



**Gretchen Murphy.** *Hemispheric Imaginings: The Monroe Doctrine and Narratives of U.S. Empire.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2005. xi + 195 pp. \$21.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3496-5; \$74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-3484-2.

**Reviewed by** Martin Haas (History Department, Adelphi University)

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“The past is not dead, it is not even past,” William Faulkner famously wrote in *Requiem for a Nun*.<sup>[1]</sup> Gretchen Murphy’s *Hemispheric Imaginings* argues that the past is not only alive but protean; seminal historical concepts are constantly re-imagined to reflect the political and cultural environment of the present. Murphy’s case study traces the evolving understanding of the ideas embodied in the Monroe Doctrine from two years before its articulation in James Monroe’s annual message before Congress on December 2, 1823 to Max Boot’s 2003 *Financial Times* editorial declaring that George W. Bush’s policy of preemption “merely expanded the Monroe Doctrine to a global scale” (p. 98). While beginning in the early nineteenth century when the American empire was primarily a continental dream, *Hemispheric Imaginings* concludes in the twenty-first century when U.S. stewardship of the western hemisphere is, in the age of globalization, globalized.

Murphy, an assistant professor of English at the University of Minnesota, Morris, applies interdisciplinary analysis toward understanding the changing meanings of the Monroe Doctrine in narratives of U.S. imperialism. In her introduction, Murphy clearly states that the book “is guided by the premise that the separation between politics and culture that structures many disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences is a false

one” (p. 10). To achieve a broader vision Murphy applies literary analysis to probe political documents such as John Quincy Adams’s July 4, 1821 speech and the Grover Cleveland/Richard Olney “twenty-inch gun” letter of response to England during the Venezuelan crisis of 1895. She argues persuasively that political and diplomatic discourse cannot be separated from the cultural milieu but reflects the world view of the times. To illustrate this theme, Murphy pairs political statements with contemporaneous literary works from both high-brow and middle-brow culture. John Q. Adams’s Fourth of July speech, for example, is matched and interrelated to Lydia Maria Child’s novel *Hobomok* (1824) and the Cleveland/Olney letter is juxtaposed to Richard Harding Davis’s best-selling novel *Soldiers of Fortune* (1897). “I see literature,” the author proclaims, “as a force that tested, modified, and made more sense of narratives that would influence the perceptions of both policy makers and the popular mind” (p. 18). In addition, the opening chapter analyzes maps and political cartoons as other mirrors into the cultural perception of the time.

For Murphy the Monroe Doctrine is a key to the construction and continuous renovation of a national narrative attempting to resolve important tensions and ambivalence within U.S. culture. Throughout the book Murphy explores the changing imaginings of spatial bound-

aries: “we have a long history of ambivalently locating the United States within the uncertain boundaries of the nation, the continent, the hemisphere and the globe” (p. 31). On the level of geographic imaginings, for example, interpretations of the Monroe Doctrine reveal the paradox of perceiving the United States as part of the Americas and, at the same time of conceiving the United States as America. Beyond the geographical, the books and speeches illustrate further contradiction in U.S. ideology. One contradiction that appears throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century is that “the city on a hill” was based on the ideology of racial hierarchy.

