various way, namely "erasing the line between domestic and international perspectives." He thus "join(s) together what other authors usually treat separately"(ix)-- continental expansion and what Norman Graebner aptly called the American "empire on the Pacific." Under this frame the Louisiana and Alaska Purchases, as well as the Mexican War, shaped the American empire more fundamentally than the Spanish American War or the issuance of the Open Door Notes. William Seward's purchase of Alaska was the "master stroke," as "Now a comprehensive American Pacific Rim began in San Diego, ran north along the coast for more than 2,000 miles and then northwest to the Bering Strait and the Aleutians, arced down along the Asian coast by the Kamchatka Peninsula, Japan, and Korea, and then on to the Philippines, potentially gathering in everything Pacific north of the equator."(194) Hawaii then became the "centerpiece" of empire. "Hawaii is the earthly foundation for a truly awesome power projection across some 100 million square miles of land and sea, just about half of the planet's entire surface,"(177) Cumings explains. "By 1945 American forces would garrison every valuable strategic point (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Okinawa, Guam, Midway, Wake Island), turning the seemingly limitless North Pacific into an American lake."(196)

To Cumings economics is the engine of empire. He draws on classic theorists Joseph Schumpeter, Karl Polanyi as well as Fernand Braudel whose classic study of the Mediterranean

world emphasized geography and “structural realities” over the *longue durée*. Cumings offers something less than a unified “theoretical framework” in a brief appendix, as he decided, probably wisely, to “wear lightly” his theoretical framework for fear of driving off readers.(xiii)

The pivot of empire, and the site that holds the most fascination for Cumings, is California. Cumings brilliantly deploys the film “Chinatown” (1974) as an allegory of the Pacific Empire centered in California. This great American film, starring Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway, and John Huston, chronicles the rise of modern Los Angeles through the secret diversion of water from the Owens Valley. The diversion of course actually occurred and made the real Los Angeles what it became. The film’s Horace Mulwray is the thinly veiled William Mulholland, the man who as head of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power colluded with a burgeoning corporate elite to transform the desert city.

Empire is about power and power often wielded ruthlessly and even immorally hence “Chinatown” is a perfect metaphor for this narrative of the rise of the “real life” American Pacific Empire. California fused the drive and wealth of the continent with the rising empire on the Pacific. Hollywood, the Silicon Valley, and raw military power (more on this below) kept the empire ascendant into the current century. From modern Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle (Boeing, Starbucks) as well, the American Pacific Empire spread across the sea.

As is well known, the New Deal and especially World War II made the modern American West, transforming U.S. politics and the global economy in the process. The war brought “a hegemony unlike any the world had ever seen emanating from a productive continental homeland, a compelling set of ideas . . . a seductive lifestyle born in Southern California and channeled to the world by Hollywood, and an integrated industrial base from sea to sea.”(329-30) Agribusiness and high tech industries, think tanks, and above all, the military-industrial complex (MIC) flourished here. The Cold War and especially the Korean War ensconced the national security state, the MIC, and the Pacific Empire. “For the next half-century a bipartisan internationalist coalition, committed to the cold war and high defense budgets, dominated American foreign policy, and almost anyone who dissented seriously from their basic tenets was tarred with the brush of isolationism, pro-communism, or simply Neanderthal thinking.”(348-49)

In a penetrating analysis of the militarization of the American Empire, Cumings argues that overseas bases provided “the coercive structure that locked in the American position in the North Pacific.”(399) The “archipelago of empire” is not limited to the Pacific, of course, as it stretches across the globe on land, sea, and in the air. The United States has some 750 to 850 overseas military installations in 150 or so countries. Once the Americans establish an overseas base, it takes a proverbial act of God (such as the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991) to get the Yankees to go home. Otherwise, as the Germans and Japanese can tell you and the Iraqis are finding out, once ensconced the bases generally are there to stay. While people who live in places like Okinawa are often painfully aware of the American presence, in other respects it is a “stealth empire” little seen by the overwhelming majority of Americans. Nonetheless, it enjoys “thoroughly bipartisan”(395) backing.

Cumings rightly points out that the militarization of the empire “is one of the most unstudied phenomena in American life.”(395) It is also one of the most important, the one thing in the

classic fate of all empires that can bring down a structure that Cumings otherwise views as built to last. The problem is that “Americans cannot recognize a victory when they see one.”(493) The United States possesses immense economic and cultural power, as “people everywhere want our stuff.”(499) It is not difficult for those of us like Cumings who have traveled and lived abroad for long stints (Cumings weaves his travel into the narrative) to see the powerful sway of the American model. (Everyone in China wants a car and more and more obese Chinese can be seen waddling into the doors of McDonald’s, KFC and Pizza Hut.)

