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Review of *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492-1830*, by John H. Elliott

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Habsburg Monarchy, Transylvania until the year 1918, Greater Romania between the World Wars, and the new nationalism of the Romanian Communist regime and of its successors after 1989. They are fair and balanced in their judgments of events and the motives of elites. Of particular interest are the chapters on Cluj between 1918 and the present, which trace its transition from a predominantly Hungarian city to one that was 80 percent Romanian.

Part 2 is a case study of ethnicity at the daily level, an inquiry into the nature of nationhood and nationalism from below, from the perspective of ordinary people. Such an approach, the authors argue, avoids the distortions created when nationalist politics are observed from above and when the ideas and pronouncements of elites are taken as true expressions of the whole community. To understand how ethnicity works, they treat it as a “perspective on the world” and as a “way of acting in the world” rather than as a “thing in the world.” Their primary sources of data are the ordinary residents of Cluj (Clujeni), and their topics are habitual preoccupations, language, institutions, and interactions between Hungarians and Romanians (as individuals, not as categories). Their favored procedure is observation rather than the imposition of structured discussions and formal questionnaires on their Hungarian and Romanian hosts. They conclude that ethnicity is irrelevant most of the time in the day-to-day existence of Clujeni.

In the final chapter, which returns to the starting point of politics, they reach a similar conclusion: Clujeni in their everyday lives are little interested in politics, let alone nationalist politics. Such a finding raises fundamental questions about the strength of ethnicity generally outside elite circles. It will require scholars concerned with earlier periods to re-examine the development of national consciousness and national movements.

This book is an indispensable contribution to the study of modern nationalism to which theorists, researchers, historians, and social scientists will have to refer. If the authors had chosen another Transylvanian city or a city elsewhere for scrutiny, the results might have been different in the details. But the prime importance of their undertaking lies in an illuminating approach to ethnicity with the widest possible application.

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Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830. By John H. Elliott (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006) 546 pp. \$50.00 cloth \$22.00 paper

In the introduction, Elliott makes his overarching goal clear, stating that “by constantly comparing, juxtaposing, and interweaving the two stories, I have sought to reassemble a fragmentary history, and display the

development of these two great New World civilizations” (xviii). He succeeded in this aim; *Empires of the Atlantic World* stands as an impressive achievement. Elliott’s ability to hold English America in the same analytical frame as Spanish America is the result of prodigious reading in two allied but distinct sub-disciplines. The text is informed by recent ethnohistorical, political, social, and art-historical scholarship, effectively synthesizing a large body of material.

Developing the insightful morphological approach that Elliott deployed in the 1994 Stenton lecture at Reading University, the chapters in *Empires of the Atlantic World* are thematically arranged. They explore the processes of exploration and contact, the occupation of space, the consolidation of imperial structures, and the management of dissent. The book is organized into three parts, titled “Occupation,” “Consolidation,” and “Emancipation.” Each part is comprised of four chapters, which break the large processes of the imperial life span into more manageable topics of investigation.

In the first part, Elliott compares the processes of intrusion—the justifications and activities of occupation of space, conversion, coexistence, and segregation in Euro-indigenous interactions. In the second part, he treats the structural frameworks of the empires, the emergence of local elites, religious developments, and the formation of trans-Atlantic cultural communities.

By the time Elliott turns his attention to Part III, his chronologies and morphologies are more or less synchronized, the two empires’ interactions with each other having attained similar levels of colonial maturity during the 1760s. The last part of the book deals with population growth and the movement of peoples in the Americas, the Seven Years’ War, the imperial crises, and the emancipation of America.

Looking at the Spanish and British imperial experiences in the Americas through the lens of Elliott’s sustained comparison dispels the arguments made by early modern Britons regarding their nation’s exceptionalism. Although coming a century after Spanish activities in the New World, England’s early activities in the Chesapeake and Caribbean during the founding era appear similar to the early steps taken by the Spaniards. In an Epilogue, Elliott states the conclusion in clear terms: “As the fate of the indigenous peoples and imported Africans makes all too clear, the records of New World colonization by both Britons and Spaniards are stained by innumerable horrors” (405).

Elliott’s comparison, however, does much more than make the two empires clones of one another, as if the English merely re-played Spanish imperial history 100 years later. The book does not homogenize the two experiences; in fact, it allows for the differences between the two to stand out in sharper relief. Even though one of the messages of the text is that neither the Spanish nor the English experiences were entirely exceptional, and even though (especially in the early stages) the two countries took similar paths, Elliott is careful to note the ways in which the

empires, the people in them, and the polities that emerged in their domains were distinct. Political development, cultural self-definition, European-indigenous interactions, and the emergence of local hierarchies and structures of power emerged as distinct processes in the Anglophone and the Spanish realms.

One quibble with the book—more like a matter of questionable emphasis—concerns the narrative’s directionality: Once Elliott’s chronologies come into a rough alignment after the English Glorious Revolution and the eighteenth century, a subtle note of end-point driven explanation enters the work in an attempt to anticipate the rupture that will engulf the First British Empire in the 1770s, and the Spanish empire soon thereafter. Elliott stresses and comments upon discordant notes in British imperial development as straws that might eventually break the camel’s back, while slightly downplaying elements of imperial administrative, political, and cultural integration that occurred in concert with the process of British national integration. This series of discordant events (a fractious New York legislature, increasingly independent town meetings in New England, and the inability of the British colonies to field militia forces that might act in concert), need not have been adding up to an inevitable imperial rupture. In fact they might have been local expressions of politics and competition among local elites within the larger framework of an increasingly integrating empire.

Another quibble arises from Elliott’s treatment of first contact and the early encounters between indigenous leaders and Europeans. He accepts the mediated transcriptions of what historical figures like Moctezuma and Powhatan said and thought at face value without a deeper exploration of early colonial sources. The (sometimes quite small) body of sources on which we must rely for the utterances and opinions of indigenous leaders during this crucial period of contact history may well demand more scrutiny than Elliott affords them.

These minor points do not seriously detract from Elliott’s *Empires of the Atlantic World*. Scholars engaged in research on the comparative history of the Americas can profitably engage with it to explore how Elliott answers key questions, how he makes his comparisons, and how he synthesizes a broad range of scholarship and integrates it into an ambitious argument.

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Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550–1700. By Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006) 327 pp. \$60.00 cloth \$24.95 paper

Puritan Conquistadors presents an imaginative, comparative history of ideas focused on early colonial religious themes in Spanish and British