Murphy argues, with some truth, that historians have often conceptualized diplomatic history as rigidly compartmentalized diplomatic exchanges without a broader cultural context. A closer examination of the historiography reveals a more sophisticated understanding. William Appleman Williams notes the importance of a nation’s *weltanschauung* in understanding history and, for example, analyzes Mark Twain’s Pudden-head Wilson in *The Contours of American History* (1961). Walter Lafeber keynotes *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (1984) with a quote from Robert Stone’s novel *A Flag for Sunrise* (1981) to reveal the existential context of foreign relations. George F. Kennan recommended that American diplomats immerse themselves in the literature of the nation in which they serve to fully comprehend the culture of other countries. Murphy’s first chapter pairs John Quincy Adams’s 1821 Fourth of July speech, when he famously declared that the United States “goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy” with Lydia Maria Child’s novel *Hobomok* (p. 36). In Murphy’s perspective both the political speech and the work of fiction seek to negotiate the new nation’s hemispheric imaginings as both New World- and Old World-centered. Both Adams’s address (and the later Monroe Doctrine) and Child’s novel critique European colonialism while championing United States imperialism. In both Adams’s address and Child’s novel, moreover, Native Americans enter the narrative as a means to differentiate two types of domination; the oppressive methods of European colonialism are unfavorably compared to paternalistic imperialism whereby the United States regulated the domestic geographical sphere. In her conclusion to the chapter, Murphy argues that Adams and Child encouraged a “motivated blindness” to the contradictions between racism and protective paternalistic imperialism (p. 60). But as Michael Rogin argues in *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (1975), the violent underside of paternalism rationalized,

on conscious and unconscious levels, Indian removal and destruction.

Murphy continues to the 1850s which she views through the lens of Francis Lister Hank’s account of Admiral Perry’s “opening of Japan” and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of Seven Gables* (1851). In her analysis, both works attempt to resolve the tension of domestic expansion, particularly the impact of the transportation/communications revolution, and the outward thrust of global reach. At times, however, as traditional diplomatic history has shown, the two trends were complimentary. Norman Graebner’s *Empire on the Pacific* (1983) clearly demonstrates that expansion on the Pacific coast was self-consciously a means to obtain harbors for commercial expansion across the Pacific Ocean. Still, Murphy’s idea that the Monroe Doctrine both expanded the national geographical imagination and limited it to the New World is intriguing. Turning to a Latin American viewpoint of U.S. hegemonic ideation toward South America and the Caribbean, chapter 3 analyzes two contrasting visions opposing U.S. imperialism and formulating, in Murphy’s words, a “geographic morality” (p. 98). The two authors under review are the Cuban poet, journalist, and revolutionary Jose Marti and the Mexican novelist Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton. Both opposed U.S. hegemonic influence but from different political, social, and cultural perspectives. Marti sought integration of all classes in his strategy for achieving Cuban independence from both Spain and the United States. Ruiz de Burton, on the other hand, seeks to offset United States influence by enhancing traditional European influences. She rejects the traditional literary trope of ridiculing European pretensions and influence as potentially corrupting Nature’s North American noblemen and noblewomen. The idea of separate spheres of pure Americans and corrupt Europeans was formalized in the Monroe Doctrine’s declaration that “the political system of the allied powers is essentially different from that of America.”[2] Ruiz de Burton’s novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) argues that Mexico should embrace the cultural influence of Europe. She “inverts” the trope of nineteenth-century plays and novels such as Anna Cora Mowitt’s wonderful comic play *Fashion* (1845) in which the hero frontiersman Adam Trueman warns the Tiffany family and their sycophants, such as the poet T. Tennyson Twinkle, against the dangers of snobbish European culture. Ruiz de Burton looks to Europe as a countervailing influence to U.S. hegemony; Marti embraces the participation of all Americans—white, black, Native American—in his revolutionary plans for Cuba. Both seek freedom from United

States hegemony and both counter the precepts of late nineteenth-century U.S. ideology.