Although the deep thinkers about foreign policy have belatedly recognized the utility of “soft power,” the militarized empire continues to suck up resources and lurch into one grotesque war after another. Thus at present “the U.S. military is trying to stabilize the most unstable region in the world”(484) because it can’t learn the simple lesson that “forcing your ideas down other people’s unwilling throats never works.”(500) Drawing on Schumpeter’s theory of the inherently atavistic character of empires, Cumings suspects there might come a “breaking point” absent “truly significant reductions in defense spending.”(488) The Crash of 2008 only reinforces this point yet one notices that tea partiers never complain about overseas bases.

As noted at the outset, this is a brilliant and important book but one naturally not without flaws. There may be a contradiction, for example, in the very discussion of empire that, as Cumings points out, provided the “coercive structure” and yet he suggests could be drawn down without jeopardizing the empire itself. Moreover, my Chinese graduate students surprised me by pointing out that the American bases might be all that keeps them from pulverizing the still despised Japanese. Cumings discussion of empire and its implications thus is not past debate, though the case he makes for the United States having forged an inter-linked Pacific empire of profound and under-appreciated importance appears airtight.

Having attempted and still attempting to take my own research back in time, I sympathize with Cumings’ efforts in this regard yet in some areas he came up short. Although he is appropriately sympathetic to the plight of Native Americans and recounts their destruction, they play the familiar role of victims and function as objects in the way of empire with no agency of their own. Indians WERE objects in the way of empire but their resistance was far more substantial than Cumings suggests. I realize what he is getting at with the statement, “what stands out is how easy it was to put the continent together,”(55) and yet it’s a glaring oversimplification that belies centuries of ongoing Indian resistance to American ethnic cleansing. An abundant literature exists, including some of the best new work in American history. Cumings would not have had a chance to consult recent books by Pekka Hamalainen and Brian Delay, which show the critical role Indians played in the Mexican War, whose outcome Cumings over-simplifies.¹ Along these lines, as scholars such as Noenoe K. Silva and Jonathan Osorio have shown, Hawaiians were far more resistant to the extension of the American Empire into their islands than Cumings account suggests.² Likewise, scholars such as Louis Perez have emphasized the importance of Cuban

¹ Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Brian Delay’s *War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

² *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004); Jonathan Osorio, *Dismembering Lahui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002)

resistance in the defeat of Spain.³ Cumings does a nice job with wartime Japanese relocation and with factoring in Asian Americans (now a majority of students in many California colleges) into his narrative. Although he recounts some of the most infamous violence against Chinese in the American West, for full appreciation of the breadth and depth of this campaign of American ethnic cleansing he would have benefited from Jean Pfaelzer's chilling account.⁴ Like most diplomatic historians, Cumings shows no interest in a rich literature loosely known as postcolonial studies--a literature that emphasizes the agency of the colonized as well as the colonizers.⁵

All that said it's a bit unfair to criticize someone with a 35-page bibliography for not having done enough reading. Rest assured there is plenty of important work that Cumings has read and to good effect. His command of California and Pacific history is deeply informed and intricately and engagingly delivered. *Dominion from Sea to Sea* is also a beautifully illustrated book with slick color inserts of paintings, prints, and black and white photographs, and is well packaged by Yale University Press.

³ Louis A. Perez, Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁴ Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)

⁵ For an excellent analytical introduction, see Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1998, 2005).

Dominion from Sea to Sea is history in a grand style by one of the most provocative historians of this generation. In a manner that mimics its subject, it sprawls, digresses, shines like gold, and often disturbs. It is expansive in interpretation, language, and references. This book may present too much complexity for the chain bookstore market and may encompass too much scope for the monograph-driven tastes in the history profession. In short, please read it.

I will confess that I was personally predisposed to admire the book. Now living in California, I better understand the urgency of placing the Golden State near the center of the American story. I appreciate that this book will challenge the Eastern-centered perspective of many historical narratives, a perspective that students, even in the West, often normalize. But *Dominion* does more than just add the West and the Pacific to a national story. It advances an arresting interpretation of U.S. foreign policy that is centered on the changing role of the West. Before the completion of a national continental market, Americans bent toward isolationism, holding onto the “ideal of a self-contained, westward-facing America that cultivated and developed its own garden (the largest national market in the world).” The genteel tradition of outward-looking Atlanticism remained “a regional and minority phenomenon” based in New England. (40) With World War II, however, the surge of industrial production in the West provided the basis for continental integration and the country’s embrace of globalism.

Although other scholars have described America’s Janus-faced foreign policy, in which a Western-looking tradition of nationalism, expansion, and unilateralism faces off against the tradition of Atlanticism and internationalism, never before has such an interpretation been so solidly anchored in a deep investigation of the West’s evolving political economy, culture, and involvement with the Pacific. Cumings states that the “central problem of the book is how to understand and explain the difference between an Atlantic-facing internationalism and a Pacific-facing expansionism.” One, of course, dealt with Europeans; the other largely with people of color.

