

Robert McGreevey, Christopher T. Fisher, Alan Dawley. *Global America: The United States in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xxxii + 446 pp. \$44.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-19-027990-5.

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Published on H-Empire (May, 2020)

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Writing the United States Back into World History

Since the late 1990s, there has been a growing interest in writing US history in a global context. A pioneering example is Thomas Bender's *A Nation among Nations: America's Place in World History* (2006), which has become a model of a "US in the World" approach. *Global America: The United States in the Twentieth Century* by Robert C. McGreevey, Christopher T. Fisher, and Alan Dawley is a recent attempt to apply the US in the World approach to the writing of twentieth-century US history. *Global America* "highlights America's effect on the wider world and the reciprocal impact of global developments on the United States" (p. xxviii). This emphasis on US interactions with the wider world echoes what has been decades of efforts to overcome Eurocentrism in world history studies and American exceptionalism in the field of American foreign relations. From a disciplinary perspective, *Global America* aims to bridge the divide "between American historians and historians who studied the rest of the world" (p. xxvii). Notably, it seeks to examine other nations from their own perspectives rather than from the US perspective. The result is a US history that is still distinctive but closer to not only the histories of nations with similar socioeconomic systems but also

the histories of those with supposedly opposing ideologies.

Global America is divided into fourteen chapters, covering the same familiar ground as in other US history surveys. But this survey stands out in its attention to the larger global setting. From the very first chapter, this book places the United States in the context of the world economy in the 1890s on the grounds that the United States had become part of a highly interdependent world economy, and the parts had to be understood in relation to the whole. It describes what should be familiar to Immanuel Wallerstein and other world-system proponents: a world economy in three tiers, in which the US North "was in the vanguard of global development," and its West "was dependent on outside capital, while some parts of the South ... shared similarities with the underdeveloped world" (pp. 12-13). Uneven development and inequality were the norm both internationally and domestically. "Although the late nineteenth century saw spectacular gains," *Global America* concludes, "those gains were unequally distributed along lines of class, race, gender, and region" (p. 30). To the extent that the above-mentioned socioeconomic issues persisted, the world-

economy approach helps put the United States in context not only around the turn of the twentieth century but also in the rest of the century.

As can be expected, *Global America* treats the United States as an empire, both formal and informal, in light of the new imperialism. On formal US imperialism, the authors stand back and put themselves in other people's shoes. They sympathetically depict the Filipinos in 1898 as "following the path of nationalist revolutionaries since 1776" and the initial American role in "defeating Spain" as "similar to the French role in helping Americans win their own revolutionary war against the British" (p. 43). By extension, they regard the Cuban patriots who demanded independence in 1868 as "following in the footsteps of New World revolutionaries from George Washington to Simon Bolivar" and independent movements in Latin America as "the Spanish American counterpart of the American Revolution against Britain" (p. 38).

Global America looks at not only colonialism but also racism in a larger global context and views the two as mutually reinforcing. It portrays the United States as in "a transatlantic bond of white supremacy among Western colonial powers" (p. 74). Its analysis of Nazi racial ideology is most revealing of racism in the West: "At the level of ideas, the Nazi ideology of racial hierarchies was disturbingly close to the Western mainstream. What put the Nazis in a class by themselves was their vicious treatment of those deemed inferior" (p. 163). In fact, a major theme running throughout the book is that in similar situations, the United States differed in degree, not in kind. The relationship of racism to colonialism was evident in the colonies, of course. The authors show that the United States brought racial segregation to occupied territories, such as Cuba, Haiti, and Panama. They observe a correlation between colonial practices and racial oppression: "The more the United States embraced racial justifications for rule over others abroad, the more entrenched Jim Crow became at home" (p. 58). In

other words, the new imperialism worsened the condition of African Americans. There is the inescapable conclusion aptly drawn in the book that "desegregation and decolonization would only arrive together" (p. 60).

It is well known that the United States favored informal empire or the Open Door in the tradition of British free trade imperialism. *Global America* accepts that, but goes further like William Appleman Williams, insisting that more than equal commercial opportunity, America's Open Door was "a worldview built around the open society and the free market." This explained why the United States "embarked on a long-term mission of opening closed societies: Japan in the 1850s, autocratic Germany in the First World War, militarist Japan in the Second World War, and the Soviet Union during the Cold War," including "a series of interventions to open the poorer countries of Latin America, southeast Asia, and the Middle East throughout the twentieth century" (p. 48). This sums up the essence of US foreign policy in three later chapters on World War I, World War II, and the Cold War.

