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978-0-521-76752-1 - The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations,
Volume 2: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865 – 1913

Walter Lafeber

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THE NEW CAMBRIDGE HISTORY
OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS,
VOLUME 2

The American Search for Opportunity, 1865–1913

Since their first publication, the four volumes of *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* have served as the definitive source for the topic, from the colonial period to the Cold War. This revised second volume describes the causes and dynamics of United States foreign policy from 1865 to 1913, the era when the United States became one of the four great world powers and the world's greatest economic power. The dramatic expansion of global power during this period was set in motion by the strike-ridden, bloody, economic depression from 1873 to 1897 when American farms and factories began seeking overseas markets for their surplus goods, and also by a series of foreign policy triumphs, as America extended its authority to Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Panama Canal Zone, Central America, the Philippines, and China. Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt set foreign policy precedents by creating historic policies in which they used the post-1890 battleship fleet, a navy that quickly became one of the world's most powerful armadas. Ironically, as Americans searched for opportunity and stability abroad, they instead helped create revolutions in Central America, Panama, the Philippines, Mexico, China, and Russia. These outbreaks introduced the twentieth century as a century of revolutions with which the United States would have to deal as a great world power.

Walter LaFeber is Andrew Tisch and James Tisch Distinguished University Professor Emeritus in the Department of History at Cornell University. He is the author of *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–2006* (10th edition, 2007); *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1865–1898* (25th anniversary edition, 1998), which received the Albert G. Beveridge Prize from the American Historical Association; *The Clash: U.S.-Japan Relations Throughout History* (1997), which received the Bancroft Prize in American History and the Ellis Hawley Prize from the Organization of American Historians; *The American Age: U.S. Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad 1750 to Present* (2nd edition, 1994); and *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (2nd edition, 1992), which won the Gustavus Myers Prize.

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The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations

Warren I. Cohen, Editor

Volume 1: Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754–1865
– William Earl Weeks

Volume 2: The American Search for Opportunity, 1865–1913
– Walter LaFeber

Volume 3: The Globalizing of America, 1913–1945
– Akira Iriye

Volume 4: Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present
– Warren I. Cohen

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GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

My goal for *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, published in 1993, was to make the finest scholarship and the best writing in the historical profession available to the general reader. The response of readers and reviewers was gratifying. Then, as now, I had no ideological or methodological agenda. I wanted some of the leading students of diplomatic history, regardless of approach, to join me, and I was delighted to have my invitations accepted by the first three to whom I turned.

When I conceived of the project nearly thirty years ago, I had no idea that the Cold War would end suddenly, that the volumes would conclude with a final epoch as well defined as the first three. The collapse of the Soviet Empire, just as I finished writing Volume 4, astonished me, but allowed for a sense of completion those volumes would have lacked under any other circumstances.

Twenty years have passed since the publication of those volumes. Most obviously, additional chapters were needed to bring the story to the present. In addition, we were aware of the need to incorporate new scholarship, fresh insights into the works. *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* offers our most recent thoughts.

The first volume of the 1993 series was written by Bradford Perkins, then the preeminent historian of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century American diplomacy and doyen of active diplomatic historians. Brad's death necessitated a search for a successor to write the initial volume of *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*. With the concurrence of my colleagues Akira Iriye and Walter LaFeber, I chose William Earl Weeks as this generation's finest student of early American diplomacy.

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Weeks has written persuasively, sometimes provocatively, on a broad range of subjects, focused primarily on American expansion. Like Perkins, he stresses the building of an empire and sees a pattern of imperial behavior that existed before the creation of an independent United States. He sees men such as Ben Franklin promoting a vision of a great nation, an empire of freedom that would stretch across the continent. Again, like Perkins, he notes the persistent effort of presidents to dominate policy, contrary to the intent of the participants in the Constitutional Convention. In particular, Weeks raises the stature of James Monroe, portraying him as the first “hidden hand” president, foreshadowing methods Dwight Eisenhower perfected more than a century later. He is equally impressed with the audacity of James Polk as he contributed mightily to the nation’s self-declared expansionist mission. He describes how Polk’s role in acquiring an empire on the Pacific provided an enormous stimulus to continental expansion. Weeks argues that the concept of Manifest Destiny was applicable to the entire forty years’ period preceding the Civil War. He demonstrates that American leaders did not hesitate to eliminate all obstacles to the creation of the early American Empire. He details their brutal treatment of Native Americans as the nation satisfied its lust for land on which various tribes had lived for hundreds of years. And finally, he takes a fresh look at the issue of slavery as a cause of the Civil War.