Cumings interweaves international and domestic developments into a narrative replete with interpretive contributions to numerous historiographies. In the early chapters, Cumings sweeps through the story of the Manifest Destiny that powered and justified rapid acquisition of a sea-to-sea empire. He presents the usual litany of motivations that others have also advanced—commerce and greed, romantic views of mission, political jockeying, disdain for racial others, main-chance elites—but in kaleidoscopic form. His fast-paced story reads much like history happens—in hues and mixtures, unstable and never overdetermined yet with clear directions. Meanings may be multiple but may not be absent. Within this movement West, California provides the dynamic center and exemplifies another central theme of the book. A place essentially unknown to the outside world until about the time that Japan and China were also being “opened” to European influences, California emerged in a “jubilee of gold” on “the horizon of discovery and

invention” to become “a virtual paradigm of unceasing modernity for the nation—and the world.” (41).

When he gets to the late nineteenth century, Cumings proceeds area by area, illustrating the distinctive forces and cultures of each territory. California’s story is one of gold, Indian extermination, and railroad barons. Texas history is organized around cotton, cattle, oil, and the cowboy mythology. In offering the figure of the loner and the satisfactions of retributive violence, the oil and cowboy cultures of Texas fused together into an ethos that spread through the nation and even the world. For the Pacific and the Caribbean, Cumings lays out the story of colonial acquisition, the “dirty war” in the Philippines that transplanted the fierce traditions of frontier Indian-fighting to overseas imperial possessions, and the triumphalism of the Great White Fleet. Splendid chapters then sketch the economic and social histories of Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, and Alaska, each with their singular destructions, extractions, and economic elites. A short but powerful chapter surveying the immigration of Asians across the Pacific completes *Dominion’s* vision of the emergence and dilemmas of American power along the many different Pacific shores.

Cumings explains why, despite a vigorous thrust into the Pacific during TR’s presidency, governments of the early twentieth century pursued no further enlargement of territory and found no more “monsters to slay” in the Pacific. In 1900, the United States held Manila and Pearl Harbor, but commercial ties proved less lucrative than late nineteenth dreamers had calculated. Trade with Asia languished, and the U.S. lost strategic interest in the area. Cumings writes that before World War II, the United States, a third-rate military power anyway, “was not really a Pacific power.” (151).

World War II marked the “tipping point” in the Pacific Ascendancy. The New Deal, particularly through the Department of Reclamation, had channeled money to the West in the 1930s, but it was really the war that boosted the likes of Kaiser, Bechtel, Lockheed, and Boeing. Naval, army, and air bases came to dot the West coast, and a “river of people” filled new wartime jobs. California, Cumings argues, had always thrived on abrupt change, and the war marked the newest version of a gold rush. The avalanche of government contracts associated with defense and high-tech research stimulated a startling pace of growth.

The rapid rise of the West made America’s power base truly national in scope. No longer an east-facing nation with a western hinterland, the United States became a dominion from sea to sea. In his emphasis on the transformations associated with postwar militarization, Cumings underscores arguments previously advanced by Gerald Nash and Michael Sherry but adds his own special emphasis.¹ He knowingly details how the often overlooked Korean War turned containment toward militarization, especially in the Pacific. The United States tightened its grip on strategic locations in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Okinawa, Guam, Midway, and Wake. The North Pacific became a militarized American lake.

¹ Gerald D. Nash, *The American West Transformed: The Impact of the Second World War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Michael S. Sherry. *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930’s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Although Cumings moves adroitly from place to place, interweaving the various histories that draw together the Pacific region, he clearly places California, especially Southern California, at the heart of his analysis. California is presented as the land where East and West, inspiration and avarice, beauty and despoliation meet in citrus groves, water projects, and automobility. The movie *Chinatown* (1976) provides the motif for Cumings's multilayered explorations of the politics of water, race, and class. Water projects, especially, reveal not just the dynamics of *Western* development but of an *American* way of development in which powerful elites condemn government when discussing taxes, unions, and regulations but simultaneously grow huge and fat from government dam and then defense contracts. His story of public costs and private profits might seem repetitious (which it *was*), if it were not so frequently overlooked.

California, above all, became the home of mass consumerism. It was not its originator, of course, but it quickly became its principal point of projection. Southern Californians fashioned the quintessential American Dream – the detached suburban, low-density housing (beginning in the 1920s), the stores that promised shopping could be entertaining, the automobiles, and movies, movies, movies. All the new wealth, he shows, helped bankroll the rise of Western Republican leaders who rode to national power by denouncing taxes while ensuring that defense spending continued to rise. Drawing heavily on Kevin Starr, Mike Davis, and others, Cumings examines California's discursive landscape of dreams and terrors.² In California, the nostalgic version of a past, ever-reshaped and unrecoverable, keeps meeting up with a future that beckons both utopia and calamity.

When dissecting the postwar era, Cumings again follows a long treatment of California with sketches of post-World War II Texas, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, and the Pacific. Here, his examination of the “archipelago of bases” that have hosted America's permanent transnational military presence provides one of the most important contributions of the book. Connected like webs to US defense industries and installations in the West, the archipelago constitutes a visible empire if only Americans would see it. In a useful complement to works by Chalmers Johnson and Andrew Bacevich, Cumings does see, and indeed tours, the archipelago of bases that was put into place as containment became militarized globally during the Korean War.³

Dominion from Sea to Sea may provide a historical prologue to what may become a Pacific Century in which America plays a dynamic role. By setting the history of the Western United States within both national and global history, Cumings has illustrated how a historian may successfully scale back and forth among regional, national, and global affairs

² Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), and Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005) and their many other books.

