The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade

Following the Second World War, the United States would become the leading "neoliberal" proponent of international trade liberalization. Yet for nearly a century before, American foreign trade policy had been dominated by extreme economic nationalism. What brought about this pronounced ideological, political, and economic about-face? How did it affect Anglo-American imperialism? What were the repercussions for the global capitalist order? In answering these questions, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade* offers the first detailed account of the controversial Anglo-American struggle over empire and economic globalization in the mid to late nineteenth century. The book reinterprets Anglo-American imperialism through the global interplay between Victorian free-trade cosmopolitanism and economic nationalism, uncovering how imperial expansion and economic integration were mired in political and ideological conflict. Beginning in the 1840s, this conspiratorial struggle over political economy would rip apart the Republican party, reshape the Democratic, and redirect Anglo-American imperial expansion for decades to come.

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The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade

The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalization, 1846–1896

Marc-William Palen

University of Exeter

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107109124

First published 2016

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Palen, Marc-William, author.
The "conspiracy" of free trade : the Anglo-American struggle over empire and economic globalization, 1846–1896 / Marc-William Palen.
Cambridge, UK ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
LCCN 2015030769 | ISBN 9781107109124
LCSH: Free trade – United States – History – 19th century. | Free trade – Great Britain – History – 19th century. | United States – Foreign economic relations – Great Britain. | Great Britain – Foreign economic relations – United States. | United States – Commercial policy – History – 19th century. | Great Britain – Commercial policy – History – 19th century.
LCC HF1755 .P235 2016 | DDC 382/.71094109034–dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015030769

ISBN 978-1-107-10912-4 Hardback

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Preface

Neoliberal policies of free trade and deregulation have become synonymous with economic globalization. As the close-knit global economy becomes ever more frayed, these same policies are also increasingly coming under fire.[1] Protectionism, the preferred political economic choice throughout the *longue durée* of world history, is now once again in fashion.[2] From this longer historical perspective, the international turn to trade liberalization since the Second World War – from GATT to the WTO – represents the rare exception to the protectionist rule. Aside from the notable case of Free Trade England, most nations in the latter half of the nineteenth century sought safety from the gales of modern global market competition behind ever higher tariff walls, buttressed with government subsidies to domestic industries and imperial expansion.

Few did so with more gusto than the United States, which from the 1860s adhered to stringent economic nationalist policies at home while increasing its imperial proclivities abroad. Not until the 1930s under the direction of FDR's State Department would free trade begin to displace protectionism as the preferred policy for American economic expansion. The inspiration for this book arose in seeking to explain this sizeable political, economic, and ideological about-face within the history of modern US domestic and foreign policy, a neoliberal turn that continues to perplex pundits, political scientists, historians, and economists alike. The origins awaited discovery within the nineteenth century, hidden amid the

[1] See, for instance, Gerard Dumenil, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Douglas A. Irwin, *Free Trade Under Fire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009 [3rd ed.]).

[2] Henryk Szlaijfer, *Economic Nationalism and Globalization*, trans. by Maria Chmielewska-Szlajfer (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Dani Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox: Democracy and the Future of the World Economy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012); Anthony P. D'Costa, ed., *Globalization and Economic Nationalism in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008).

conspiratorial conflict over free trade, imperialism, and global economic integration (economic globalization).[3]

Encompassing an era in which Great Britain effectively led the globe in capital investment, emigration, imperial expansion, and industrial productivity, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade* fast developed into a study of Anglo-American relations. Previous scholarship of Anglo-American imperialism, while prodigious, has focused primarily upon non-linear comparisons between the pre-1945 British Empire and the post-1945 American Empire.[4] This book offers instead a contemporaneous study that bridges the historiographical divide separating mid- to late-nineteenth-century American imperialism from histories of the British Empire and economic globalization. The book does so by focusing upon the ideological debates surrounding free trade and protectionism that came to dominate the era's international political economic landscape, a global contest over capitalism and imperialism that was fought with special ferocity within the United States and throughout the British Empire.

