American Imperial Development

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Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion. By Paul Frymer. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

American Imperialism and the State, 1893–1921. By Colin D. Moore. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Populism and Imperialism: Politics, Culture, and Foreign Policy in the American West, 1890–1900. By Nathan Jessen. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017.

The Trump era in American politics has brought about renewed battles over national identity and community. At the same time, new questions and disputes have arisen over the appropriate role of the United States in the world. These recent political phenomena—including the resurgence of an America First movement, efforts to restrict immigration and police who belongs in the national community, and the inadequacy of the federal response to the suffering of Puerto Rico in the wake of devastation from Hurricane Maria—have long historical legacies.

The impacts of American expansion and imperialism remain with us today. In this review essay, I consider new contributions from three scholars of American political development (APD)—Paul Frymer, Colin Moore, and Nathan Jessen—that illustrate the significance of American imperial development. The review proceeds as follows. First, I briefly summarize the arguments of each book in chronological order, from the development of the overland American empire through overseas imperial efforts. Second, I consider the question of how and to what extent the events chronicled in each book constitute "political development." Third, I outline some broader conceptual contributions of this group of books to the field of APD, focusing on foreign policy, perceptions of state capacity, and the role of ideas.

EMPIRE, FROM THE CONTINENT TO OVERSEAS

These works chronicle efforts at American empire both over the continent and overseas. Together, they offer a comprehensive picture of the politics of imperialism.

In a sweeping history spanning from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, Paul Frymer shows us a federal state creatively directing overland expansion. With the vision of constructing a white settler nation, expansion policies had devastating consequences for nonwhite groups. Using evidence including private papers, congressional debates, and newspapers, Frymer illuminates the centrality of both state capacity and race to how US territorial expansion unfolded.

Characterizations of the US state as strong or weak, Frymer argues, are misguided. Rather, expansion policies "were of a specific type: carefully managed and designed to harness the nation's strengths (its increasing population of settlers and citizens soldiers) in order to minimize its weaknesses (a small and weak military and bureaucracy, respectively)" (35). Federal land policy allowed the state to exercise broad authority over expansion by maximizing its strengths. Congress established the federal government as the "sole authority" over nonincorporated lands (10). In the late 1700s, the federal government focused on controlling the US national boundary to overcome its lack of a strong military, fearing the possibilities that settlers might try to separate from the United States or that war might break out with Native Americans or other nations. These efforts continued as the nation expanded in the early 1800s, as the federal government sought to have white settlers expand compactly, rather than diffusely, in order to secure the border. In an especially effective comparison with Mexico, Frymer illustrates the relevance of state capacity. The United States "achieved centralized control over land distribution" (175), while the Mexican state—relying on decen-

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tralized federalism—had northern territories that were more resistant to central authority and thus more vulnerable in the Mexican-American War. However, when the federal government attempted to more directly exert authority over Native Americans—especially in implementing the Indian Removal Act—its brutal efforts were accomplished only with enormous logistical difficulties that revealed substantial limitations in military and bureaucratic capacity.

Race was central to the politics of expansion. The mid-nineteenth-century policy of homesteading provided "a very conscious means of getting more and more white settlers onto lands populated with people perceived not to be white, enabling the government to manufacture demographics while expanding and incorporating these lands more easily and quickly" (133; see also Mayhew 2017, chap. 2). To the extent that other races were incorporated, it was often because of a lack of bureaucratic capacity to remove them. This issue, for example, prevented Republican efforts to colonize African Americans during the Civil War.

By considering the counterfactuals of territories that the United States did not expand to, Frymer shows how race both limited some territorial expansion and delayed the incorporation of other territories as states. For example, the lack of a white majority population explains why the federal government did not annex Cuba in the nineteenth century. And in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the Mexican-American War, Congress specifically sought to acquire the maximum amount of land with the minimum amount of (nonwhite) people. Moreover, territories were often acquired, and later became states, only when reaching "a white 'tipping point' that eased the politics of declaring the land part of the American state" (10). For example, while both California and New Mexico were acquired as a result of the war, New Mexico's statehood was delayed by decades because of the perception that it had a nonwhite population. Finally, the later US overseas empire was significantly affected by race. Despite the perceived end of the frontier, US overseas expansion did not fully become a project of colonial empire. Hawaii was annexed only when it was perceived to be under white control, while Congress resisted efforts in other territories where it would not pursue white settlement. US imperialism "only went as far, territorially, as it could settle lands in a manner where whites were the majority" (267).

