

United States Reconstruction Across the Americas

David Prior

University of New Mexico, dmprior@unm.edu

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Recommended Citation

Prior, David (2020) "United States Reconstruction Across the Americas," *Civil War Book Review*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 1 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.22.1.22

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol22/iss1/22>

Review

David Prior

Winter 2020

Link, William A., *United States Reconstruction across the Americas*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2019. HARDCOVER \$24.95. ISBN 9780813056418 pp. 136

This short collection of three essays by prominent scholars constitutes the first volume published in the *Frontiers of the American South* series at the University Press of Florida. It focuses on three sets of connections between the Reconstruction of the United States and the rest of the Americas, and as such advances the now-longstanding quest to internationalize U.S. history. The editor and authors should be applauded for undertaking this work since Reconstruction scholars have, with some caveats, hesitated to engage with the transnational turn in American history, which has otherwise been so transformative. Indeed, if anything, Reconstruction scholarship has been moving towards national history, not away from it, with leading scholars such as Heather Cox Richardson, Elliott West and Richard White seeking to reconceptualize Reconstruction as the transformation of nation's political economy and the consolidation of the United States as a continental polity through the conquest of the West. Of course, as every seasoned scholar knows, and every graduate student should be warned, the depth and range of monographic scholarship concerning the United States is truly stunning. Not surprisingly, there are many excellent works, such as by Alison Clark Efford, Moon-Ho Jung, and Philip M. Katz, that address various international connections in the postbellum decade. Still, Reconstruction's core narrative seems to have resisted, so far, the kind of wholesale transnational revisionism common in other fields of study. It is one of the enigmas of Reconstruction scholarship that it has for so long produced some of the best comparative history but has not readily translated this into excitement about transnational connections.

The volume's introduction moves briskly through several topics—including W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935), how we define Reconstruction, and the field's engagement with comparative and transnational histories—on its way to the chapters. Collectively, these have

impressive range and depth for such a brief volume, although specialists will find points to disagree with.

The first chapter, by Rafael Marquese, examines how international commodity markets connected the United States and Brazil. Marquese frames his study within the “second slavery” paradigm pioneered by Dale Tomich. Scholars of new-world slavery have long pursued comparative research, but often by treating its units of analysis—nations, regions, empires—as discrete from each other. The second slavery paradigm, in contrast, foregrounds the late-18th- and 19th-century commercial and financial integration of the New World’s slave regimes within a globalizing capitalist economy. Brazil’s booming coffee exports to the United States before the Civil War, Marquese points out, were financed in no small part by the United States’ own growing exports of cotton. But far from dismissing earlier comparative work, Marquese explicitly builds on them. His chapter draws on the work of Steven Hahn and others who compared the post-emancipation struggles between former slaves and former slaveholders across the Americas and found that the latter wielded more political power in Brazil than in the United States. From there, Marquese shows that the growth and dynamism of coffee culture in Brazil over the period of and after abolition there reflected in good part consumer demand in the United States. What is more, many of the European migrant laborers who sustained Brazilian coffee output felt both the pull of Brazilian financial incentives, sanctioned by the landholding class, and the push of falling grain prices in Europe due to growing output in the United States. The underlying value of wedding comparative approaches to transnational research is evident here, as the political power of landholders within Brazil was magnified and exercised in part through shifting patterns of global trade and migration. A case could be made that, even if scholars do opt for an expansive definition of Reconstruction, it is still difficult to understand its precise impact on grain supply and coffee demand. Indeed, if the Civil War had not happened, and if then, presumably, there had been no U.S. Reconstruction at all, arguably coffee demand and grain production in the United States would have both been higher, if only because more Midwesterners would have been alive.

