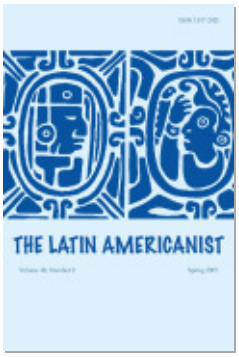
Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization

by Thomas Schoonover (review)



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Rock nuances previous interpretations highlighting the existence of interregional tensions and conflicts. He also gives us interesting insights on several important topics such as the nature of Argentine liberalism, the recurrent political and economic crisis of 1880 and 1890, the attitudes of upper-class women towards lay education and the formation of the UCR. Concerning this party, Rock stresses the continuity of its political practices with those of "political movements of the previous fifty years" although, following a more traditional view, he states that "the foremost novelty of Radicalism lay in its support from the middle class" (p.214).

But despite Rock's effort to provide us with a more balanced account the weakness of his work resides in the lack of references and dialogue with a growing literature on the period. Even though the author states his work benefited from the outgoing work of several outstanding younger Argentine scholars such as Paulo Alonso and Ariel de la Fuente, he avoids to discuss their arguments and findings. He therefore leaves out of the analysis relevant historiographical debates, such as of the significance of elections before Saénz Peña's reforms; the relationship between the *caudillos* and their followers and the nature of the Radical Party. Rock pays almost no attention to anyone or anything outside the *elites* circles, a vision that has been also challenged by recent historiography on nation building. His definition of *caudillo*—"political and military leaders associated with specific provinces, of the period 1860-75" (p.1)—seems also quite limited and would have benefited from further discussion and elaboration. Nevertheless, and in spite of the existence of these remaining topics and questions, Rock provides us with a comprehensive picture that certainly contributes to our understanding of this period and its main protagonists.

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Uncle Sam's War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization. **By Thomas Schoonover. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2003. 180p. $30.00.**

Most historians would agree that the War of 1898 was a

turning point in US history. Thomas Schoonover, however, challenges traditional historical interpretations that assert that US involvement in the War of 1898 was primarily motivated by a set of economic, national security, and ideological concerns having to do with US attempts to maintain hegemony in the Caribbean. Although US interest in the Caribbean was great, it was not the ultimate goal, but merely a means to an end. Schoonover, a professor of history at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, contends that the US became a global power during the 1890s and that this was by design, not by accident. It was the "consequence of a century of dreams and expansion" (p. 4). Westward expansion during the nineteenth century was not merely a search for land and freedom, it was a route to reaching the Pacific basin.

As such, interest in the Caribbean, starting with the voyages of Christopher Columbus, was the focus of European, then US, expansionist efforts to reach Asia and its potentially rich markets. According to Schoonover, US officials attempted to tie the North Atlantic to the Pacific region through "purchases, conquests, and diplomatic agreements regarding naval stations, harbors, and canal routes" from 1898 to 1917 (p. 116). In addition, the author contends that for the last five hundred years it has been sea power, rather than land power, that has been the ultimate deciding factor in which nations would be great powers and which nations would fail. As so eloquently pointed out in Alfred Thayer Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History* (1890), sea power was the ultimate determinant that separated great powers from lesser powers. Mahan also stated that control of the seas was contingent upon the construction of a canal in Central America that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Schoonover makes a connection between European motives for expansion during the sixteenth century and US motives for expansion during the nineteenth century. Both groups were motivated by "greed, competitiveness, and curiosity" (p. 3). Eager to reach Asia, US merchants and missionaries sought converts, luxury goods, raw materials, investment opportunities, and markets for manufactured goods. Technological developments during the nineteenth century—such as engineering skills to build the Panama Canal, submarine cable networks for telegraph lines, and massive iron and steel production—facilitated US penetration in the Pacific region. Nevertheless, unlike the Indians (who were decimated by European diseases) encountered in the Caribbean by Columbus, the Asians were able to mobilize nationalistic sentiment to try to resist Western attempts at imperialism at the end

of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. Schoonover highlights resistance to US and European imperialism in the Philippines and China. He claims that the revolution that overthrew China's Manchu dynasty in 1911 "can be interpreted as a dramatic end marker for the international history of the War of 1898" (p. 3).