Global America is sympathetic to labor. In a way reminiscent of Karl Polanyi, it notes that "economic activity for most of human history had been subject to strict social controls," and "the overthrow of the society by the market" was a development in more recent centuries (p. 5). At a time when labor needed protection, the US federal government did intervene in the market but on the side of capital, for decades to come until the New Deal. In addition, this book characterizes the "flow of cheap goods produced by cheap labor" as the "tribute" of the market, "a modern form of imperial tribute" (p. 36). This implies that the imperial tribute was masked by the "invisible hand" first as a structural condition and further obscured by the high-minded principle of free trade as a policy choice. There seems to be a link between the Open Door policy and the tribute of the market, but the

authors address those two issues in separate sections and do not make the link explicit.

Global America covers the Progressive era in the United States within the bounds of Western society. It emphasizes that America was “not exceptional,” “ahead in some ways, behind in others, but moving down the same path” (pp. 87-88). Specifically, the United States led European nations in the struggle for women’s rights but lagged behind in social welfare. The comparison of state-market relations in the United States with those in Russia, Germany, and Britain is particularly illuminating. It not only puts the United States into perspective but also hints at alternative development models. Moreover, it resonates with the comparative analysis of revolutions and reforms, implying that social change is conditioned by the political culture of a nation and should be understood along a continuum. Revolution and reform are generally considered diametrically opposed concepts. Yet *Global America* reminds us that this was not the case in the Progressive years. At the time, “the distance between reform and revolution was not as great as it would become after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia,” and “the border between liberalism and socialism was an open one, allowing people and ideas to cross freely back and forth” (p. 70). Revolution was a structural condition as well. *Global America* stresses that uneven development was most acute in the middle tier of the world economy. It was in this tier, not in the industrial North or the agrarian South, that revolutions occurred. This is important to our understanding of not just twentieth-century revolutions but also how well American leaders have responded to them.

As far as the Cold War was concerned, *Global America* seeks common ground and even finds constructive engagement between capitalism and communism. Contrary to the popular view that the Cold War was an ideological struggle between capitalism and communism as well as a military geopolitical struggle, the authors state: “This was

not so much a difference between capitalism and communism, because to some degree America’s mixed economy marked a convergence between the two. Rather, the key difference was ideological, an outgrowth of America’s open society, on the one hand, and the Soviet’s closed society, on the other” (p. 213). They adopt a dialectical approach few Western scholars have, viewing “the presence of a Communist alternative” as “a goad to reform in the capitalist democracies,” not just in the 1930s and 1940s when capitalism was in crisis (p. 270). It was a goad even to Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society. The authors show remarkable understanding of the other side of the Cold War. For example, they express sympathy for the much condemned Soviet collectivization by relating it to their industrialization, which was crucial to Allied victory in World War II. Joseph Stalin has widely been denounced for imposing the Soviet system in Eastern Europe, but the authors remind us that he learned that from the Allies, who excluded him “when they established a capitalist democracy” in recaptured Italy. They fully acknowledge Soviet military intervention in Eastern Europe, but point out that the United States was “no less active in preserving their own sphere of influence, and it was “just far less heavy-handed” (p. 221). Similarly, they believe that “South Vietnam was no more than a client state of the United States, similar to the Eastern European satellites of the Soviet Union” (p. 279). Few in the West understand that the Soviets felt encircled, but they do. Most scholars underscore Russia’s paranoia. The authors see a parallel in their own country: “The United States, too, was caught up in its own paranoia—the red scare” (pp. 227-28).

However, the same understanding does not extend to China. From the US (not the Chinese) perspective, the authors dismiss the Chinese fear of US military presence in Japan as “ill-founded” (p. 224). When it came to the Sino-Soviet split, they claim: “Challenging the orthodox Soviet emphasis on the revolutionary leadership of the urban proletariat, Mao Zedong’s version of Marxism em-

phasized the revolutionary role of the peasantry. Likewise, Mao rejected Soviet willingness to accept the stalemate of ‘peaceful coexistence’” (p. 244). The problem here is partly one in the literature. Mao’s views of the peasants and peaceful coexistence have widely been misunderstood. Mao saw the peasants as allies, who were no substitute for the urban proletariat. He rejected peaceful coexistence with the West from the party’s, not the state’s, point of view. His “continuous revolution” was a party line, not a state policy. But such a subtle difference made little sense in the West. How could the Chinese Communist government seek regular diplomatic relations with the West while the party encouraged the people to overthrow their bourgeois capitalist governments? In fact, the United States did not act very differently. Even after it recognized the Communist government in 1979, it was no secret that American leaders continued to show support for the liberals in China.

