

To the Editors of *Ricerche di Storia Politica*

Response to Antonio Donno's review of *Power, Profit and Prestige: a History of American Imperial Expansion*, Pluto Press, London and New York, 2010, in *Ricerche di Storia Politica* 1, 2012.

I am pleased that Professor Antonio Donno took the time to write his short review of my book on American expansionism. Unfortunately he does not seem to have taken terribly much care reading it. Rather than engaging my arguments and demonstration, which are founded on a vast body of scholarly literature, original research, and a wealth of empirical evidence, he caricatures and attempts to disqualify my study by giving the false impression that it is primarily concerned with a purely normative condemnation of 'imperialism'. He thus faults me for being "Manichean" and "simplistic" when I argue that US expansionism in the nineteenth century was part of the "general movement of expansion of the West that created the historical structures and hierarchies" of the late-modern world, and that it was driven by material forces and representations of racial and cultural hierarchy common to all late modern imperial states. While this may be a controversial argument, insofar as it normalizes the US' expansionary experience and thereby undermines exceptionalist narratives of US nation and state building, it is hardly simplistic. If it is, then so too are all the major reinterpretations of transatlantic and transnational history that have done so much to renew our understanding of modernity.

Building on a long and distinguished tradition of historiography, *Power, Profit and Prestige* indeed places « empire at the centre of the study of world history and specifically the history of globalization », to cite the research agenda suggested years ago by Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins that I made my own and applied to the United States. It situates the U.S. firmly within transnational history as an integral and dynamic component of European-centered late modern globalization in the nineteenth century, then as the systemic center of the second wave in the latter part of the twentieth century, highlighting the persistence over long periods of what I call an imperial cosmology that was consubstantial with the "rise" and subsequent globalization of the "west". This cosmology, or set of foundational assumptions about world order, cultural hierarchy and historical purpose, outlasted the era of formal empires and continues to inform western cultural discourses and international practices in deleterious ways. The intense albeit brief revival of explicit imperial and colonial discourses on both shores of the Atlantic in the early years of the twenty first century, as well as current diffuse antagonistic representations of the culturally alien and hence dangerous post-colonial other are derived from a past that has not fully passed, from the mappings of difference drawn from centuries of expansion and domination.

The sources stretch back to the overseas territorial colonization of the Americas and the commercial colonization of the British and Dutch East Asian companies in the early modern period, which generated a new consciousness and mental map of the world. The western observer, trading and conquering, began to see the world as a hierarchically ordered system rather than as a mosaic of autonomous polities and socio-cultural spaces. Inextricably intertwined with material interests, this hierarchical vision hardened in the late modern period when expansion became what Hannah Arendt described as the "permanent and

supreme aim of politics", and imperialism took on a world encompassing scope. Visioning and mapping the world became coterminous with domination as global systems of control and management of populations, resources, and space were put into place. In the mental map of the late modern Euro-Atlantic imperial powers, the "West" was constructed as the centre and the apex of the universe as it projected itself onto the world, incorporating or enmeshing ever-larger parts of the "rest" into its constantly expanding and ever-tighter global net. Out of this emerged a picture of a continuously ascending "west" that was the thinking and active subject of history, and a picture of plural others as immobile, history-less or pre-historical objects caged in tradition and circular time, hence locked out of modernity. The intellectual result was the naturalization of hierarchy.

Was the United States' an exception in this systemic process? US expansionists at the end of the nineteenth century such as Brooks Adams, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Henry Cabot Lodge, Theodore Roosevelt and their predecessors who forged the expansionist credo of "Manifest Destiny" were acutely aware that the US was participating in a global movement. They framed it, of course, in a specific American nationalist idiom, in the same way as French, British, German and later Italian expansionists did. Perhaps Prof. Donno should engage a bit more with the early and fecund work of William Appleman Williams, Richard W. Van Alstyne and Walter LaFeber, or with the more recent writings of Bernard Porter, Paul Kramer, Bruce Cumings as well as many others, before so lightly dismissing one of the core argument of my book.

I don't have the space here to answer Prof. Donno's brief comments on the Cold War in any detail. Here again, he caricatures rather than discussing the issues brought up in my book. I have no sympathy for Soviet expansionism or the Soviet system, as he implies. Nor is it "bizarre" to understand *militarized* containment as a project of power and empire. On this, he might want to read or reread C. Wright Mills, George Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, and David Calleo, among others. In sum, Prof. Donno's objections appear to be based uniquely on the fact that the contents of my book do not coincide with his views. Rather than seriously debating my arguments, in appropriate scholarly fashion, he commits the sin he accuses me of by penning a review that is Manichean and simplistic.

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