The volume’s second chapter, by Don H. Doyle, examines the diplomatic stances and actions of prominent U.S. politicians and generals during and after the Civil War. In particular, Doyle is concerned to highlight the anti-imperial streak running through U.S. politics at the end

of and then immediately after the Civil War, much of which reflected Unionist commitment to the Monroe Doctrine. The chapter offers a brief discussion of postbellum U.S. military prowess and the mourning of Lincoln's death by Afro-Cubans, European liberals, and others around the globe. It then turns to the context for this rising tide of anti-imperialism: the Spanish reoccupation of the Dominican Republic and the French invasion of and puppet regime in Mexico, the latter of which the Confederates flirted with and then, in some cases, fled to. That it was conservative, Catholic powers that orchestrated these incursions, and that they did so at a moment of historic weakness for the United States, made them all the more galling to Unionists. Doyle unpacks the competing sets of maneuvers by Andrew Johnson and Ulysses S. Grant, who were eager to confront Maximilian's forces and come to the aid of Mexican nationalist and liberal Benito Juárez, and those of Johnson's Secretary of State, William H. Seward, who favored diplomatic pressure on Napoleon III in France. Seward, an enigmatic figure who often divides scholarly opinion, proves to be the star of the show, getting the upper-hand through clever maneuvering and a dramatic appearance at a cabinet meeting. Seward also features prominently in Doyle's analysis because diplomatic historians of American empire often treat Seward's commercially-minded postbellum expansionism—he secured the purchase of Alaska, was in office during the occupation of Midway Island, and maneuvered for a foothold in the Caribbean—as setting the stage for America's embrace of overseas colonies at century's end. Far from being the forebearer of American empire, Doyle suggests, Seward's major postbellum policy achievement, the French withdrawal from Mexico, was anti-imperial. This constitutes a valuable intervention, although Doyle might have engaged more fully with Jay Sexton's recent analysis of Seward in the pages of the *Journal of the Civil War Era*, which found him to favor a reformed, progressive model of imperialism in parts of the Old World. Perhaps it is because Seward was both pro- and anti-imperial, and in complex ways, that he anticipates Americans' conflicted and inconsistent attitudes toward overseas colonies a few decades later.

The final chapter by Edward B. Rugemer examines the origins of and bloody reaction against the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica, as well as how news of these events filtered into the United States during a critical period of Reconstruction policy-making. Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's distinction between opinion formation and will formation, Rugemer sees the period of 1866 and 1867 as one in which Radical Republicans resolved to put a Reconstruction agenda into practice through the Civil Rights Act (1866) and Reconstruction Acts (1867). Like

Marquese, Rugemer stresses the interconnected nature of the new-world's slave and post-slavery societies, arguing that while Jamaican emancipation came earlier, subsequent developments there clearly spoke to and dovetailed with events in the United States. In both societies, a white landowning class used violence to quash political mobilization by former slaves, especially by targeting non-white political leaders. To illustrate this point, the chapter details the rebellion—including the political, social, and religious developments in post-emancipation Jamaica that led to it—and the violent reaction overseen by Jamaica's Governor Eyre. The chapter then turns to compiling a number of instances in which newspapers and politicians in the United States referenced the suppression of the rebellion right as they were formulating a response to the white supremacist violence the post-abolition South. This chapter brings us much closer to a robust understanding of how the Morant Bay Rebellion shaped opinion and legislation in the United States immediately following the Civil War. Yet the chapter could be more nuanced in its assessment of the political landscape within the United States. This is especially the case with its handling of the moderate faction of the Republican Party, which was arguably the dominant force in the shaping of congressional Reconstruction but which receive only passing mention in the essay. One would think that it was the moderates, not the radicals, who needed to be convinced that presidential Reconstruction was not working and that the federal government needed to take bolder action to defend southern freedpeople.

Collectively, these three chapters offer original contributions to Reconstruction scholarship and the transnational turn. They make for a short, engaging volume that highlights some of the various topics—economic history, geopolitics, and the hemispheric history of slavery and emancipation—that help us situate the Civil War-era United States in broader geographical contexts. Such a brief volume of course cannot tell the whole story. Still, the contributors might have better settled on a concrete definition of what Reconstruction was, and therefore how precisely these international topics help us understand it. That noted, this slim volume covers plenty of ground and will provide scholars, advanced undergraduates, and graduate students with much to ponder.

David Prior is an Assistant Professor of History at the University of New Mexico. He is the author of *Between Freedom and Progress: The Lost World of Reconstruction Politics* (LSU

Press, 2019) and the editor of *Reconstruction in a Globalizing World* (Fordham Univ. Press, 2018). He is currently working on an anthology entitled *Reconstruction and Empire*.