In the last three chapters of the book, which cover the years from 1980 to 2012, *Global America* addresses globalization and American leadership in the world. In neither case are the authors sanguine. This can be seen from their characterization of the 1980s as a decade of global convergence, the 1990s as one of American leadership, and the years from 1999 to 2012 as ones of global divergence. On global convergence forces, the authors follow the general tendency to applaud the Chinese and Soviet liberal reforms. They even give the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, not the much eulogized President Ronald Reagan, more credit to end the Cold War. As a matter of fact, they portray Reagan as a lawbreaking president who got away in the Iran-Contra affair. However, they do not regard global converging forces as all positive. Using the production of the Ford Escort as a typical example of economic globalization in the 1980s, the authors conclude that “the loss of jobs would be one of the many consequences global convergence would bring to the upper tier of the world economy” (p. 335). While many Americans complain

about outsourcing, the authors take issue with “the centrality of conservative beliefs in economic globalization” (p. 336). In the United States, such beliefs found expression in the neoconservative return to free market during the Reagan administration and its attack on the welfare state. By the same token, the authors are critical of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organization because their decisions hurt poor countries at a time when “the clash between East and West dissipated, tensions only increased between the global North and the global South, between rich societies and poor societies” (p. 365). In other words, the global South was already structurally disadvantaged in the world economy, and the policy choices of those international financial institutions made their situation even worse. The authors come to the conclusion that for developing countries, “state-guided capitalism, not the free market, was the safest route to control one’s economic destiny” (p. 393). In the long run, they have a message for the global North as well: wealthy countries should ask questions about the sustainability of the consumer-oriented world economy “where prosperity depended on ever-increasing consumption of ever-scarcer resources” (p. 422).

On world leadership, *Global America* mostly has a positive view of the United States as the lone superpower in most of the 1990s, especially its cultural influence or soft power in the world. Militarily, its authors speak highly of the US role in the Gulf War and the Balkan crisis because both events had multilateral international support. Conversely, they are critical of US foreign policy from the beginning of the new century because it was unilateral, thus lacking international legitimacy, notably the George W. Bush administration’s opposition to the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and the Iraq War. Climate change was an area where “the United States forfeited world leadership in the early twenty-first century” (p. 423). In the case of the Iraq War, the authors are concerned about the widespread anti-American senti-

ments in the Islamic countries. They find it particularly troubling that “even educated Americans were generally unable to comprehend the roots of this animosity” (p. 410). More broadly, they oppose the war as “the latest example of how the Open Door policy that had been in place since 1898 led to America kicking in doors when weaker countries did not cooperate” (p. 407). They obviously see this war as a continuation of earlier military interventions aimed at opening closed societies, but emphasize that it occurred at a time when the United States was in decline since the end of the 1990s due to the rise of both Western Europe and China and began to show signs of all earlier declining imperial powers. That is, the United States was increasingly dependent on other countries “for loans, food, manufactured goods” (p. 368). Unlike those who support a grand strategy of primacy for the United States, the authors do not lament the decline of their own country as an imperial power. In fact, they hold that the United States was “the last empire in a postimperial age” and had long been “out of step with history” (p. 421). They would prefer the United States to maintain its cultural influence and set an example for the world. Viewing nativism as a reflection of a culture clash, they worry about the rising nativism that stood in contrast to the model of open society the United States offered during the Cold War.

Global America analyzes many American issues as global issues with local variations. It is particularly strong on class and racial analysis. It is intended for undergraduates, but it is deeply analytical and critical. It reads more like a monograph. If this suggests the direction of future textbooks, it should be a welcome development because they would be not only for students but also for teachers.

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Citation: Jingbin Wang. Review of McGreevey, Robert; Fisher, Christopher T.; Dawley, Alan, *Global America: The United States in the Twentieth Century*. H-Empire, H-Net Reviews. May, 2020.

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