

WILLIAM EARL WEEKS, *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations, Vol. 1: Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013), 336 pp.

The 4-volume *Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*—written by leading scholars in the field—has been a knowledgeable, readable, reliable, and useful introduction to U.S. diplomatic history from the foundation of the republic to date. However, since its publication dates back twenty years, the editor, Warren I. Cohen, made the decision to revise the book series to incorporate the scholarship of the last two decades and consequently asked each individual author to update their contributions. Because Bradford Perkins, writer of the first volume in 1993, deceased in 2008, Cohen chose William Earl Weeks, Lecturer in History at San Diego State University, to write a new monograph on the early phase of U.S. foreign relations.

Weeks is most successful in providing an erudite and informative overview—reflective of recent trends in diplomatic history such as the connection of foreign policy and domestic politics, the incorporation of non-state actors, transnational movements of ideas and peoples, and global interdependences—in his discussions of post-1815 U.S. foreign relations. This is not surprising, since it is the period for which Weeks has earned himself the reputation of a preeminent expert through important previous publications.<sup>1</sup> The focus of his research interests is also revealed by the fact that the antebellum period makes up two thirds of the book, whereas the early republic is dealt with only in the remaining third (in Perkins's book the relation was the other way round).

By treating America as an empire, Weeks leaves behind traditional divisions of foreign and domestic affairs. For example, by arguing that California was such an alluring target since it offered suitable entrepôts for Asian markets, he connects American territorial expansionism in North America and commercial expansionism throughout the world (149-50). He, moreover, includes detailed discussions of the Missouri Crisis, the Wilmot Proviso, and the Kansas-Nebraska-Act—topics which treatments of American diplomatic history usually

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1992).

ignore; Perkins failed to even mention these events in his account. More than his predecessor, Weeks elaborates on the sectional differences and the nexus between expansionism and the collapse of the union, hinting at the fear that southern slaveholders could expand the union (and consequently increase the number of slaveholding states) to Mexico and the Caribbean, making it urgent for Republicans in 1860 to end the expansion of slavery once and for all (237, 245). Blurring the lines between domestic and diplomatic history, Weeks also gives the Civil War a prominent place in his account, devoting an entire chapter each to its origins and its course, since he interprets it as an international event, arguing that “by the spring of 1861, the Confederate States of America had achieved a degree of independence and institutional autonomy characteristic of a nation-state” (249). Weeks's treatment of the Civil War is quite unusual for an overview of U.S. diplomatic history, as he is less concerned with the Union's and the Confederacy's relations with European powers but rather with the war operations and strategies on the American continent. He justifies his approach by considering the inner-American conflict “as a foreign war against a breakaway confederation” (249). After all, he explains, “many Northerners and almost all Republicans saw the slave South as another country” (231).

Weeks's inclusion of non-state actors as agents of American imperialism is another aspect that distinguishes his account. He identifies, for example, whalers and missionaries as the frontrunners of American overseas expansionism who “Americanized” Hawaii (137), and he analyzes the expansionist schemes of so called filibusters in the Caribbean who tried to conquer Cuba and Nicaragua for the U.S. without official government sanction (213-19). He also explains that the activities of businessmen, adventurers, and settlers helped expand the authority of the federal government in foreign affairs since they justified interventions abroad if their personal interests were in jeopardy (140).

Finally, following Brian Schoen's seminal study on the global origins of the Civil War, Weeks posits American foreign policy in a global context explaining, for example, how the textile revolution created a global cotton boom, which not only encouraged the expansion of slavery in the American South, but even gave that section the appearance of being “modern,” as it played a significant role in the progressively integrating world economy

(124-27).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, he does not consider American imperialism simply a westward movement across the North American continent but as “a globalized expansionist process” that took Americans in pursuit of wealth into all corners of the world (131). He thus exposes notions of American isolationism in the nineteenth century as a myth.