Murphy's concluding analytical chapter studies two manifestos of the new American empire of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when "the Doctrine assumed its status as a sacred national tradition and cherished document, akin to the Declaration of Independence and Washington's Farewell Address" (p. 120). In particular, Murphy examines secretary of state Richard Olney's correspondence with British foreign minister Lord Salisbury on the border dispute between Great Britain and Venezuela, and Richard Harding Davis's best-selling novel *Soldiers of Fortune*. Both sources manifest and emphasize, in subtle ways, racial and economic elements of the Monroe Doctrine. Olney's letters emphasize the advance of "civilization," a code word for racial superiority and economic power. This idea was formalized in Theodore Roosevelt's famous 1904 corollary to the Monroe Doctrine which stated "a general loosening of civilized society, may in America, as elsewhere, ultimately require intervention by some civilized nation," i.e., the United States.[3] Intervention had occurred informally during the filibuster era of the 1850s, most notably with William Walker. Richard Harding Davis's novel brings the ideology of U.S. stewardship of Latin America into the dawn of the twentieth century with a distinct economic emphasis. It is difficult to overestimate Davis's influence as a bylined reporter and war correspondent, popular short-story writer, best-selling novelist, and world traveler who authored successful travelogues. By the last decade of the nineteenth century he was as known to Americans as Tom Brokaw, akin to what Dan Rather has been until recently. Even his image was familiar because Davis posed for the Gibson Man who accompanied Charles Gibson's iconic Gibson Girl. A survey of Davis's travelogues reveals the late nineteenth-century pattern of hemispheric imagining expanding from the North American continent to World Empire. In his travelogue—*The West from a Car Window* (1982)—Davis wrote from the point of view of a touring Easterner carrying with him cultural impressions of the West gleaned from railroad maps, newspapers, popular history, James Fenimore Cooper's novels, and the short stories of Bret Harte. Crossing the country in the throes of a snowy winter in search of an idealized West, Davis discovered a "mild-west show." [4] With compelling anecdotes, Davis's book reinforced the Turner thesis that with the closing of the frontier the first great epic of American history had ended.

Unlike Frederick Jackson Turner, Davis turned to the

Caribbean for redemption. As Murphy notes, his travelogue *Three Gringos in Venezuela and Central America* (1896) posits the dual ideas of Latin America as a cultural and ideological inheritor of U.S. republican revolutionary impulse—all statues of Simon Bolivar, he reports, wear a miniature portrait of George Washington—and as a land of racially inferior people unable to exploit their abundant natural resources. With total conviction born of the nineteenth-century belief in racial and religious hierarchy Davis instructs the reader: "The Central-Americans are like a gang of semi-barbarians in a beautifully furnished house, of which they can understand neither its possibilities of comfort nor its use. They are the dogs in the manger among nations. Nature has done so much there is little left for man to do, but it will have to be some other man than a native-born Central-American who is to do it" (p. 147).

This attitude informs his 1897 best-selling novel *Soldiers of Fortune*. When Robert Clay sails to the fictional Caribbean nation of Olchano he perceives a virgin land awaiting the skills of Northern entrepreneurial energy. After discovering mineral resources, Clay announces that the natives have "let the chance go." [5] Within months the mines are fully up and running. In a Whitmanesque aphrodisiac homage to progress, Davis describes a "spectacle of desperate activity" where "panting steam drills" shake solid rock with "fierce short blows" and the warning whistles of the dummy-engines drove away the accumulated silence of centuries (p. 126). The Monroe Doctrine, Murphy argues, has transcended the political and become economic.

Murphy's substantive chapters concentrate on the nineteenth century. In a coda she suggests that in the twentieth century the Monroe Doctrine expanded beyond the geographic imaginings of the hemisphere onto the world at large. She notes that the ideology of this global projection was always a generative undercurrent in the Monroe Doctrine, like a DNA blueprint evolving over time. Murphy keynotes her concluding chapter, for example, with a quote from Woodrow Wilson's 1917 speech to the Senate proposing the creation of the League of Nations: "the nations should with one accord adopt the doctrine of President Monroe as the doctrine of the world" (p. 130). In her analysis Murphy provides important insights into the past and demonstrates how the ideology of the Monroe Doctrine impacts on the present.

#### Notes

[1]. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1959), 210.

- [2]. James Monroe, *Seventh Annual Address to Congress*, December 2, 1823. [3]. The National Archives and Michael R. Beschloss, *Our Documents: 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137.
- [4]. Richard Harding Davis, *The West from a Car Window* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1892), 6.
- [5]. Richard Harding Davis, *Soldiers of Fortune* (New York: Scribner, 1906), 50.

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