Walter LaFeber, author of the second volume, is one of the most highly respected of the so-called Wisconsin School of diplomatic historians, men and women who studied with Fred Harvey Harrington and William Appleman Williams and their students, and were identified as “New Left” when they burst on the scene in the 1960s. LaFeber’s newly revised volume covers the last third of the nineteenth century and extends into the twentieth, to 1913, through the administration of William Howard Taft. He discusses the link between the growth of American economic power and expansionism, adding the theme of racism, especially as applied to Native Americans and Filipinos. Once again, his rejection of the idea of an American quest for order is striking. He argues that Americans sought opportunities for economic and missionary activities abroad and that they were undaunted by the disruptions they caused in other nations. A revolution in China or Mexico was a small price to pay for advantages accruing to Americans, especially

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when the local people paid it. His other inescapable theme is the use of foreign affairs to enhance presidential power.

The third volume, which begins on the eve of World War I and carries the story through World War II, is again written by Akira Iriye, past president of the American Historical Association and our generation's most innovative historian of international relations. Japanese-born, educated in American universities, Iriye has been fascinated by the cultural conflicts and accommodations that permeate power politics, particularly as the United States has confronted the nations of East Asia. Iriye opens his book with a quick sketch of the international system as it evolved and was dominated by Europe through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. He analyzes Wilsonianism in war and peace and how it was applied in Asia and Latin America. Most notable is his discussion of what he calls the "cultural aspect" of the 1920s. Iriye sees the era about which he writes as constituting the "globalizing of America" – an age in which the United States supplanted Europe as the world's leader and provided the economic and cultural resources to define and sustain the international order. He notes the awakening of non-Western peoples and their expectations of American support and inspiration. In his conclusion he presages the troubles that would follow from the Americanization of the world.

Much of my work, like Iriye's, has focused on American–East Asian relations. My friend Michael Hunt has placed me in the "realist" school of diplomatic historians. Influenced by association with Perkins, LaFeber, Iriye, Ernest May, and younger friends such as John Lewis Gaddis, Michael Hogan, and Melvyn Leffler, I have studied the domestic roots of American policy, the role of ideas and attitudes as well as economic concerns, the role of nongovernmental organizations including missionaries, and the place of art in international relations. In the final volume of the series, *Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present*, I also rely heavily on what I have learned from political economists and political scientists.

I begin Part I of the book in the closing months of World War II and end it with the disappearance of the Soviet Union in 1991. I write of the vision American leaders had of a postwar world order and the growing sense that the Soviet Union posed a threat to that vision. The concept of the "security dilemma," the threat each side's defensive actions seemed

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to pose for the other, looms large in my analysis of the origins of the Cold War. I also emphasize the importance of the two political systems: the paradox of the powerful state and weak government in the United States and the secrecy and brutality of the Stalinist regime. Throughout the volume, I note the importance of the disintegration of prewar colonial empires, the appearance of scores of newly independent states in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and the turmoil caused by American and Soviet efforts to force them into an international system designed in Washington and Moscow. Finally, I conclude Part I with the reemergence of Germany and Japan as major powers, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the drift of the United States, its course in world affairs uncertain in the absence of an adversary.

In Part II, two chapters focus on the American role in world affairs since the end of the Cold War. I write of the struggle of political leaders and public intellectuals in the United States to find a new lodestar after the collapse of the Soviet Union rendered containment obsolete. George H. W. Bush and William Jefferson Clinton were hampered by a public tired of efforts to pacify an unruly world, demanding attention to domestic affairs. Not until the al Qaeda attacks on American soil on September 11, 2001, was a new foreign policy goal, articulated by George W. Bush, “the War on Terror,” widely accepted – with grim consequences in Iraq and Afghanistan. But in the twenty-first century, it was quickly apparent that the principal challenge to American primacy would be the resurgence of Chinese power. As I write, Barack Obama has disposed of Osama bin Laden, but American troops remain in Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea taunt the American president, and he rebalances his nation’s defensive forces across the Pacific.

There are a number of themes that can be followed through these four volumes, however differently the authors approach their subjects. First, there was the relentless national pursuit of wealth and power, described so vividly by Weeks and LaFeber. Iriye demonstrates how Americans used their wealth and power when the United States emerged as the world’s leader after World War I. I discuss America’s performance as hegemon in the years immediately following World War II, and its response to perceived threats to its dominance through the Cold War – and after.

A second theme of critical importance is the struggle for control of foreign policy. Each author notes tension between the president and

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Congress, as institutionalized by the Constitution, and the efforts of various presidents, from 1789 to the present, to circumvent constitutional restraints on their powers. The threat to democratic government is illustrated readily by the Nixon-Kissinger obsessions that led to Watergate, Reagan's Iran-Contra fiasco, and the deceptions of the Bush-Cheney administration that led to the invasion of Iraq.

Finally, we are all concerned with what constitutes American identity on the world scene. Is there a peculiarly American foreign policy that sets the United States off from the rest of the world? We examine the evolution of American values and measure them against the nation's behavior in international affairs. And we worry about the impact of the country's global activity on its domestic order, fearful that Thomas Jefferson's vision of a virtuous republic has been forgotten, boding ill for Americans and for the world they are allegedly "bound to lead."