While Weeks's assessment of U.S. foreign relations between 1815 and 1865 is thus largely successful in providing an eloquent, instructive, and up-to-date overview, his treatment of the preceding period is less convincing. For one, this section contains a few factual inaccuracies and misrepresentations. For example, Weeks claims that the Monroe-Pinckney Treaty “offered little to assuage American concerns over impressment, blockades, and the carrying trade” (79). While it is true that the British refused to renounce the practice of impressment on the high seas, they did agree in the treaty to allow America's re-export trade if the ships engaged in this trade paid a small duty when stopping at an American port and promised to let Americans know in advance of any blockade. Weeks also significantly overestimates U.S. power in the Early Republic, claiming that “the United States had conclusively demonstrated its ability to defend the coastal waters of the nation and to project naval power to the far reaches of the globe” in the War of 1812 (92). In fact, however, the U.S. Navy was bottled up in American ports for most of the war, the Royal Navy raided America's coast at will, and—except for three naval victories early on in the war—American war ships lost all major naval battles against the British.<sup>3</sup>

More importantly, Weeks fails to connect domestic politics and foreign policy and to situate American foreign relations in a larger global context in the first part of his book. He does not dwell on how the French Revolution spurred the development of America's first parties and clarified their ideological differences. Identifying with different contestants in the French Revolutionary Wars, both Federalists and Republicans believed that the fate of the American republic was determined in

<sup>2</sup> Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Andrew Lambert, *The Challenge: Britain Against America in the Naval War of 1812* (London: Faber and Faber, 2012).

the European conflict, which is why they pursued opposing foreign policies—Federalists favoring a British victory, Republicans hoping for the success of French arms. Weeks, however, is not sensitive to the profoundly different outlooks of Federalists and Republicans when he asserts that no substantial change occurred in America's foreign conduct after Jefferson assumed the presidency in 1801, even though Republicans' non-compromising stance towards the former mother country would inexorably lead to armed confrontation in 1812. As a result, his interpretation of the War of 1812 is simplistic when he explains Westerners' support for a declaration of war by the fact that Britain's interference with American trade limited their agricultural exports, and when he argues that Federalists' voters with shipping and commercial interests in New England were opposed to war simply because in peacetime they were still making “windfall profits” despite occasional British seizures of their ships and goods (87).

Finally, Weeks does not engage the research on transnational exchanges of ideas and peoples and on global connections in the Early Republic, even though the European wars and the party struggles in America were intrinsically intertwined. For example, Americans residing in France, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe, took an active part in the French Revolution trying to influence European developments in light of their American experience, in the process reconsidering the role of the American republic in the tumultuous era of the Atlantic Revolutions.<sup>4</sup> Many immigrants in the Early Republic, moreover, brought revolutionary ideas from Europe to America, which fueled the party struggle over American diplomacy.<sup>5</sup> A modern history of early U.S. foreign relations would also need to address the global repercussions of the American Revolution, examining its reception and adaptation in other parts of the world.<sup>6</sup>

Weeks's interpretation of pre-Civil War America as an empire might account for the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Philipp Ziesche, *Cosmopolitan Patriots: Americans in Paris in the Age of Revolution* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic* (Lawrence: UP of Kansas, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2007).

simultaneous strength of the book's second and the limitations of its first part. As he considers "the history of antebellum U.S. foreign relations as fundamentally linked to the creation of an American republican empire" (xvii), the dominant thread structuring his history of early American foreign relations is the topic of American imperialism and expansionism. Since, according to Weeks, the territorial appetite of European settlers in North America formed the driving force of early American foreign relations, he even starts his narrative at the beginning of the Great War for Empire in 1754, i. e. twenty-two years before the U.S. was founded, explaining that the desire for expansion already existed in the colonial period.

By focusing on American imperialism, Weeks finds a way to link domestic politics and foreign policy, integrate non-state actors, and place the U.S. in a global context in the analysis of the antebellum period. However, the exclusive emphasis on imperialism makes him neglect America's relations to Europe in the early republic. Americans did not ex-

clusively—and prior to 1815 not even primarily—look to the West, but sought to establish their nation as an equal and independent member of the European state system in the East. Post-colonial nationalism is, therefore, a theme equally important to understand early U.S. foreign relations. In the end, the U.S. was both a nation and an empire for the first one hundred years of its existence, and it is the tension between both conceptions of America that shaped and explained the contradictions of U.S. diplomatic history in this period.

Weeks's contribution to the *New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* is thus not a replacement of Perkins's formidable initial volume but rather complements it. Whereas Perkins's account is more convincing in explaining how republican ideology shaped American foreign policy towards Europe before 1815, the appeal of Weeks's monograph is its competent and engaging analysis of how imperialism determined America's foreign conduct after 1815.

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