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Amy S. Greenberg. *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire.* Cambrigde: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 344 S. $27.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-60080-4.

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A. Greenberg: Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire

Amy S. Greenberg explores gendered interpretations of âmanifest destinyâ particularly in the two decades between the U.S.-Mexican and the Civil Wars. She does so by focusing on âaggressive expansionismâ in the âcontroversial but widespreadâ form of filibustering. This âfilibusterâ should not be mistaken for a âlong-winded speech in Senateâ but instead referred to âmen who on their own initiative went to war against foreign nations, often in the face of open hostility from their own governmentâ (p. 5), which suggests a potential of conflict between individual and national priorities. Yet in addition to that, in the language of contemporaries such as Sam Houston, âannexation was not only a national matter, it was a personal one as well. The national victory could, and would, correspond with a âdelightfulâ personal victory for the man willing to make the trip southâ (p. 89). In other words, American expansionism in individual cases is examined as a metaphor of for example the Mexican woman who succumbs to American masculinity. A most recent overview of the history of American masculinities is given by a collection of articles edited by: Martschukat, JÃ¼rgen; Stieglitz, Olaf (Hrsg.), VÃ¤ter, Soldaten, Liebhaber. MÃ¤nner und MÃ¤nnlichkeit in der Geschichte Noramerikas. Ein Reader, Bielefeld 2007.

Of course, this âconnection between masculinity and national strength is an ancient one, and well before the period under consideration in this study people at war have critiqued their opponents in gendered termsâ (p. 26). However, â[w]hat is notable about the period between the U.S.-Mexico War and the Civil War [â¦] is the extent to which gendered language and assumptions continued to frame the popular understanding of expansionism during a period when the United States was not at warâ (pp. 26-27). Hence, in mid-19th century America privately organized âexcursionsâ into Latin America filled an âaggressive voidâ in times of peace.

This urge to conquer does not conform to a traditional historiography that proclaimed an âabsence of empireâ in nineteenth century U.S.-history. Instead, Greenberg follows a different line of thinking, arguing that âdifferences between Britainâs empire and the immediate prospects for an American empire were far less distinct during the 1850s than was later assertedâ (p. 19). The thought might be pushed as far as to question the concept of âAmerican exceptionalismâ â is the way in which for example native Americans were treated strikingly different from European forms of imperialism? Did American imperialism start only with the advent of the 20th â the âAmericanâ â century and the creation of a âcultural imperialismâ that found expression in the global âvictoryâ of Coca Cola and McDonalds?

The monograph is structured into seven chapters plus introduction, whereby the final chapter on âAmerican Manhood and War, 1860 to the Presentâ serves as a conclusion above all; however, Greenberg devotes merely the last two paragraphs to a few observations regarding more recent examples of âbelligerent foreign policy.â Referring to Alexander DeConde DeConde, Alexander, Presidential Machismo. Executive Authority, Military

Intervention and Foreign Relations, Boston 2000. she states: âMany Americans still believe that the superiority of their nation resides in its military power and the machismo of its leadership, while U.S. political leaders justify preemptive military strikes against foreign governments on the basis of the superiority of American culture, economics, and political formsâ (p. 282). One might argue that the âto the presentâ-aspect announced in the chapter heading might have been treated a bit too stepmotherly. Then again, the entire study invites a comparison with earlier and later periods in U.S. history; an undertaking which, however, in all actuality would probably require a separate study. Still it would be worthwhile indeed, for example in the context of the manliness cult of the late nineteenth century that was personified and promoted by Theodore Roosevelt Bederman, Gail, Manliness & Civilization. A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917, Chicago and London 1995. , to whom Greenberg also alludes (p. 281).

Greenberg includes several figures in her monograph that illustrate the gendered filibustering spirit of the time; the best-known being probably the 1872 painting âAmerican Progressâ by John Gast, which also serves as cover illustration. It features âa scantily clad and well-formed flying woman [â¦]. So focused is Gastâs allegorical figure on her civilizing project that she fails to note that her translucent gown is in imminent danger of sliding offâ (p. 1). The question rightfully to be asked would be why American Progress should be portrayed as a woman, especially as âso many of the iconic nineteenth-century images of western settlement were maleâ (p. 1).

To better trace this gendered imagery, Greenberg does not only discuss the cases of two male filibusters and the various ways in which they were depicted in detail, i.e., William Walker and Narciso LÃ³pez (chapters four and five). She also takes up the cases of two intriguing American women and their attitudes and utterances as regarded filibusters; they are Lucy Holcomb and Cora Montgomery (chapter six). Ironically, Walker looked somewhat effeminate, for which his expressed manliness made up (p. 144), while âfemale supporters of filibustering were not unknownâ (p. 221). In the end âmanifest domesticityâ was in no way endangered but rather upheld by the filibustering and indirectly imperialistic spirit. Women in the U.S. thus became important allies by playing a complimentary role to men in politics (pp. 200-201).

A particularly inspiring aspect of the book is found in the sections that deal with landscape. To North Americans and Europeans the South American landscape must have appeared a strange world. Greenberg argues that not only in European travel writings See for example Pratt, Mary Louise, Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation, New York 1992. but also in the accounts by American expansionists foreign landscape was familiarized through the choice of adjectives that explicitly tied the South American landscape to the âhome culture of the explorers,â such as in the form of âplum coloredâ volcanoes or ârose coloredâ landscapes (p. 60). Of course, how else should a person see the world than with the words that culture has taught her? Yet as a result of this language one may argue that the filibuster really âcomes homeâ when venturing to South America, which brings us back to manifest domesticity: the male explores and annexes, and the female â no matter if American or foreign â provides for the happy home.

Finally, even though this study is a fascinating and well-researched scholarly undertaking, the chapter headings might be a little difficult to grasp particularly for the not so well-versed reader; they all contribute to the larger themes â which is apparent in the chapters themselves â yet they require some thinking before the logic of the evolving narrative becomes apparent. For example, chapter three is entitled âAmerican Men Abroad: Sex and Violence in the Latin American Travelogue.â It is immediately followed by the sub-heading âRace and Manifest Destiny,â which is a little bewildering. But the reader who takes up the book in spite of that will be rewarded with a convincing and thought-provoking piece of scholarship.

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