³ Chalmers A. Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004); Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

contributing to historiography at each level. Such “scaling” has been part of the call for building a transnational history of “America and the World,” exemplified in works by Thomas Bender and Ian Tyrrell.⁴

Cumings ends the book as he began it – looking at U.S. empire and thinking broadly about America’s role in the world. A sharp critic of U.S. foreign policy in all his work, Cumings’s examination of George W. Bush’s policies is devastating. *Dominion* ends, however, on a somewhat hopeful note. He seems inspired by the growing ethnic diversity on the West Coast, and he contests the inevitability of any “coming war” with China. “The American Century continues apace,” he writes, and pronouncement of its demise is “nonsense.” People of the world, after all, still day-dream about a mythical California (especially Los Angeles), which has never ceased to reinvent itself. Cumings’s own ending perhaps appropriately parallels the hope/nightmare dualism that he has presented as characteristic of this gold-rush-shaped region.

⁴ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Ian R. Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

Pacificism Writ Large, or, Schumpeter in California

I am not too keen on Bruce Cumings's cover but his text fulfills admirably Edward Gibbon's eternal criteria of excellence in a historical work, viz. that it should instruct and entertain. I was profusely instructed and entertained but then again I enjoy reading about many of the things that Cumings finds instructive or entertaining in his Pacific explorations, such as the ins and outs of citrus cultivation, the nature of jet fuel, the workings of regional climates and the number of golf courses (234) that Pentagon operates around the world. I am not quite as fascinated by the tech specs of engines and I have no desire at all to cruise down Whittier Boulevard; but whatever the topic (and there are many), Cumings is always interesting and always writes with verve, one-liners and all, which is not to say that I agree with him.

This, to be sure, is not five hundred pages worth of random stuff that Cumings happens to find striking. He is typically unapologetic about the personal character of the work: it is a book he wanted to read but could not find and so the result very much reflects his own sensibilities. Hence the sprinkle of anecdotes, the authorial presence, sometimes in the form of *Rolling Stone* reportage, Cumings travelling here and there, visiting military installations in the Archipelago of Empire as, ingeniously, he likes to call it, or gazing at some natural phenomenon or other. As one would expect, however, there is a strong argument here. As one would expect, too, that argument is articulated within a strong theoretical frame, to be found in an appendix but present in its absence throughout as it were.

What one does *not* expect (at least I didn't) is the actual subject-matter. This is not a book about 'the Pacific'. Cumings is of course an eminent authority on East Asia, U.S. foreign relations, those with, and against, East Asia in particular. I imagined, therefore, a disquisition on the Pacific (critically understood) as an arena for U.S. power projection or some such thing, the 'American power' referred to in the subtitle. My anticipation was reinforced by the weighty blurbs which grace the handsome tome: Mel Leffler (U.S. foreign relations), Carol Gluck (Japan) and Akira Iriye (East-Asian/U.S. relations). It all seemed pretty obvious. One is immediately disabused. 'The Pacific Rim' and 'Asia-Pacific' are brushed aside as nebulous inventions and, whatever those names are supposed to designate, it is in any case not what Cumings wants to pursue. What one gets instead is, strictly speaking, the political economy of the 'Rise of the West,' the Winning of the West,' the place of the West (or the Pacific West) in the emergent and eventually triumphant U.S. hegemony in the world. There is not very much about 'foreign relations' or even, more generally, geopolitics. Pious words about wedding the domestic and the international notwithstanding, this is really a book about a region, even a part of a region, in the United States. The outside or 'foreign' certainly intervenes so to speak, mainly as a project in that domestic world in particular and powerful ways which then becomes a self-perpetuating 'interest' as we all know. Yet what concerns Cumings is not the problematic movement within that process as much as the effects, the possibilities, that it generates. Even the one

chapter devoted to the imperial system in the Pacific veers back, symptomatically, into familiar western topics.

The 'West' here refers to the *American* West (let us stick to Cumings's terminology which explicitly genuflects to everyday usage and has no truck with any political correctness, as he refers to 'Indians' in the sense of Cowboys and Indians). His actual concern is not the west in general but the Pacific west/coast and its auxiliaries Alaska and Hawaii. He also includes Texas for some reason, ostensibly on the odd grounds that this partly western state faces an ocean; but he has nothing exciting to say about this state, much less that ocean, once he has cleared the original constitution and inclusion of the Lone Star in the 1840s; and it soon becomes evident that its real function (I am tempted to say semiotic function) is to be Not-California, to be called upon to explain by negative example (too much reliance on raw materials and always second-rate even when high-tech) why California is so much better. For another way of casting the Rise of the West here is to say that it is the irresistible Rise of California as Paradigm and Essence of 'America.' Cumings's book is in fact an astonishing ode to the Golden State as a place of transcendental advantage which has somehow managed to put into perpetual and accelerating motion Joseph Schumpeter's principle of creative destruction, invention and reinvention, a series of constant spurts of development that, essentially, eliminates qualitative time or History (though there is a qualitative event here as we shall see, namely, World War II).

