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Joseph Michael Gratale

- 1 Not long after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld expressed confidently to Al-Jazeera the following about American foreign policy: "We don't do empire. We're not imperialistic. We never have been. I can't imagine why you'd even ask the question."¹ His undisguised denial of an American empire, either in the past or present, runs up against rather compelling evidence which suggests otherwise. Reluctance to acknowledge a persistent and strong current of imperialism in US policies and practices moves beyond the realm of government 'officialdom' and into all avenues of American society. Juxtaposed to public denial of American imperialism is a committed American academia which has produced volume after volume on American empire, especially after the end of the Cold War, and perhaps even more intensely during the Bush administrations of the early 2000s. Unconvinced, however, the majority of Americans continue to emphasize the benign characteristics of American foreign intervention and find recourse in nationalist discourse centered on notions of freedom, liberty, and equality to explain America's global presence.
- 2 In acknowledging America's colonial-imperial continuum from its beginnings to the present, there is, in turn, the need to recognize those individuals and forces which sought to challenge and undermine such a project, namely through what has been termed US anti-imperialism. It is this topic, which has received markedly less attention in academic circles than US imperialism and empire, which forms the central focus of an edited volume by Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton. Curiously enough, in the final chapter of their book, Tyrrell and Sexton quite appropriately begin the chapter with the following quote: "In logical terms, without imperialism there would be no anti-imperialism" (219). The title of the volume is *Empire's Twin: US Anti-imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism*. Following an introduction by the editors, the volume consists of a total of

twelve articles which are divided into four thematic sections. The sections are as follows: Conquest and anticolonialism in the Nineteenth Century; Anti-Imperialism and the New American Empire; The Extent and Limits of Anti-Imperialism; and the final section which is titled Anti-imperialism in the Age of American Power. At the conceptual level, the authors see anti-imperialism as “a strand of political thought and a form of social and political action” (5). The authors proceed to admit that the meaning of this term is indeed contingent upon the historical particulars of a given period, hence the aim of the volume to “keep in view the particularism of specific anti-imperialisms, while also tracking the evolutionary and interconnected story of the *longue durée*” (5). I believe this represents an important strength in the volume’s focus—the notion that US anti-imperialism is not a handful of static, linear positions and ideas, but rather a more complex set of discourses and nuanced articulations, or, as the authors suggest, in seeing American anti-imperialisms through its diverse manifestations. Finally, Tyrrell and Sexton inform the reader of the threefold aims of the volume. First, they seek “to broaden our conception of anti-imperialist actors, ideas, and actions; second, to chart this story across the range of American history, from the Revolution to our own era; and third, to open up transnational and global dimensions of American anti-imperialism” (5).

- 3 What follows in *Empire's Twin* is an impressive line-up of contributors who have written articles which explore both well-known topics, but also chapters that explore lesser known episodes and themes on US anti-imperialism and US foreign policy. While the topics included are diverse and some articles highly specialized, there remain certain threads which smoothly connect each chapter to the next. For example, Peter S. Onuf in his chapter on the early American republic compellingly reminds the reader that anti-imperialism may not necessarily emerge from progressive forces in society. Americans, prior to the commencement of the American Revolution from the British crown, became increasingly vexed by England’s attempts to curtail colonization of the American hinterland. American colonists felt they were being deprived of their ‘pursuit of happiness’ as colonizers. Onuf suggests that “Anglo-Americans declared their independence in order to sustain colonization” (34). Encroachment of Indian lands continued unabatedly from the first colonization projects into the early national period when the US, oddly enough, became a postcolonial society. Jeffrey Ostler’s chapter on the Native Americans correctly reframes the struggles of these communities within the larger context of resistance and opposition to American imperialism, or what some might refer to as internal colonialism. For most Americans, the ‘stories’ of westward expansionism into ‘virgin land’ across an ‘open frontier’ led by innocent ‘pioneers’ who from time to time encountered the violent savagery of Native Americans, remains the dominant narrative. The “winning of the West,” as Jay Sexton reminds us was part and parcel of the “tension between the imperial reality and the anti-imperial imaginary” (73). An equally important point he makes is the utter significance of the American Civil War in relation to the geopolitical shift in the international relations of the period. In essence, the American Civil War set the stage for greater exploits in empire-building during the latter part of the nineteenth century. While it was not only the final act in America’s independence from the British Empire, it was also, as Sexton notes, the event which established the “political, economic, and labor arrangements that would emerge from an internally contentious postcolonial period...”(75).
- 4 American experiences in conducting war against Native Americans and upon each other during the Civil War were soon applied elsewhere in the world—from the Caribbean to

East Asia, and from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. How peoples from the developing world responded to US intervention varied from place to place and regime to regime. Anti-imperialism in these geographical spaces, Julian Go points out, “oscillated between movements for independence and political integration” (80), hence the need to recognize the varieties of anti-imperialisms which existed both within the US and beyond its borders. A very good example of distinctive types of anti-imperialisms of the internal variety is explored by Robert Buzzanco in his chapter on the Vietnam War. When one thinks of resistance to the war, images of student protesters and peace activists on the streets of major cities come to mind. But as Buzzanco points out, key elements of America’s ruling class were opposed to the Vietnam War. Due to ‘strategic positioning’ based on realpolitik and cost benefit analysis, these anti-imperialists opposed the war “not because they believed the war was wrong, but because they believed it undermined the imperial interests of the United States” (204). Elements of the military, Wall Street, and powerful political figures questioned the war for a variety of reasons. Their anti-imperialism was “a critique of specific policies of imperial overstretch rather than an overarching condemnation of the US imperial system itself” (216). The failure of US policies in Vietnam for the ruling elite were lessons to be learned if the US had any intent on maintaining empire—either of the old or new variety.

- 5 As Tyrrell and Sexton point out, just as American “imperialism continues to evolve, so too will anti-imperialism” (242). This position taken by the editors is clearly evident throughout this volume. The depth and scope of each article, and the level of expertise exhibited by each author, make *Empire's Twin* an invaluable contribution to scholarship on American anti-imperialism. In addition to the articles I have mentioned in this review, it is worth noting the authors that I have not mentioned. The contributors are: Alan Knight and his work on anti-imperialism and the Mexican Revolution; Ussama Makdisi and his study on missionary work and the King-Crane Commission; Erez Manela for his work on Woodrow Wilson; Patricia A. Schechter and her study of feminist historiography and the decolonial; and Laura A. Belmonte and her work on anti-imperialism and the early Cold War. This fine selection of articles fills an existing gap on a topic that has been overlooked and simplified. *Empire's Twin* is a book that can be read not only to gain an understanding of US anti-imperialisms, but also for readers to become more cognizant of America’s imperial machinations, past and present.

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