For Colin Moore, imperialism presented a constitutional problem. The American empire, he shows, developed and adapted in the face of limitations including mass democracy, a lack of central bureaucratic state capacity, parochial legislators, and a Congress that was not deferential to the president in foreign affairs. Using cases that include the Philippines, Hawaii, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico and through substantial archival research, Moore demonstrates how Progressive imperialists attempted to avoid interference from Congress. First, as opposed to seeking autonomy from Congress through reputation-building (Carpenter 2001), imperial administrators used strategies of "inconspicuous action," trying to avoid attention from Congress by controlling information from the colonies (particularly through the Bureau of Insular Affairs) and avoiding requesting appropriations as much as possible. Second, strategies of "state building through collaboration" were used with actors outside of formal institutions, particularly relying on financing from Wall Street bankers. Finally, administrators were motivated by ideas of empire and Progressive administration (Moore, 19–28).

Moore's story picks up where Frymer's ends. Hawaii, although an overseas territory, fit patterns of earlier settler expansion, which directly concerned Congress. However, as Moore shows, Congress was predominantly hostile toward imperialism, as the nonwhite populations of the territories were not viewed as potential voters. This combination of congressional opposition and bureaucratic creativity to overcome it is especially shown in the Philippines. Moore notes that "by granting it no appropriations, by restricting its ability to attract investments, and by refusing to lower American tariff rates in any significant way, Congress had designed the Philippine colonial state to fail" (100). As a result, imperial administrators, such as Elihu Root, used the Bureau of Insular Affairs in the War Department to concentrate information, shielding their efforts from Congress. A combination of inconspicuous action and alliances with bankers allowed for imperialists to create a civil service, control information, raise taxes, develop a police force, develop a separate currency, and sell bonds to fund infrastructure.

Dollar Diplomacy in the early twentieth century relied even more on inconspicuous action and collaborative relationships with bankers. In the Dominican Republic, for example, Congress opposed formal imperialism, so more informal mechanisms of control were used. As Moore recounts, "American state officials would gain effective control over Santo Domingo in exchange for arranging a *private* loan through their partners on Wall Street" (159).

Still, the means by which imperial administrators achieved their aims in the face of obstacles from the US constitutional system proved to be ephemeral. By Woodrow Wilson's presidency, the American empire was collapsing. In the wake of World War I, many borrowers began to default on loans, undermining Dollar Diplomacy. As a result, Wilson intervened with military force—the very opposite of inconspicuous action. As Moore summarizes, "In an irony that became so

familiar in later decades, the United States now needed to erect a formal colonial state to defend—with bullets—a policy designed to achieve hegemony through peaceful and informal means" (263). Imperialism became a liability for both political parties, and by the early 1920s, the military occupations were winding down, while the Philippines slowly pushed toward independence. As Moore shows, overseas imperialism was not easily compatible with the limits of the American political and constitutional system (see also Meiser 2015). However, imperialism had opened up new space for executive power in foreign affairs independent of Congress, foreshadowing the modern national security state.

Nathan Jessen studies Populist opposition in Congress and western states to imperialism in the same time period, focusing on Populists from Nebraska, Colorado, and Washington. Their opposition, Jessen demonstrates, centered on the belief that financial elites sought to control and benefit from imperialism. Populists worried that colonialism would entail a military buildup, expand public debt, and increase wealth inequality. Jessen shows how this viewpoint influenced Populist responses to a number of episodes of imperialism, especially the Spanish-American War of 1898. The war's commencement was the key moment when Populists—often disinterested in foreign policy—had to conceptualize what imperialism meant for their agenda. With Senator Henry Teller's (D-CO) amendment to renounce territorial ambition in Cuba, Populists initially supported the war, viewing it as a liberating effort. But Populist doubts were quickly aroused. In addition to opposing Republican plans to use bonds and regressive taxation to finance the war, the Populists soon found that the war had opened up opportunities for imperial expansion. Still, the Populists divided on the final Treaty of Paris vote, with some voting in favor to end the war while others voted against it out of opposition to territorial acquisitions.

