

Ninkovich, Frank A.: *Global Dawn. The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865-1890*. London: Harvard University Press 2009. ISBN: 978-0-6740-3504-1; 440 S.

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In *Global Dawn*, Frank Ninkovich examines the international outlook of educated middle and upper class Americans during the second half of the 19th century, the so-called Gilded Age. Based on an extensive analysis of liberal journals such as *The Nation*, *The North American Review*, or *The Atlantic Monthly*, the author argues that they projected an intense internationalist worldview during an era which he characterizes as the golden age of political isolationism. In the short run those global outlooks did little to alter the nation's self-absorption; in the long run they provided the discursive cultural foundations for America's rise to world power along an ideological trajectory of liberal-democratic internationalism: „These were the years in which the cultural soil was prepared and planted with internationalist ideas that would germinate and eventually blossom in the 1890s and beyond“ (p. 15).

The universalist outlook of Gilded Age liberals and their insatiable appetite for information about global trends reflected attempts to come to terms with the accelerating process of global integration through increased trade, cultural relations, and innovations in communication and transportation technologies. According to Ninkovich, the idea of 'civilization' provided the analytical framework for such discussions which he interprets as a conceptual precursor to modernization and globalization.

While the term was diffuse and carried a variety of connotations, most Gilded Age liberals understood 'civilization' as a historical process through which industrial and non-industrial societies would increasingly develop in convergent ways towards a global society characterized by an integrated economy, a universal culture, and the worldwide spread of democracy. This positivist outlook, however, did not automatically translate into uniformly optimistic evaluations of the state of

world affairs.

Although liberal observers had much praise for international developments they also identified potential repercussions at home and roadblocks abroad which might derail or delay further global integration. At home this ambivalence was most poignant in discussions about the benefits and dangers of further integration. On the one hand, liberals worried that the accelerated inclusion of the United States in the network of industrial societies might make the country more vulnerable to economic and political shockwaves from abroad; on the other hand, liberals felt the increasing need to contain the spread of economic and political nationalism in Gilded Age America by framing domestic debates over issues such as education, civil service reform, tariffs and copyright laws in international contexts.

Liberal commentators held similarly ambivalent views about developments abroad. Despite admiration for European cultural achievements for example, they found the stubborn resilience of monarchism and conservatism in the Old World a disappointment. The failure of republicanism to take hold in Europe was explained with cultural shortcomings and indicated that industrial modernity did not automatically translate into the rise of political democracy.

In the Middle East, liberals identified religion as an impediment to modernization. Most commentators recognized the civilizational contributions of Islamic societies but for example perceived rampant religious fanaticism and revivalism as indications of the shallowness of the Ottoman Empire's reform agenda. Asia on the other hand presented two alternative developments for liberal observers: while China was diagnosed with cultural stagnation which impeded its ability to reform, Japan received praise for the willingness of a tradition-laden culture to incorporate Western knowledge on its path to modernization.

According to Ninkovich, race played only a marginal role in such liberal debates about the civilizational future of Asia and the Middle East. He acknowledges that while the second half of the 19th century witnessed increasing global integration, it also entrenched brutal regimes of racial hierarchies by which

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many contemporaries explained differences between perceived superiority and inferiority, between progress and backwardness. How then could American liberals: "... be simultaneously racist and universalist without fatally compromising their beliefs and self-integrity" (p. 138)?

The author argues that liberal commentators, while intensely ethnocentric, rejected a biological in favor of a cultural conception of race which was deemed "... extremely flexible in leaving open the possibility of cultural advance to civilized levels while not excluding the possibility of doomed outcomes" (p. 230). Liberals suggested in Lamarckian fashion that civilizational 'uplift' was a possibility but also a pre-requisite for the ultimate breakthrough of a truly global civilization. This 'uplift' had no tolerance for pluralism or cultural relativism but demanded the complete voluntary or forced acculturation of those identified as 'backward' and culturally 'inferior'. Ninkovich writes: „Civilization thus stood for a process of ecological simplification whereby the number of vital cultures would be reduced drastically through radical acculturation. The loss of cultural identity, whether through mixing, assimilation, or extinction, might be regrettable, but it was a historical fact of life whose unblinking acceptance was the price of progress" (p. 164).

In addition to race, religion, and reform-resistant cultures, liberal observers identified the quest for empire as a fourth possible impediment on the way to global integration. They interpreted the European competition for colonies as a threat to international stability and recognized that power differentials between industrial and pre-industrial societies were being entrenched in the quest for empire. Although they held little sympathy for empire as an exercise in exploitation they nevertheless supported the supposedly civilizing mission of the colonial projects. While their criticisms of imperialism were more conditional than fundamental Ninkovich emphasizes that Gilded Age liberals had little interest and enthusiasm for an American empire.

What was the impact of those liberal global outlooks on U.S. foreign relations? In the short run their political impact was negligible; in the long run, however, they mattered,

"...because they provided a cultural foundation on which a foreign policy structure was eventually being built in the twentieth century" (pp. 332f.). It is in this interpretation of culture as a causal force in the emergence of American internationalism and globalism that *Global Dawn* makes sophisticated conceptual contributions to the historiography of U.S. foreign relations. While Ninkovich admits that the short-term political influence of those liberal worldviews was marginal he emphasizes instead that their long term contribution to a cultural current of global outlooks was essential to the rise of 20th century liberal-democratic internationalism.

Like any important book, *Global Dawn* strikes the right balance between empirical specificity and conceptual generalizations which leaves room for questions and further discussion. The author's characterization of the Gilded Age as a period of political isolationism for example strikes this reviewer as misleading. While the United States was undoubtedly preoccupied by domestic problems during this era, its traditional mantra of non-entanglement was increasingly subverted by an active and interventionist foreign policy in Latin America (which is surprisingly absent from the book's discussions) and the Pacific.

In addition, it is also debatable if the Gilded Age constituted a dawn of globalism in cultural and ideational discourses on America's position in the world or not simply a continuation of a long-term and very traditional concern with the global which accompanied and shaped the United States from its founding days. If 20th century internationalism emerged historically "... because it had roots in the past that allowed for future growth" (p. 331) one might ask if the United States from Thomas Paine's „idealistic internationalism" to Jefferson's empire of liberty to John Quincy Adams and Henry Seward was not always conceived as a global project to reconcile nation-building with global ambition.

Finally, the book also leaves room for dissent when it comes to the importance of race and empire to U.S. history. Both were more deeply woven into the fabric of American society and politics than the discourses of Gilded Age liberals suggest. Ninkovich untangles their complex discussions of 'civili-

zation', race, and empire with great sophistication. And yet, their insights, observations and outlooks are contrasted by much of 19th century American history. As the creation of a transcontinental empire with hemispheric ambitions and the simultaneous internal colonization of Native Americans, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans amply illustrates, race and empire were deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the nation. Neither Lamarckian notions of 'civilization' as an inclusive vision of global integration nor the liberal conceptualization of race as a cultural marker should distract from their hierarchical, violent, and often destructive nature. Culture and power, as *Global Dawn* so eloquently demonstrates, are, after all, intimately connected.

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