Ultimately, then, the other 'Pacific' states, with the partial exception of Washington, receive not only less attention (which one can understand) but a kind of attention that often illustrates why they, too, are not California. Cumings refers half-facetiously to the Rest of the West but he means it. Oregon is thus altogether too much of a transplanted New England (the ultimate contrariety of California and very much the enemy, especially if incarnated by its latter-day representatives around Harvard Square). One learns a *great deal*, nevertheless, about this Rest, about its particular configurations of geography, settlement, economy, politics and interests, not to mention about a whole host of other matters. This is not a book one can skim.

And so we have arrived at the actual argument.

There are really two related arguments, or two arguments unfolding on different levels that intersect in a single event. There is, first, an argument about expansion and periodization. For a century and a half, the U.S. develops westwards, fairly easily, quite powerfully, facing away from Europe, secure and isolationist (in a manner of speaking). World War II changes all that, turning the U.S. into a predominantly Atlanticist power and for the duration of the cold war as conventionally understood (that is, until 1989-91), so it remains. Another name for Atlanticism would be 'internationalism.' The collapse of the Soviet Union then brings into view a kind of generalized (or 'globalized') version of that Atlanticist form of hegemonic rule in the 1990s, which is at once the dialectical end of Atlanticism and the preservation of it at some higher level (I am simplifying and rewriting a bit). Unexpectedly, very unexpectedly for Cumings himself (and me too), this was cut short by a particularly atavistic return in 2001 to some pre-1941 form of unilateralism in the figure of George W. Bush and his cohort. In his conclusion, to which I will return, Cumings changes into

polemical gear on this last turn. Much of the bulk of his work, then, concerns the systemic nature (for lack of a better word) of this trajectory, how the Pacific environment, natural and social, emerged and was eventually transformed.

The second line of argument has to do with that great transformation and its axial event. Government (or the state) had always been involved in development. Witness the gigantic subsidies to the railroads, in turn the constitutive factor in the process. Witness also the intimate connection between state and often individual business on the crucial problem of providing water to essentially arid southern California, a feature amplified by the New Deal and creating a spectacular kind of hydraulic state at the opposite political end of what such a state notoriously was supposed to be. World War II, however, marks a decisive, qualitative shift. Massive infusions of funds serve to industrialize across the board, to connect the west organically to the rest of the nation, while actually also catapulting to the cutting edge of capitalism at home and abroad. Unrepeatable historical and geographic circumstances in combination with federal intervention opened up for a monumental expansion of innovation and entrepreneurship, two already existing features in the region that, in combination with extraordinary natural resources and agricultural prowess, made the west (i.e. California) peerless in capitalist development. California (and the rest, though less so) benefitted enormously from having been created ex nihilo as it were, from being a late developer in world capitalist terms and from having no existing structures to contend with, only abundant resources and incomparable weather, the totality now fuelled by cheap water and cheap electricity, not to mention local oil. Paradoxically, this moment also provides the ground for the emergence of rightwing Republicanism, the kind of politics that lives on denigration of taxes, Washington and the government whilst benefiting tremendously from these very institutions, above all in the form of defense expenditure. The combination of forces and the conjuncture following first 7 December 1941, then the advent of the cold war in 1947, and then, finally and irrevocably, the outbreak of the Korean War (in a way) in June 1950, all produced an exceptional space for capitalist development. This, then, is the outside project deployed to rev up what is already there, creating the full-fledged Pacific city on the hill.

Cumings is fairly brief on the first argument, more extensive on the second which allows him to expand into a series of rich narratives about power, technologies, remarkable and odd individuals, cynical interests, state politics, university politics, revolutionary knowledge, new industries, ways of doing all manner of things. It is all very interesting. Think Roman Polanski's film *Chinatown* - which, as it turns out, is Cumings's original source of inspiration and, appropriately, the central reference point or supertext of the whole book.

What can be said by way of critical commentary? I find, spontaneously, my reaction to take the form of distinct but related points, as opposed to, say, an alternative vision proper (perhaps because I find much to agree with in Cumings's way of thinking, if not always his actual account). The following, I must emphasize, is not a wish list for another five hundred pages on matters I'd like to hear more about. It is meant instead to respond to the many questions that Cumings engenders by asking more questions and perhaps suggesting a slightly different position.