Ultimately, as Jessen demonstrates, the Populist opposition to imperialism lost. They opposed Hawaiian annexation, believing that the territory would not be granted statehood because of its nonwhite population. Similarly, Populists opposed colonialism in the Philippines. While against giving statehood to the territory's large nonwhite population, they also felt that the "the Constitution would be ruined . . . if the people of the Philippines were denied government based on their consent" (167). Jessen ends his account with the election of 1900—a decisive defeat for Populist opposition to imperialism with William Jennings Bryan's loss to McKinley and defeats of Populists in the west. "The Populists, Democrats, and Silver Republicans who had been swept into office in the West in 1896 were nearly swept out again" (245). This loss, for Jessen, was decisive turning point in American political development.

THE QUESTION OF DURABILITY

Each of these works addresses the question of American empire from the perspective of political development—"durable shift[s] in governing authority" (Orren and Skowronek 2004, 123). But how imperialism represented political development is not equally clear across the books.

The clearest case of durable development comes from Frymer's work. The United States acquired enormous amounts of territory in the nineteenth century that ultimately were incorporated into the country. Frymer, Moore, and Jessen also all address the unique case of Hawaii, an overseas territory that ultimately became a state. But one case not as fully addressed by these works is Puerto Rico. Moore gives it the most attention by examining how Puerto Rico's people were made American citizens (see also Venator-Santiago 2017) and the island was included in the US monetary system, but why these unique moves were taken while at the same time the island never was made a state is not as clear.

For Moore, the shift to an American empire itself was not durable. Governance through inconspicuous autonomy ultimately proved unsustainable. But Moore also broadly claims that there was a lasting developmental shift from imperialism—the move toward "an executive-dominated national security state," which came to fruition after World War II (275). A tantalizing hint of the connection between imperialism and the rise of the national security state is suggested, as Moore gives the examples of Sumner Welles, Henry Stimson, and Herbert Hoover as former imperial officials who went on to play roles in that later development. Additionally, Moore argues that the "strategic moves by the president and executive officials to maximize their discretion over American foreign affairs, while minimizing congressional supervision," provided a template for those later moves (272). Perhaps the connection between imperialism and the national security state may be somewhat self-evident. But the precise connections between imperialism and the modern national security state need more illumination, a topic that should interest researchers. Indeed, even with the move toward executive discretion, the post–World War II basis for that system—the passage of the National Security Act of 1947 and amendments in 1949—relied, at least for its foundations, on the buy-in of Congress (Stuart 2008).

For Jessen, the story of the Populist response to imperialism is also a lack of a durable shift in their preferred policy directions. "The death of Populism," Jessen argues, "was truly a significant moment in the history of American political development" (251). Jessen convincingly makes the case that the Populists' inability to halt imperialism was significant. But one wonders what the counterfactual is for some of his other claims. Jessen suggests that "although some of [the Populists'] proposals for more direct democratic

channels were acknowledged, their calls for a transformed national economy went unanswered" (251). But what would these transformations have entailed? For Sanders (1999), Populist farmers ultimately did wield a significant influence on the development of the American state in the Progressive period. A more precise description of where the Populists fell short would be informative.

Jessen also suggests that there is a durable link between Populism and nationalism, offering examples in which Populist movements respond to nationalistic movements such as imperialism in the 1890s, the America First movement in the late 1930s, and the New Right in the 1960s. But, of course, observers of world politics today often view Populism and nationalism as a part of the same movement. To be sure, this would entail a different book, but it is a question worth pondering for researchers, given that Jessen notes "we are approaching a similar juncture at present" with globalization, wealth inequality, and changing demographics (252).