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P R E F A C E

The most prominent and important characteristic of the years 1865 to 1912 was the take-off of the U.S. industrial complex, a take-off that transformed the nation's society and consequently its foreign policy. By 1900, Americans had suddenly moved ahead of the British to claim the globe's greatest economy. Their remarkable success, however, forced them to carry out an accelerated search for markets that could absorb the large surpluses of their industrial and agricultural goods – the surpluses that produced the long, horrific, and at times bloody economic depression of 1873 to 1897. U.S. political and industrial leaders were willing to fight wars to win access to stable markets (including China), so they also sought out strategic bases (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Manila, the Panama Canal) from which the new post-1890 battleship fleet, by 1912 one of the four greatest navies in the world, could protect the routes to foreign markets and, at times, sources of raw materials. Out of this process arose a more powerful presidency, the kind of chief executive the Constitution and the Supreme Court implicitly and explicitly empowered in the foreign affairs realm. If not before, then certainly after, the 1890s, Americans, if they recognized it or not, lived in and were indeed integrated with – as well as dependent on – that realm, whether they lived in 1898, 1903, 1917, 1941, or 2001.

Using the term “realm” avoids the use of the term “empire,” which most Americans have not wanted to employ to describe their conquests in the 1890s, or their 750 military bases acquired since 1945. They prefer more selfless terms, such as “American Century” or “Free World.”¹

¹ Andrew Bacevich, ed., *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012), provides the most recent analyses, offered by nine authors, of the components of the American Century, whether it will continue – or whether it even existed.

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But increasingly since the early 1990s, if not the 1970s, authors, both scholarly and nonscholarly, have found it necessary to identify and discuss American foreign policy as “imperial.” The term is given to various eras but tends to be applied initially at the end of the nineteenth century, when U.S. leaders recognized that their continental expansion was finished with the announcement of the frontier’s closing in 1890. They began to look abroad for strategic bases from which they could protect overseas markets and the routes from the United States to those markets. These leaders were not primarily interested in land suitable for colonization; there remained vast underpopulated areas at home, even as the pace of immigration multiplied after 1870 – and, in any event, Americans of the years 1865–1912 were so racist that many fought furiously against the annexation of any territory populated with non-whites who might ultimately want to enter the Union. The Americans of these generations instead searched for an “informal empire,” as Thomas McCormick would later term it – an informal empire that had as its objectives both conquering overseas markets (despite the win-or-die competition from Europeans and Japanese, who felt the same pressures) and acquiring a series of naval bases and island protectorates that could guard the routes to those markets and, if necessary, could provide the military forces to win conflicts that invariably erupted over those markets.

The present volume attempts to spell out this quest for a stable, dependable informal empire, but argues that the American quest for such outposts, markets, and sources for raw materials too often climaxed in – ironically and often tragically – anti-American outbreaks and revolutions. The U.S. search for opportunity thus helps us in part to understand why the early twentieth century was a historic era of revolution.² In this sense, the years 1865 to 1912 anticipate the initial years of the twenty-first century.

² For a comprehensive survey of the creation and expansion of the “American empire” and the many studies (usually post-1970) that have argued over, and defined and redefined, this empire note the important essay by Paul A. Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review* 116 (December 2011), 1348–91, especially 1374–6, where the pivotal idea of “informal empire” that developed in the 1960s and after, and that is a central theme, implicitly and explicitly, in the present book, is critiqued and, in the present author’s opinion, somewhat misunderstood as it is applied to the 1865–1913 era. “Informal” refers to the absence of formal, political, territorial, and usually extensive ties (as opposed to colonial relationships) but

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Preface

With this revised volume, I owe an immense debt to Warren I. Cohen, the editor of this Cambridge History series and a friend of many years. Warren and the Cambridge University Press editor, Eric Crahan, have shown unusual, if not supernatural, patience, and Eric, Regina Paleski, and Betsy Hardinger have been both supportive and effective in overseeing the publication of this edition. Again, Frank Costigliola, Bob Hannigan, Michael Kammen, Fred Logevall, Tom Schoonover, Joel Silbey, and Dick Polenberghave been valued friends whose conversations and emails often serve as an ongoing informal seminar, one that at times even relates to American foreign relations. Another longtime friend, David Langbart of the National Archives, again provided declassified documents for this book as well as for the work of many other authors. Andrew Tisch's wide interests, unstinting support, friendship, and commitment to Cornell have been crucial for the university (and this book) as well as for Sandy and me personally. Lloyd Gardner and Tom McCormick continue to be special friends and never-fail intellectual stimuli, not only after an unfathomable number of years but increasingly so over the past decade. The greatest personal debts are owed to Sandy, Scott, Suzanne, Tom, and those who have joined us since 1993: Matt, Trevor, and Sylvie.

does not at all preclude the use of military force to defend a de facto protectorate (such as Cuba or the Panama Canal Zone) or limited but strategic naval bases (as in Samoa). Nor is "informal empire" understood to be "exceptionalist," since, as Kramer indicates, Great Britain had been using informal expansion backed by its navy and pushed by its economic power.

For the Thomas McCormick references, see especially his *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893–1901* (Chicago, 1967).