

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush by Aims McGuinness

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nitrates, Colonel John North, helped by friends and associates, formed the Nitrate Trust in London to address these problems.

Some of these essays lend support to the concept of “gentlemanly capitalism,” prominent in recent discussions of imperial expansion, which stresses London’s key role as a source of mining investment. Certainly, mining activity could be intimately associated with overseas territorial acquisitions, especially by Britain, fretful about the supply and control of gold. Several contributors (including Dumett, Phillips, and Monteon) emphasize the influence of a mining entrepreneurial elite in the process of imperial expansion. But while acknowledging the City of London’s importance to global mining, this volume challenges some previous assumptions by emphasizing the significance of *local* financial centers to mining development in the United States and Western Australia, and Colin Newbury challenges any notion of centralized control from London. Moreover, as this collection makes very clear, in gauging the links between mining and imperial growth, it is necessary to remember that the tycoons considered here were engaged autonomously in building their own business “empires.”

Scholars in a number of fields will find much interest in these essays, covering mining history in all its forms, but also business–government relations and the connections between mining development and territorial expansion. Revisiting some old debates, they also open fresh and intriguing avenues for future research.

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Aims McGuinness. *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. xiii + 249 pp. ISBN 978-0-8014-4521-7, \$35.00 (cloth); 978-0-8014-7538-2, \$19.95 (paper).

On April 15, 1856, in Panama City a drunken American refused to pay a Panamanian melon salesman for a slice of watermelon and cursed him. Each brandished a weapon, and a riot ensued, in which Panamanians attacked Americans traveling by the Panama Railway on their way to California. Fifteen, possibly nineteen, passengers died and 50 were wounded, and one Panamanian is said to have lost his life. This “Tajada de Sandía” incident, as it is known in Panamá, or “Melón de Panamá,” in Colombia, provoked a serious conflict between

the United States and the national government of Colombia, and in different ways troubled Panamá.

A number of works have been written on the Panama Railway and passage to California. But Aims McGuinness has made a unique contribution in exploring the social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions underlying the upheaval in 1856 and responses to it. On another plane he discusses the Panama Railway as an instrument of empire and as a causal agent in the conflict. The book is a wonderful piece of historical detective work, piecing together disparate information from a number of archives. It deals with many different topics in an inspired piece of analysis and interpretation. It is a diamond cut with many facets, glistens with insights, ironies, and/or ambiguities in practically every paragraph. A review of this brevity cannot begin to capture all its virtues; it can only present the bare bones.

The book has a number of interwoven themes. First, the Gold Rush. Travel across the Isthmus was difficult for Americans bound for California from 1848 into the early 1850s. People and goods were carried overland by a combination of mules and human porters and by water in canoes. Poor Panamanians, knowing their clients were desperate to get to California, exacted their price. Americans with fixed notions of racial status resented the costs, but also, as McGuinness emphasizes, were upset by what they perceived to be a disruption of the (or their) proper social order, and expressed their anger in arrogance and sometimes cruelty.

A complementary theme is the role of the railway. Poor Panamanians who were making good money by moving passengers across the Isthmus were disinclined to work on railway construction, forcing the railway to bring workers from Jamaica, the Colombian mainland, China, and other places. The Panamanian porters and boatmen viewed the railway as a threat, while the railway, like American travelers, was openly contemptuous of their Panamanian competitors. When the railway was completed, suddenly the porters and boatmen had no work and deeply resented the railway.

McGuinness also emphasizes the Panama Railway as an agent of empire; indeed, in a sense it was in itself an empire. In addition to transforming Panamá and impoverishing its economy, the railway's company town, Colón, called Aspinwall by Americans, was an early example of an American enclave. McGuinness further notes that Americans have tended to see the period of American expansive aggression in the first half of the nineteenth century as something disconnected from the late stage imperialism of the 1890s. The conflict in Panama, like the filibusters in Nicaragua who impinged on Panama, and American aggressions in Asia, show that American aggression did not stop with the Mexican War. McGuinness also stresses Latin

American reactions to North American expansion from the Mexican War to the mistreatment of Chileans and Mexicans in California to the filibusters in Nicaragua, all viewed as threatening to South Americans, particularly on the Pacific coast.

The theme of race runs throughout the book—not only American racism but in Colombian elites as well. McGuinness discusses the racial contempt and racial fears of Colombian elites, but he also notes that Colombian Liberals at least had abolished slavery in 1851–1852. Further, their Constitution of 1853 had instituted universal male suffrage, so that at least formally blacks in Colombia had rights that their counterparts in the United States did not. McGuinness in his effort to whack the Americans with Colombian liberalism sometimes gilds the Colombian lily, but he also does make clear that while Colombian liberal elites looked to blacks as political clients and allies, they also, in private, were deeply racist.

McGuinness also interestingly links the aggressions of Americans in California, the filibusters in Nicaragua, and American aggressiveness in Panama. The Panama Railway, presumably an exemplar of progress, employed vigilantes to solve some of its problems in Panama, and in many ways deliberately undercut and undermined their Panamanian competitors. And the United States Navy found itself rescuing the filibusters in their time of decline.

McGuinness' multifaceted work is part of a wave of analyses of the cultural aspects of American imperialism. His book, in my opinion, has achieved a place of distinction among them.

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Laura Ugolini. *Men and Menswear: Sartorial Consumption in Britain, 1880–1939*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2007. xiii + 292 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-0384-9, \$124.95 (hardcover).

The purpose of Laura Ugolini's thoughtful and well-argued volume *Men and Menswear* is to explore the relationship between men, manliness, and consumption of clothing items in Britain in the sixty years preceding World War II. Ugolini, the Director of the Centre for the History of Retailing and Distribution at the University of Wolverhampton (U.K.), examines how notions of manliness intersected with men's