



Thomas W. Zeiler, David K. Ekbladh, Benjamin C. Montoya, eds.. *Beyond 1917: The United States and the Global Legacies of the Great War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 352 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-060401-1.

Reviewed by Lloyd Ambrosius

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

This excellent collection of essays presents an overview of recent historiography regarding the legacies of the Great War with particular focus on the United States' involvement. Although the authors present their own interpretations, they generally share the view that the war still shapes world history a century later. As David K. Ekbladh notes in the introduction, "our understanding of the world today rests on the legacies of World War I" (p. 1). Stating the book's purpose, he explains, "The overall goal is to demonstrate the reach of the legacies of the First World War, both in and on history" (p. 5).

All authors agree that the Great War was both global and total. It erupted in Europe but soon had an impact on the rest of the world. Imperial rivalries among the great powers outside Europe provided the context for the war. By the early twentieth century, the world had become so interconnected that conflicts rippled across continents, making the war global. The war was also total in that it affected all aspects of life. It involved domestic societies and economies of belligerent states, not just their governments, armies, and navies, and also those of neutral nations. Essays in this book present both global and total dimensions of World War I.

In "The Historiographic Impact of the Great War," Akira Iriye dissents from the common view by downplaying continuity in both history and historical writing over the past century. He argues that contemporary history began during the 1970s, not as a consequence of World War I. The new globalization since then marked the beginning of contemporary history and provided the context for new historical scholarship. "It is to be noted," Iriye asserts, "that despite the Great War's obviously global dimension, it did not immediately trigger a scholarly movement to globalize the study of history" (p. 24). He criticizes earlier historians for interpreting world affairs from a traditional European viewpoint that highlighted geopolitics. He explains, "No new conceptualization was needed so long as one focused on power relations" (p. 26). The new globalization since the 1970s, however, apparently contributed to a major shift in historical writing. "New perspectives on the study of world history, in particular international affairs, would seem to have emerged only toward the end of the twentieth century," Iriye observes. "During the 1980s and especially in the 1990s, historians began conceptualizing international history, and indeed world history, by incorporating a number of nongeopolitical themes, such as globalization, human rights, envi-

ronmental issues, cultural exchange, and migrations. Thanks to their work and that of those who came after them, it is now possible to throw much fresh light on World War I and on subsequent developments” (p. 27).

Many essays in this book exemplify the range of new perspectives in historical writing that Iriye describes and celebrates. However, in “The War as History,” Katharina Retzler notes that the Carnegie Endowment’s *Economic and Social History of the World War* included volumes on subjects beyond geopolitics. Led by John Bates Clark and James T. Shotwell, scholars they commissioned during the 1920s and 1930s embraced “a transnationally constituted American internationalism” and created “a new style of international politics” (pp. 37, 38). Their volumes covered non-geopolitical themes, such as food, public health, and environmental conservation, thus anticipating the scope of historical writing that characterizes more recent scholarship.

Several essays emphasize the war’s global dimensions. Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela, in “The Great War as a Global War,” place the war in the context of global history. They criticize earlier Western historiography that saw the war as a conflict between European nation-states, noting that it was actually “a war among global empires” (p. 198). They expand the geographic scope to examine the war’s impact on the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and lengthen the chronology to begin in 1911 and end in 1923. Their framework shifts the focus from the western front, which pitted nation-states against each other between 1914 and 1918, and underscores their view of a global war among empires. From this perspective, even victorious empires began to experience imperial decline. “One of the supreme ironies of the war, of course,” they note, “was that a war fought for the protection and expansion of empire in fact led to the dissolution of empires” (p. 200). It began with the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German, and Ottoman empires, but soon afflicted apparently vic-

torious empires too as a consequence of “the realignment of global patterns of power and legitimacy” (p. 201). The British and French empires, and also the United States, subsequently experienced this imperial dissolution as “the Greater War of 1911-1923 remains a global watershed” (p. 210).

Emily S. Rosenberg applies a similar global framework in “The Great War, Wilsonianism, and the Challenges to US Empire.” She observes that, while historians have written about European empires and the war, they have traditionally not focused on the US Empire during this era. Like President Woodrow Wilson, they have typically not seen the United States as an imperial power except for a brief time after the Spanish-American War of 1898. Wilson certainly did not regard himself as an imperialist during the Great War. Yet, as she observes, he was “one of America’s most interventionist presidents” (p. 215). He not only kept the formal US Empire but also expanded it with long-term military occupation of Haiti and the Dominican Republic and temporary military intervention in revolutionary Mexico. Rosenberg shows that critics of Wilsonianism, such as W. E. B. DuBois and other anticolonialists, challenged Wilson’s military and economic dominance over peoples of color in the US Empire. Noting the irony, she concludes, “This essay has argued that the Wilson administration, by tightening its grip on US dependencies in the Caribbean and the Pacific and by promoting Wilson’s rhetoric about national self-determination, helped to spark anti-imperialist movements within the US Empire” (p. 230).

