

The primary audience for Tyrrell's book – scholars and students of US history – should be nudged away from insularity by its engaging details. Yet global historians will also be interested in Tyrrell's incidental discussion of American variations on world patterns: the factors that spurred US economic development, comparative analysis of immigration to the US, the course of US state-building, and the workings of US empire. Embedded within the book's transnational narrative are thoughtful mini-essays that link American developments to those elsewhere and offer comparative assessments.

*Transnational nation* will help world historians to understand better the vexed and conflicted history of the US relationship to global engagement. And, while the specific American combination of global pull and national insularity may be unique, its broad outlines are not, as the histories of China, Japan, Russia, or England would show. Without intending to, *Transnational nation* provides an attractive template for producing a globally-informed history of any modern great power.

### **L'Esprit économique impérial (1830–1970): groupes de pression & réseaux du patronat colonial en France & dans l'empire**

*Edited by Hubert Bonin, Catherine Hodeir, and Jean-François Klein. Paris: Publications de la Société Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 2008. Pp. 844. Paperback €70.00, ISBN 978-2-85970-037-9.*

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For decades after John Hobson's analysis of the 'economic taproots' of colonialism and Lenin's definition of imperialism as the 'highest stage of capitalism' at the beginning of the twentieth century, through Robinson and Gallagher's 'economics of free trade', down to 'development theory' in the 1960s, economic and commercial arguments dominated much of the debate on European overseas expansion. Many historians disagreed with such perspectives about the primacy of commerce, however, suggesting that politics (and geopolitics) played the key role in the conquest of much of the earth's surface by European powers and other imperial states, such as the United States and Japan. Since the

1970s, with the cultural turn in history, emphasis has shifted to the realm of ideas and representations as the substructure for imperialism.

Now there appears to be a rediscovery of the economics of empire, with new works on particular businesses, patterns of trade, and commercial relations between the colonizing and colonized countries. This huge book – it weighs several kilograms – is one example, bringing together the work of many French historians and studies taken from recent doctoral theses. The themes, periods, and places covered are numerous in the thirty-odd chapters, and there is a lengthy introduction and no fewer than four conclusions. The chronology ranges from French economics and the colonization of Algeria in the 1830s through to the war in Indochina in the 1950s. There are specific chapters on those areas; on other French colonial regions in sub-Saharan Africa, Tunisia, Djibouti, and Reunion Island; on French spheres of commercial and financial influence in China and Egypt; and on metropolitan France.

The thrust of the book, as the subtitle indicates, is on commercial networks that extended into the world of politics and even education. A particularly useful section provides cases studies of colonial activities undertaken by the business elites in Bordeaux, Marseille, Toulon, Lyon, Le Havre, Mulhouse, and the industrial Nord region of France. Other chapters treat organizations such as the Paris Chamber of Commerce, the Comité des forges (the syndicate of mine-owners), and the *instituts coloniaux* (lobbying and colonial promotion institutes set up around France). Several chapters look at theorists of colonial expansion, such as Paul Leroy-Beaulieu, and one examines the teaching of 'colonial economics' in French universities and schools. One author looks at the links between missionaries and capitalists, another at the commercial relations between France and Germany in the colonial world.

Trying to calculate whether colonialism did or did not return a profit to the great powers, at the end of the balance sheet, is a difficult and ultimately fruitless effort. Jacques Marseille, in *Empire colonial et capitalisme français: histoire d'un divorce* (1984), doubted that, in a general sense, imperialism was worth it for the country as a whole, though he said that particular sectors and companies did make substantial profits. The contributors to this volume do not reject that thesis, but they develop a subtle analysis of the various institutions, individuals, and firms closely tied to the colonial enterprise and the ways in which their interests were interlinked. Bankers, merchants, and other businessmen frequently promoted colonialism,

but they faced enormous challenges in trying to gain profits – problems in raising capital and obtaining labour, the lack of infrastructure overseas, commercial rivalries (both among French firms and with foreign competitors), and the reluctance of the French state, for a long part of the colonial era, to commit vast resources to distant domains with occasionally dubious potential. For some, colonialism was a true vocation and commercial *raison d'être*, while others opportunistically took advantage of access to the raw materials and markets provided overseas. The end of empire did not spell the ruin of these interests; indeed, many French companies and investors proved very savvy in being able to restructure their activities, redirect their energies, and sometimes simply retain their interests in newly independent states (behaviour that, of course, gave rise to charges of neo-colonialism).

Though this dense volume may overwhelm readers with detail (enlivened by good illustrations), and few will have a need or desire to read the collection from start to finish, the case studies and 'micro-histories' relativize the role not only of the economic stakes in empire but also of imperial activities in metropolitan business strategies. They also show the benefits of a discussion of colonialism that moves away from overarching theories to specific examples, and from focus on great entities such as the state and capitalism (in a systemic sense) to attempts to trace and decipher the complex arterial and capillary networks that established themselves in the colonies. This work valuably relates the colonial period to the wider narrative, before and after the empire, of French economic history.

### Britain, the empire, and the world at the Great Exhibition of 1851

*Edited by Jeffrey A. Auerbach and Peter H. Hoffenberg*  
Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. Pp xviii + 219. 14 b/w illustrations. Hardback £55.00, ISBN 978-0-7546-6241-9.

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London's 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of All Nations, more familiarly known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition, has come to embody Victorianism

considered both as a cultural and as an ideological system. From the building's construction and design through to the contents of its multiple naves, the whole show brimmed with confidence, faith in progress, and commitment to empire. Over the years, much has been written about the Crystal Palace Exhibition and this collection of essays is a pretty fair representation of many of the central questions that scholars are asking about this event.

The book opens with a brief introduction by Jeffrey A. Auerbach, which insists that 'Crystal Palace displays were the product not of the organisers' totalizing vision, but of negotiation and compromise between British organizers and potential exhibitors around the globe' (p. xiii). The result, Auerbach writes, 'was a truly global and not just a British event' (p. xviii). The essays that follow more or less stick with this theme. Paul Young, Kylie Message, and Ewan Johnston interrogate the exhibition for the light that it sheds on Victorian-era globalization as well as on shifting race and class relationships brought about by industrialization and imperial expansion.

The remaining essays explore the world on display at the exhibition. Louise Purbrick writes insightfully about how exhibits of Irish lace, linen, and art reflected deep divisions about Ireland's national status: 'nationhood was either premised upon the modernizing efforts of industry and could be achieved at some easily deferred moment in the future, or it had existed when Irish land was productive and it could reclaimed' (p. 75). Ewan Johnston and Peter Hoffenberg write expansively about New Zealand's and Australia's displays, noting how exhibits 'addressed, although not always reconciled, the often conflicting sources of ethnic political, social, regional, and religious identity' (p. 120).

Contributors to this volume do not limit their focus to displays from the British Empire. David Fisher connects nineteenth-century Russia's desire to modernize and be respected by the West with Russian efforts today to host a full-scale, universal-class world expo. Modernization is also the theme of essays by John R. Davis and Debbie Challis about German and Greek exhibits at the Crystal Palace Exhibition. Where German exhibits stressed technology and technology transfer, the Greek exhibit – the first major representation of Greece as an independent nation-state – pegged its modern identity to its classical past (a strategy that continued to unfold at subsequent exhibitions in the reconstructed Crystal Palace in Sydenham). Ambiguity also characterized the representations from Turkey and