The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade argues that the late Victorian free trade-protectionist debate was not only a struggle over domestic prosperity, but also over the course of economic globalization. It was an ideological battle that would reshape the late-nineteenth-century US political economy and redirect Anglo-American imperial expansion for decades to come. This politico-ideological controversy correspondingly shines much-needed historical light upon today's ongoing debates over the future of economic globalization, alongside its complex relationship to global economic development.[5]

[3] This challenges recent scholarship that suggests neoliberal ideas originated in the twentieth century. See Daniel Stedman, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Angus Burgin, *The Great Persuasion: Reinventing Free Markets Since the Depression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe, eds., *The Road From Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[4] Phillip Darby, *Three Faces of Imperialism: British and American Approaches to Asia and Africa, 1870–1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Bernard Porter, *Empire and Superempire: Britain, America and the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Tony Smith, *The Pattern of Imperialism: The United States, Great Britain, and the Late-Industrializing World Since 1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Patrick Karl O'Brien and Armand Cleese, eds., *Two Hegemonies: Britain 1846–1914 and the United States 1941–2001* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[5] See, for example, Dani Rodrik, *One Economics, Many Recipes: Globalization, Institutions, and Economic Growth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Ray Kiely, *The New Political Economy of Development: Globalization, Imperialism, Hegemony* (New York:

The book is all the more timely considering that current critics of US-led neoliberalism commonly associate it with imperialism.[6] Imperial theorists of various stripes have similarly asserted that Anglo-American economic expansion in the nineteenth century was little more than free-trade imperialism in disguise. Such studies nevertheless overlook the fact that economic nationalism dominated the late-nineteenth-century American political economy and imperial expansion. They also gloss over how, in seeking greater domestic prosperity, the most avid Anglo-American free traders themselves subscribed to a cosmopolitan anti-imperial vision of peaceful economic expansion, non-interventionism, and global market integration.

Through an examination of the era's Anglo-American free-trade movement and its protectionist opposition, this book illuminates how so many ideological adherents to free trade during this period advocated *against* imperialism in its myriad manifestations. Rather, the principal Anglo-American proponents of empire were economic nationalists. In response to the diffusion of free-trade cosmopolitanism and the onset of the late-nineteenth-century Great Depression (*c.* 1873–1896), an expansionist doctrine of economic nationalism rose to prominence within protectionist circles. This imperial policy, the "imperialism of economic nationalism," coercively sought access to foreign markets while maintaining protectionism at home. The politico-ideological battle over economic globalization became particularly frenzied behind the high tariff walls of late-nineteenth-century America, where protectionist sentiment ran rampant. The US search for new markets would thus take on an imperial and protectionist cast – and American advocacy for free trade would become tantamount to a British conspiracy. This same controversial Victorian free-trade tradition would lay the ideological foundations for today's own neoliberal order.

Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Ha-Joon Chang, *Globalization, Economic Development, and the Role of the State* (London: Zed Books, 2003); Chang, *Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective* (London: Anthem, 2002).

[6] Et al., Ahmet H. Kose, Fikret Sense, and Eric Yeldan, eds., *Neoliberal Globalization as New Imperialism: Case Studies on Reconstruction of the Periphery* (New York: Nova Science Pub Inc., 2007); Francis Shor, *Dying Empire: US Imperialism and Global Resistance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Richard A. Dello Buono and Jose Bell Lara, eds., *Imperialism, Neoliberalism and Social Struggles in Latin America* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century* (New York: Zed Books, 2001); Robert E. Prasch, "Neoliberalism and Empire: How are They Related?" *Review of Radical Political Economics* 37 (Summer 2005): 281–287.

Acknowledgments

I am immeasurably grateful to Bill Brands, Tony Hopkins, and Mark Lawrence for their supervision, mentorship, and support throughout my career, as well as for their careful reading of the book itself. Many other scholars have also provided feedback and criticisms over the years, including Peter Cain, Duncan Campbell, Ed Crapol, Steve Davies, Dave Ekbladh, George Forgie, Jon Franklin, Frank Gavin, Tony Howe, Doug Irwin, Phil Magness, Steve Meardon, Mark Metzler, Phil Myers, Eddy Rodgers, Scott Shubitz, Jeremi Suri, and James Vaughn. Sections of the book were sharpened by the feedback I received at conferences, symposia, and workshops, including Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations conferences, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Civil War-Global Conflict Conference at the University of Charleston, the University of Sydney's "History on Monday" series, the US Studies Symposium at Monash, the Porter Fortune Symposium on History at Ole Miss, Sydney's US Studies Centre postdoctoral series, International Security Studies at Yale, the British Scholar Conference at the University of Texas at Austin (UT), the British International History Group, and the Maple Leaf and Eagle Conference at the University of Helsinki. Thanks are also owed to the editors of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, *Diplomatic History*, the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, and the *Journal of the Civil War Era*, where some preliminary sections of the book have appeared as articles.