Ergo:

(i) Cumings is nothing if not a leftist kind of destinarian. The expansion of the 19th century appears altogether too easy, too smooth, as though it was indeed preordained. As François Furstenberg has shown, there were many contingencies already in the epoch of crossing the Appalachian mountains.¹ And as Donald Meinig shows, 1848 could have resulted in a very different sort of United States: the peace settlement was by no means a done deal. The grand east-to-west highway that makes up the lower 48 and makes the U.S. look continentally rational (so to speak) on the map today was never predetermined. Cumings is surprisingly teleological. Thus his notion that the nation was at some point 'completed.' To be complete is teleologically to realize one's Aristotelean potential, present in the beginning as an embryo.

(ii) The U.S. did not face west for 150 years or largely on its own in the expansionist way Cumings thinks. Turner is dead (or perhaps not). It is true that expansion proceeded 'westwards' but its condition of possibility lay eastwards. At no point until the 1980s was the U.S. economy so imbricated with the European, chiefly British, as in the immediate ante-bellum period, the moment, curiously, of the greatest bombasm about Manifest Destiny. Cotton and immigration/emigration was of course the primary nexus. There would have been no peopling of the continent without European dislocations arising from industrialization and urbanization; and the latter owed a lot to the emergence of the textile industry, centrally dependent in turn on slave labour in the American South. It is an odd and striking fact that the heavily industrialized United States of the 1920s was arguably less connected economically (conversely more continentally autonomous) than the agrarian United States of the 1840s. Meanwhile, the civilizational moment of Progressivism, uplifting across the board, was by definition inscribed in the 'West' as an Atlantic concept. This is the moment when it becomes acceptable in polite circles to declare the U.S. constitution an unworkable document. The point is this: neither Atlanticism, nor its opposite (let us not call it 'isolationism') is easily periodized. The Atlanticist post-1947 period is one in which the United States actually assumes, in the guise of Leader of the Free World, absolute and indeed unilateral authority to act (even if it doesn't usually work like that vis-à-vis, for example, western Europe).

(iii) Where is the West? Cumings recognizes the elasticity of the notion. Is it demarcated by the 98th meridian? Wherever it is, Cumings is only interested in the Pacific states plus Texas; above all, he is interested in California (and Los Angeles). Whether it is indeed the essence and whether it demonstrates where the rest will eventually go is subject to debate which won't be pursued here (for the record, I remain unconvinced). More to the point, if Texas is included, why exclude Nevada and Utah to name but two states of some interest and importance in the region? It would have been stimulating to hear what Cumings has to say about the Mormon project, one of the strangest success stories in U.S. history and with

¹ François Furstenberg, "The Significance of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier in Atlantic History," *The American Historical Review* 113:3 (2008): 647-677.

powerful extensions into the Pacific (Hawaii): political economy at its purest and unmistakably 'western' in origin (looking 'west' and being pushed west) and destination.

(iv) To put it differently, what makes a region? Cumings's notion that World War II makes the region both an organic part of the whole and (unlike the South) independent from Eastern hegemony raises the problem of how these entities are constituted in order for their relationship to be measured in such ways; and what the precise relationship actually is. Cumings, federal largesse aside, has oddly little to say about that, as though Pacific Ascendancy is its own explanation. What kind of power is in fact involved? Does the Pacific Ascendancy for instance mark the capture of the federal purse, the State itself? The issue is partly introduced in Cumings's discussion of national politics and his thesis that the election of 1952 reflects the new realities. Thus Eisenhower, the man from Abilene, signifies the shift. He is, where Cumings is concerned, from the mythic west (Abilene is physically just slightly to the east of the 98 meridian in case you're wondering). Kansas has hitherto played no part in the proceedings and one wonders how Ike can count, mythically or otherwise, though he was certainly raised in Kansas until, *early on*, he went to West Point on the Hudson and then off to a whole range of quite non-Pacific/western places, coming into the White House from having headed recently the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Columbia University in the City of New York. If Ike is symptomatic, why not go to 1948 and the election of Harry S Truman from Independence MO some 160 miles or so directly east from Abilene on Interstate 70? Truman was a man of indisputable anchorage in the area and of course the one who beat the 'effete easterner' (Cumings's verdict, 347) Thomas Dewey of New York who was actually born, raised and educated in Michigan.

(v) One undeniable aspect of power, certainly of any account of political economy, is finance and banking. This does not much command Cumings's attention, perhaps because it involves no especially productive innovations. He duly notes the rise of Giannini's Bank of America but does not pursue its trajectory (to North Carolina, for instance), which is of the greatest interest, as is the systemic place of the credit card industry. The massive changes in the world of finance capitalism since the 1980s have changed capitalism itself; and so one wonders where the Pacific Ascendancy and Autonomy fit there.