CONTRIBUTIONS TO APD

These three works together make significant contributions to APD scholarship. Here, I highlight three common themes, focusing on foreign policy, perceptions of state capacity, and the role of ideas in politics.

Foreign policy

Perhaps most obviously, these works together are a major advance in conceptualizing how foreign policy relates to APD. Of course, APD scholars have previously considered the influence of both war and trade on the development of the state (Katznelson and Shefter 2002), and Mayhew (2005) has argued that wars should be understood as formative moments of political development. Friedberg (2000) has shown how American political culture influenced and limited the national security state. Saldin (2011) has sweepingly examined how wars from 1898 onward have affected the development of the American state, such as the development of a standing army, taxation, civil rights, and the creation of the national security state. However, compared to other topics, the subject of foreign policy has received less attention from APD as a field (Kersh 2005). By addressing the significance of imperialism, these works help fill that void.

Perceptions of state capacity

These works also cumulatively make a key contribution to an ongoing issue of dispute in APD—whether the American state in the nineteenth century was "weak." Historians, in particular, have recently countered what they have perceived as inaccurate characterizations of the US nineteenth-century state as weak (Balogh 2009; Edling 2003; Novak 2008). While such works highlight the activeness of the early US state, they risk flattening out political development, suggesting continuity and underplaying key moments of change. Indeed, "state formation is seldom about more or less authority and almost always about the kind and location of authority" (Skowronek 2018, 100; see also Skowronek 1982).

In a productive shift, scholars have recently drawn attention to the importance of how a state's capacity is perceived by different groups. The role of the state is sometimes hidden (Mettler 2011), but "for some groups, the American state is not hidden, but rather is quite visible and often not for the better" (Thurston 2018, 162). Indeed, the state has often appeared quite strong from the perspective of many citizens, such as women, slaves, and servants in the nineteenth century (Orren and Skowronek 2017). In the twentieth century, racial violence and social movements have been central to state development, and the current Black Lives Matter movement has focused on making more kinds of state power visible to more groups (Francis 2018; Thurston 2018). Moreover, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) citizens have clearly been affected by the authority of the state (Canady 2009; Engel 2016), as have citizens who have been incarcerated (Lerman and Weaver 2016).

These three works on imperialism suggest how to more effectively conceptualize perceptions of state capacity. Frymer's work illuminates Johnson's (2016, 603) point that "part of the debate" over whether the state was strong or weak "resulted from a lack of clarity surrounding slavery, territorial expansion, and Indian removal and their inextricable connection to a particular kind of robust state capacity." Frymer showcases the limits of the state; its lack of bureaucratic capacity, for example, meant that black colonization efforts were infeasible. But he also conveys the ways in which the state manifested its authority to visibly affect Native Americans, while influencing the settling patterns of whites who may not have even perceived the role of the state in their own activities. As Frymer succinctly surmises, "extensions of opportunity for white freedom of movement intersected with significant constraints against the movement, not just of Native Americans, but of black Americans as well" (224).

Moore and Jessen's books also highlight these dynamics. For Moore, Congress's antipathy toward imperialism hobbled the development of strong imperial state capacity in many ways. Yet, while the solutions of the imperialists—revolving around inconspicuous action and information control—may have revealed state weakness, they surely appeared to be the actions of a strong state to those being colonized. For Jessen, the role of class affected Populist perceptions of state authority. The Populists feared a strong central state in military affairs and its potential role in imperialism, yet at the same time, they

bemoaned a weak state that was not tackling the challenges of monopolies and economic inequality.

Together, these books highlight an important conceptual point. The question is not simply whether the state is weak or strong. Key considerations should be in which areas the state has more or less authority and how that capacity is perceived by different groups.

Ideas

Our understanding of the role of ideas in APD is also improved by these works. The influence of ideas on political outcomes has long been a theme of APD scholarship (Mettler and Valelly 2016). APD has focused on political culture (Greenstone 1993; Hartz 1955; Huntington 1981; Smith 1993), and scholars have suggested how political thought and development may be intertwined (Lieberman 2002; Skowronek 2006; Smith 2014; Thomas 2014; Tulis and Mellow 2018). But empirical demonstrations of such influence have sometimes been more elusive (Jacobs 2014).

