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Review

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1980). These suggest the range and durability of interests that led him to research and write *Fortune's a River*, a job he has done well.

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Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush. By Aims McGuinness. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008. xiii + 249 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00, £17.95.)

In *Path of Empire*, Aims McGuinness delves into the often noted, but rarely explored, history of Panama's transformation during the California gold rush. Drawing on U. S., Panamanian, and Colombian archives, McGuinness has written a history that highlights the transnational dimensions of the gold rush and shows how the discovery of gold in California affected Panama's political and economic development. He argues that the California gold rush not only defined mid-nineteenth-century Panama, but also provided the foundation for future relations between Panama and the United States.

Focusing on the years between 1848 and 1856, McGuinness demonstrates how the United States' continental expansion to California depended on an early form of overseas, economic imperialism in Panama. He argues that the tens of thousands of Americans who crossed the isthmus en route to the gold fields first created opportunities for Panamanian merchants and transportation-providers, which then led to the arrival of the American railroad and steamship companies that displaced them. With an emphasis on communication, by which he means "the circulation of goods, people, and information," McGuinness describes how class, racial, and nationalist tensions rose to the surface in the struggles over the control of movement on the isthmus (p. 9).

In the second half of the book, McGuinness shifts to a discussion of sovereignty. He focuses on how the presence of American travelers, capitalists, and gunboats shaped political developments and contributed to the formation of nascent national and pan-Latin American identities in Panama. McGuinness draws on both the writings of Panamanian political theorists and histories of popular resistance. In particular, he emphasizes the importance of a conflict known as "El Incidente de la Tajada de Sandía" (The Incident of the Watermelon Slice) in which a dispute between a drunken American and a Panamanian fruit vendor led to violent clashes between Panamanians and American travelers in April 1856. This event revealed the racial and nationalist tensions of gold rush Panama and became a lasting symbol of Panamanian resistance to U. S. imperialism.

By the conclusion of *Path of Empire*, McGuinness makes clear that the story of La Tajada de Sandía is central to the histories of both the California gold rush and the formation of national identity and anti-American sentiment in Panama. Although these histories do not always fit together neatly, *Path of Empire's* greatest strength derives from McGuinness's willingness to follow archival leads and bring them together. *Path of Empire* makes an important contribution to the historiography of the California gold rush, Panama, and U. S. expansion and intervention in Latin America. It promises not only to expand scholars' knowledge of their fields, but to challenge them to engage previously overlooked transnational connections.

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