(vi) Where is indeed the 'Pacific' here and what does it do? The question is more urgent because, unlike the West, it is of determinative importance. The Pacific coast has three fantastic harbours (Seattle-Puget Sound, San Francisco and San Diego) and a good one after, I think, a bit of work (Los Angeles); but the rest of the coastline is pretty hostile to doing anything much but surf. The ocean itself, meanwhile, is as Cumings reminds us not only big but gargantuan; and there is nothing much there there, Hawaii excepted. When one talks about the Pacific as an American lake or as some latterday version of the Mediterranean, it is thus only with heavy asterisks. Waterways can connect and were for millennia, until the railroads came along, the fastest way for any transport provided one could master navigation; but the Pacific was a big deal, traversed early after the 'discoveries' to be sure and conduit for the crucial Spanish-Chinese trade lubricated by Mexican silver, yet not exactly an insignificant barrier or boundary. Cumings, quite rightly, covers the historical ups and downs of Asian immigration in the region but, overall, given

his strong concerns with geography, climate and space, he is quite economical with reflections on the Pacific *as an ocean and a waterway*. Do the lyrical descriptions of the Mediterranean-like coast have any matching sense of *limitations*? How is the curiously inward-looking (when not eastward-looking) nature of the proceedings, the lack of Pacificism proper, to be thought?

(vii) Speaking of limitations, an obvious one in the account is the north/south boundaries, displaced by the east/west axis. It is one thing that British Columbia (and Vancouver) are absent: not necessary strictly speaking though potentially valuable, perhaps, for comparative purposes to pinpoint the specifically 'American' Pacific. It is another that Mexico disappears once it yields up its northern territories to the completed nation. Cumings notes the Spanish-speaking majority in the Los Angeles area now but does not explore how the north-south Pacific works across to the California which lies on the other side of the border (or the northern Mexican provinces in general).

(viii) Meanwhile, on the matter of projection and what is being projected, I was wondering if one could not have done something more with Nike, to which Cumings devotes a single paragraph, to boot centering on the cleverness of mobilizing Michael Jordan. Then again, Nike is in Oregon. Here, at any rate, is a company featuring a Cumings-type of entrepreneur that creates something out of nothing on a global scale. Moreover, Nike is intimately tied to Vietnam and other production sites on the other side of the ocean. It is also intimately tied, interestingly (at least to me), to the Brazilian national side in soccer - a move southwards of astonishing ambition. Nike, moreover, has nothing to do with the Pentagon as far as I know.

(ix) Cumings will have nailed this book to the publisher's door at the end of 2008 or thereabouts (judging from the two variant accounts he gives of Sam Huntington who died in December that year). This is time of the exploding crisis in the global financial system and the economic downturn which had a particularly harsh effect on California. Cumings, accordingly, can have no account of that crisis except its beginnings. He notes, retrospectively, that the previous, really bad year, 1992, was just a momentary lapse in the onwards and upwards movement of the state, the process of perpetual Schumpeterian combustion. As I write, however, California is facing a budget deficit of some 26 billion USD and because the electorate in 1978 painted itself into a corner as regards taxing itself, there seems to be no easy answer except perhaps to invent new (as opposed to 'raised') taxes, probably on what is reportedly the biggest cash crop, namely, illegally (sofar) cultivated hemp. Time will tell, and so forth. As Cumings makes clear, though, almost all of the intensified development after World War II (the 'tipping point') was already in place before. The one structural novelty is Silicon Valley and all it represents, a highly significant, quintessentially Californian phenomenon to which Cumings dedicates an appropriately long and final chapter. So one is curious if, in the longer perspective, Schumpeter is not about to move away from this utopia of constant summer. Even here, perhaps, the room for creative destruction has some limits.

(x) Schumpeter's own limits have to do with class and there is indeed nothing much about class in Cumings. This is partly because we are in some Hartzian universe where the bourgeoisie is everywhere and therefore nowhere: California exceptionalism if you will,

'the clean slate,' but the main reason is precisely that Cumings is following Schumpeter. The Austrian was preoccupied with the productive disequilibria of creative destruction, innovation and entrepreneurship, with *talent* and its conditions of possibility. Here he always recognized his deep debt to Marx (and Cumings carefully notes their affinities), above all on the subject of creative destruction, the constant revolutionizing of the means of production. Schumpeter, however, was not concerned with labour and exploitation. Class entered into the account early on as the bourgeois failure to displace the outmoded aristocracy in Central Europe and later, conversely, in the bourgeois failure to find some counterpoint to aristocratic purpose.² California, as Cumings celebrates it, is presumably a Schumpeterian success in that regard: it never has to face the bourgeois impasse because the rivers of talent never dry up. I merely note this feature in Cumings. All I want to do is render it explicit so we can think systemically about his way of thinking systemically.

We now come, finally and properly, to the Conclusion, which is quite different in tenor and subject-matter, unfolding as it does a certain normative and political stand of considerable polemical force. Cumings here speaks as an American, a very concerned American. This is not my position. However, as the normative argument is framed by his preceding, rather sketchy periodization of the U.S. place in the world, one might well offer a word or two about place and orientation. Before I knew I was going to write about this book, I had happened to reread (don't ask why) a comment Cumings wrote for that legendary publication *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* in 1976, a little after he will have had his epiphany while watching *Chinatown* at the Olympia or some such theater. The occasion was a roundtable, pretty much like this one, on Franz Schurmann's already classic work *The Logic of World Power* (1973).³ Cumings's sizeable intervention had to do with Schurmann's shortcoming on, inter alia, the issue of state, class and ideology, not to mention his reliance on Schumpeter ("Schurmann hurts his own analysis most when he is consciously being Schumpeterian and anti-Marxian." 60).