Lloyd C. Gardner likewise criticizes Wilson in “The Geopolitics of Revolution.” “One could say,” Gardner claims, “that he was the most revolutionary leader, pre-World War I, in the sense of disturber-in-chief of the old order, whether the scene was China, Mexico, or Europe” (p. 162). His vision of America’s global mission required modernization of other countries to counter radical revolu-

tions and preserve peace. The opportunity to implement this US policy in Russia after the czar's abdication in 1917 influenced Wilson's decision to take the United States into the war. Regarding Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks as agents of imperial Germany, he denied their legitimacy and sought a new democratic Russian government. His decision in 1918 for US military intervention in Russia stemmed from this anti-revolutionary policy, not primarily from his strategic concern about Germany's dominance of Eastern Europe. Thus, Gardner argues, Wilson's opposition to radical revolution was his contribution to World War I legacies.

In "Ambivalent Ally," Michael Adas examines America's military intervention and its legacy on the side of "the unwieldy coalition of nation-empires" (p. 85). He credits the United States with helping win the war but sharply criticizes General John J. Pershing for failing to learn from the allied experience on the western front and consequently for wasting the lives of US soldiers. US field officers, however, learned important lessons about fighting modern warfare that they would use during World War II. Adas attributes the failure of American historians to see Pershing's weaknesses to US exceptionalism.

Matthew Jacobs places the Middle East in the context of the global war in "From Sideshow to Center State." "One could make a reasonable case," he asserts, "that World War I had as great an—if not greater—impact on the Ottoman Empire and Middle East as it had on Europe" (p. 182). As that empire collapsed, British and French leaders sought to expand their imperial dominance in the region, despite the disguise of League of Nations mandates that Wilson championed as the alternative to traditional empires. The president's advocacy of national self-determination helped legitimize rival nationalist movements by Turks, Arabs, Armenians, and Kurds, and also Jews who promoted Zionism. "Overall, then," Jacobs con-

cludes, "the greatest legacy of the Great War in the Middle East is undoubtedly turmoil" (p. 194).

Several essays focus on the total dimensions of the war. In "Blinking Eyes Began to Open," Michael S. Neiberg examines the legacies of America's road to war from 1914 to 1917 as "a nation of diverse people with transnational linkages" (p. 69). Wilson overcame ethnic and religious differences to create national unity for military preparedness and then war against imperial Germany. He blamed the German government, not the German people, as the real enemy. "Born out of the circumstances of 1914-1917," Neiberg observes, "the ideal of war against government not peoples has had a long legacy, as witnessed most recently in the rhetoric of American leaders about the goals of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan" (p. 81). Christopher Capozzola also emphasizes the war's impact at home in "Legacies for Citizenship." He reveals the Wilson administration's coercive measures to promote wartime loyalty, including military service by men. Drafting male immigrants into the army turned them into US citizens too, sometimes against their choice. Native Americans also experienced involuntary transition to US citizenship, as did residents of the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. During and after the war, the American government, Capozzola concludes, pursued "a coercive inclusion into US polity" by making citizenship "territorially inclusive without being egalitarian" (p. 118).

Julia Irwin, in "Taming Total War," shows that the Great War involved the United States in a new era of humanitarianism. She expands the definition of "intervention" to include the nation's participation in relief agencies, such as the American Red Cross, the Committee for Relief in Belgium, the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, and the American Relief Administration. These transnational agencies turned international humanitarianism into a national agenda. "American aid workers may have departed Europe and the Near East by 1923," she concludes, "but the

legacies of their Great War-era humanitarian intervention endured, reverberating throughout the years that followed” (p. 136).

In “To Make the World Saved,” Andrew Preston agrees that the war was total. It affected US society and culture, notably including religion. “For Protestants, modernist and fundamentalist alike, as well as Catholics and Jews, World War I was a transformative event even if they never set foot on a muddy battlefield in France or Belgium” (p. 142). Modernist Protestants in the Social Gospel tradition supported Wilsonianism, while fundamentalists opposed Wilson’s liberal internationalism, including his League of Nations. American Catholics and Jews also endorsed a Wilsonian peace, although for different reasons. Preston makes a persuasive argument about the influence of Wilson’s religious beliefs on his diplomacy, in contrast to the claim by John Milton Cooper Jr. in “The World War and American Memory” that he anticipated Reinhold Niebuhr’s postwar Christian realism. In Cooper’s view, Wilson recognized human imperfection and consequently limited his expectations for global reform; he was not a dreamy idealist.

In “International Law and World I,” Hatsue Shinohara focuses on the war’s legal impact even though “Wilson himself was unenthusiastic and not very supportive of a legalistic and judicial approach toward his postwar plan” (p. 270). The pre-war international legal order expanded after the war with the League of Nations and other developments, such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928. “In the years following World War I, the institutional building of international society started to take shape,” she concludes (p. 278).

Both Dietmar Rothermund in “War-Depression-War” and Klaus Schwabe in “World War I, the Rise of Hitler, and the Legacy of Dictatorship” assess the war’s impact on global economics and German politics. “The self-destruction of Europe in the First World War created an opening for the United States, which then began its irresistible

rise to global power without really aiming at it,” Rothermund notes (p. 244). He criticizes bankers and politicians for their poor handling of postwar international economic issues, such as war debts and reparations. Schwabe agrees that the Great Depression aided the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany. “World War I was a necessary, but not a sufficient, cause for the advent of Hitler to power and the collapse of the Weimar Republic” (p. 261). Nazi Germany was not the inevitable legacy of the war, Schwabe argues persuasively, despite the negative consequences of the Versailles Treaty.

Scholars and general readers alike will benefit from these essays, which clearly demonstrate that the Great War left global legacies that still shape world history in the twenty-first century.

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