Once US investors completed the Panama Railroad during the 1850s transit from the Atlantic seaboard to California was cheaper, faster, and safer. Before the US West was fully conquered, merchants and missionaries were attracted by the potential wealth of goods and souls in Asia. After China's defeat in the First Opium War (1838-1842), European powers and the US rapidly expanded into China. No nation wanted to be excluded from China's vast market. The US acquired Alaska and Midway in 1867 primarily to support trade with Asia. Although people dreamed of building a canal through Central America since the sixteenth century, it was not until 1878 that the French made the first attempt at building a canal in Colombia. Although the project was directed by Ferdinand de Lesseps, it was a failure and led to bankruptcy.

Schoonover examines three major crises during the 1890s that increased the momentum of US expansion in Asia. First, the economic depression unleashed in the US in 1893 convinced policy makers that new markets were essential to the reinvigoration of the US economy. Second, local independence movements launched in Cuba and the Philippines during the 1890s threatened to disrupt order and stability along the trade routes from the Atlantic to Asia. Third, vigorous attempts by the Europeans to carve out spheres of influence in China that might exclude US trade were viewed with suspicion by US policy makers and merchants. Schoonover points out that after the War of 1898, the US no longer viewed Spain and England as its principal rivals in China and the Pacific. The US did, however, look "at Russia, Germany, and Japan with greater distrust" (p. 85).

Although historians generally concentrate on Cuba in discussions of the War of 1898, the Pacific campaign was actually more costly, both in terms of human lives and expenditures. Whereas the Teller Amendment prohibited the US from annexing Cuba, there was no such provision regarding the Philippines. According to Schoonover, the acquisition of the Philippines "raised new questions of empire and colonialism" in the United States (p. 89). After Spain relinquished control of the Philippines, US officials refused to grant the local people independence. In

order to quell the insurrection, US officials placed over 250,000 Filipinos in concentration camps. This was the same policy followed by Spain's General Valeriano Weyler in Cuba in 1896. Both concentration camp experiences had the same result, massive death and hardship. Ironically, US newspapers employing yellow journalism had severely criticized Weyler's activities and President William McKinley used Spain's brutality in Cuba as one of his justifications for demanding Spain's removal from Cuba.

Although a very forward-looking and thought-provoking study, Schoonover falls into the quagmire of dependency theory at times, which should not be surprising to readers familiar with the scholarship of Walter LaFeber, who is frequently cited by the author and who wrote the foreword for the book. In an attempt to point out the origins of globalization, the author attempts to explain the consequences of metropole states intruding into peripheral states. Although US and European intrusions into the peripheral states were frequently motivated by greed, the notion that economic development by the metropole always results in underdevelopment in the periphery is unfounded. For example, Schoonover claims that the introduction of kerosene in China by Standard Oil caused tens of thousands of Chinese people, who had produced vegetable oils for fuel, to lose their economic livelihood. He concludes that the US exported "unemployment, social misery, and potential social disorder to China" (p. 7). This interpretation fails to take into consideration the advantages of kerosene over traditional vegetable oils and the possibility that those Chinese people who had previously been engaged in vegetable oil production could now dedicate their efforts to other economic sectors to make a contribution toward the national economy. In addition, the Chinese were not forced to use the kerosene. They made the decision to use the kerosene.

This brief, yet provocative study, raises more questions than it answers. This, however, is neither a fault nor a criticism of the book. The author, who is not trying to "tell the precise, detailed history of events," wants to "encourage further study, more questions, and additional debate" about the broader themes in US history (p. 1). Schoonover's study will surely provoke lively discussion among students and scholars.

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