Moore takes up this challenge directly, delivering on a bold claim that "it is almost impossible to explain America's approach to imperialism without understand the role of ideas in shaping the goals of the officials who created the empire" (29). Delving into the ways ideas may be translated into particular outcomes, Moore shows that ideas served both as "focal points" (uniting a group of reformers to a common cause) and as "road maps" (anticipating particular policies to achieve ideational goals; 26). Progressive imperialists were motivated by ideas about good government and administration that faced obstacles in the United States, so they sought to implement them in the Philippines and other colonies. For example, in the Philippines, these Progressives outlawed opium, instituted forestry management, developed an education system, built infrastructure and hospitals, and instituted a civil service. More broadly, these Progressives sought independence from Congress. Adopting a common trope of the time—that members of Congress were "provincial" and unable to focus on a broader national interest (see also Dearborn 2019)—they viewed Congress as an obstacle to achieving a national good of imperialism (73). Executive influence over foreign policy and the development of a civil service in the colonies were both specific responses to this critique. Notably, Progressive imperialists pursued these goals even in the face of failures and obstacles—such as a failure to gain free trade status for the Philippines in the American economy—demonstrating "their deep ideological commitment to American imperialism" and view that their "theories of scientific government and development" were at stake (128). Furthermore, Moore shows how ideas can change in the face of abrupt demonstrations of their shortfalls. With the need to send in American troops to secure colonies propped up by Dollar Diplomacy, Progressives reconsidered their imperial aspirations, deciding that the American constitutional system posed too great an obstacle.

Frymer establishes the persistent influence of an idea over the entire scope of American history. Having demonstrated that American expansion policy was based on an understanding of the United States as a white settler nation, Frymer concludes by reflecting on how this idea "remains embedded in our historical understanding of the nation and in many of our modern cultural symbols and political manifestations." As Frymer argues, perceived threats to the idea of a white settler nation—changing demographics and immigration—have "continue[d] to provide a catalyst for political protest" (281). Indeed, this idea—while of course sharply contested—has had staying power beyond any number of formative moments that could have potentially displaced it, including Reconstruction, the civil rights victories of the 1960s, and the election of an African American president. In the Trump era, the capacity of this idea to drive American politics appears to be as significant as ever.

Finally, Jessen shows how one conspiratorial idea conditioned the response of actors to new developments. Populist suspicions of the system of global and American finance (see also DeCanio 2011) influenced their response to imperialism. As Jessen shows, "the money power conspiracy was one of the most powerful and widespread ideas of the nineteenth century" (23), serving both as "an important source of unity for the otherwise diverse group that made up the new party" and conditioning their response to imperialism (29). Before the United States intervened in Cuba's war for independence against Spain, Populists criticized President McKinley's reluctance and "attributed this timidity to vested economic interests" (74). But once the United States began to acquire overseas territories, Populists criticized empire as being "demanded by the greater financiers and industrialists" (147). Throughout the age of imperialism, Populist responses and opposition were driven by a core belief that the financial elite demanded imperialism: "Western reformers believed that they were witnessing the evolution of a growing infrastructure of political, economic, and military power. Imperialism represented the extension of that system for the benefit of economic elites" (162).

Implicitly and explicitly, these works suggest how ideas influence political development. Together, they help link broad shifts in political culture with specific outcomes, focusing on key actors and formative moments.

CONCLUSION

These works make a significant contribution to our understanding of territorial expansion and imperialism in the for-

mation of the US state and national community. They emphasize the interaction of foreign affairs and domestic politics, perceptions of state capacity by different groups of Americans, and the role of ideas in political development. They remind us of the central contradiction of the US democratic creed and ideals juxtaposed with the reality of a white settler and imperial nation. Together, they suggest a connection between key moments of disputes over national identity domestically and the role of the United States internationally, a path of research that APD scholars should undoubtedly seek to pursue given our current political moment.

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