The discussion (William Appleman Williams also contributed) is well worth a visit. So is Schurmann's overly long book, not least because of its startling recasting of the notions of imperialism and expansionism as essentially typological opposites and his placing of containment and rollback against that backdrop: World War II and FDR become the axial event that transforms the U.S. from an expansionist power to an imperialist one, at which point the famous conflict of strategy emerges, old expansionists holding to Asia and rollback while imperialists turn to containment. Cumings thinks, by contrast, that consensus rather than conflict is the mark of the U.S. in the cold war, though he also retains Schurmann's distinction. Evidently, then, there is an interesting essay to be written on Cumings, Schumpeter and Schurmann. Here I will only cite one of Cumings's remarks which is relevant for his present Conclusion: "Accommodation is a sophisticated strategy that

² Compare George Catephores, "The Imperious Austrian: Schumpeter as Bourgeois Marxist," *New Left Review* I, May-June 1994, 3-30.

³ Bruce Cumings, "Reflections on Schurmann's Theory of the State," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 8:4, 1976, 55-64.

usually draws the fire of narrowminded conservatives who mistake its intent. Yet it is a truly conservative policy for defusing conflict, predicated on maintaining the existing arrangements” (62). What he is referring to is essentially FDR’s New Deal as a model for inclusion and accommodation which serves ultimately the interests of the existing system. This is the model deployed more intensively during World War II for the international reorganization of the future world (inclusion under U.S. leadership) which is then in crucial ways revised by Harry S Truman (inclusion as ‘The Free World’). What specifically worries and angers Cumings now (2008-09), after eight years of George W. Bush and the vengeful return of the expansionist rollbackers, is the prospect some future conflict between the United States and the People’s Republic of China. In that context inclusionary accommodation under U.S. hegemony appears in a very favorable light. Besides, the Chinese have already said they would like it.

This is the analytical moment in which Cumings’s always present concern with ‘Atlanticism’ in all its guises comes to the fore, counterposed then in complex ways to some new form of ‘Pacificism.’ An ‘ism’ implies an ideology and the historical commitment to the Atlantic, as in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is of course deeply ideological, the internationalist hallmark of the U.S. Eastern establishment, replete with a suitable liberal historiography to legitimate it (there is now also another kind of historiographical Atlanticism which centers on interactive space and includes Africa, an Atlanticism which opens things up but also tends to reinforce the eastern focus of U.S. history). For the Cumings of the Conclusion, as it turns out, the Eastern Establishment is still alive and dominating, even controlling the paper of record on the Pacific Coast, the *Los Angeles Times*. Objectively, the Pacific is of decisive importance; subjectively, culturally, ideologically, it is still not recognized. All in all, America remains dominant and the Atlanticist ruling interests remain dominant in America: “Central political, financial, and cultural influence still runs from Washington up through New York to Cambridge” (477).

If this is condition is bad or at the very least an ideological failure to recognize the real, Atlanticism nonetheless features said element of ‘hegemonic accommodation,’ in however warped and restrictive a form. Under neo-con rule, the United States severed that connection, replacing it with reactionary expansionism and unilateralism. Atlanticist accommodation of all types (large Rooseveltian, limited coldwar or capitalist Clintonian) thus comes to an end in 2001, its dominance in U.S. history since 1941 perhaps turning out to be an exceptional parenthesis. Scathing condemnation of the Bush Administration is followed by peremptory dismissal of its realist critics such as John Mearsheimer. After many choice words, Cumings is then ready for his dialectical alternative, namely, “a radical redirection toward the Pacific of the best in the Atlanticist tradition: collective security, consensual international law, open systems, a panoply of multilateral institutions, and especially, respect for the dignity of the billions of people who ring this ocean” (495). This would be the new, *pacific* Pacificism so to speak.

Barack Obama of course, could not have put it better. Here is a pragmatist for whom there is no European a priori and whose connections to the Pacific are obvious, however ‘easterned’ his personal trajectory. Nothing in Cumings’s prescription would indeed surprise or disturb the current powers that be, except possibly his apocalyptic (stricto

sensu) declaration that “Pacific civilization is inevitable, it will grow through war or through peaceful exchange or both” (496). The choice, as they say, is clear. For Cumings, as always, the Golden State is there to provide the non-repressive model and solution.⁴ [4]

I see no need to comment on this prescriptive finale. Unless one rejects the diagnostic frame, there is no response. One can only nod in assent. Success, meanwhile, is not as exciting a narrative as the dialectical success of failure.

Copyright © 2010 H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, H-Diplo, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the H-Diplo Editors at h-diplo@h-net.msu.edu.

⁴ So, in putting this marvelous book down, one cannot repress the question why Cumings lives in the chilly environs of the Windy City.