The generosity of the US Studies Centre at the University of Sydney since 2011 was invaluable, providing me with the opportunity to finish many of the book revisions as a postdoctoral fellow and then as a research associate. Bates Gill, Geoff Garrett, Margaret Levi, Brendon O'Connor, Tom Switzer, Craig Purcell, and Nina Fudala, among so many other amazing people at the Centre, were a constant source of support and inspiration, as were my fellow postdocs Niki Hemmer, Carrie Hyde, Rob Rakove, and Shawn Treier. Many thanks as well to Adam Tooze, Paul Kennedy, Amanda Behm, and Jeremy Friedman for welcoming me at Yale's International Security Studies at a particularly crucial point in the

writing of the book. I am grateful to the History Department at UT, the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, the Canadian Embassy, UT's School of Liberal Arts, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the New York Public Library for helping to fund the research that evolved into this book. And I have been very fortunate indeed to have had such supportive colleagues at the University of Exeter since my arrival in 2013, especially Martin Thomas, Andrew Thompson, Richard Toye, David Thackeray, and my head of department, Henry French.

Of course to Rachel Herrmann I owe an inestimable debt; she selflessly read my work with her constructive eye, and made sure that I never went hungry throughout the arduous journey. Last but by no means least, I would like to thank my parents, Andrea and Don, for their unwavering encouragement. Without them, this book would not exist; nor, for that matter, would I.

Abbreviations

ACLL	Anti-Corn Law League
AFTL	American Free Trade League
CC MSS	Cobden Club Manuscripts, Records Office, Chichester, West Sussex, England
CR	*Congressional Record*
FO	Foreign Office, National Archives, Kew, England
FRUS	*Foreign Relations of the United States*
IFL	Imperial Federation League
IFTA	International Free Trade Alliance
LAC	National Library and Archives, Ottawa, Canada
LOC	Library of Congress, Washington, DC
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA
NYPL	New York Public Library, New York City, NY
PRO	Public Records Office, National Archives, Kew, England
UETL	United Empire Trade League

Introduction

From the Civil War onward, the Republican party set out to place the United States on a pronounced protectionist path for domestic economic growth and imperial expansion abroad. American adherence to the Victorian English free-trade ideology known as "Cobdenism" – the belief that international free trade and non-interventionism would bring prosperity and peace to the world – duly became anathema within protectionist Republican circles. Despite intense Republican opposition, the influence of Cobdenism would reach its nineteenth-century apex during the non-consecutive Democratic administrations of Grover Cleveland (1885–1889, 1893–1897). As a result, in 1895 Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge would take Cleveland's second cabinet to task for having "been successfully Cobdenized, and that is the underlying reason for their policy of retreat" in the Pacific, Cleveland having opposed expanding US control in Hawaii and Samoa. President Cleveland's controversial 1887 annual message calling for freer trade during his first term had similarly shown him to be "an easy convert to Cobdenism."[1] For Republican economic nationalists, Cobdenism became tantamount to conspiracy: a secretive British-led attempt to stunt the growth of US "infant" industries and foil Republican imperial designs. Cobdenism's cosmopolitan ideology, in contestation with its economic nationalist counterpart, was interwoven within Anglo-American relations throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, spindling alongside modern globalization's interconnecting threads of global trade, communications, ideas, people, and policies.

The overarching purpose of this book is to offer a much-needed reinterpretation of Anglo-American political economy, ideology, and empire. With the exception of Free Trade England, nations like the United States sought protection from global market uncertainty behind the aegis of economic nationalism throughout the late nineteenth century. Yet

[1] Henry Cabot Lodge, "Our Blundering Foreign Policy," *Forum* 19 (March 1895): 15; George B. Curtiss, *Protection and Prosperity: An Account of Tariff Legislation and its Effect in Europe and America* (New York: Pan-American Publishing, 1896), 626.

historians instead commonly portray this as an American era of laissez-faire and free trade, a misimpression that has seeped into the dominant American imperial narrative. The following chapters correct this political economic misconception by examining how ideological conflict between free traders and economic nationalists laid the imperial path for Anglo-American economic globalization.

The book argues that two ideological visions – "Cobdenite cosmopolitanism" and "Listian nationalism" – provided the central arguments for debates over the course of late-nineteenth-century industrial development and economic globalization. The fight was particularly fierce within the United States and the British Empire. The future of Anglo-American economic development, market integration, and imperial expansion rested upon the outcome.

Late-nineteenth-century America's free-trade cosmopolitans subscribed to the philosophy of Richard Cobden (1804–1865), who became Victorian England's free-trade apostle when he successfully led the overthrow of the British protectionist system in the 1840s. Cobden believed that international freedom of trade and a non-interventionist foreign policy would lead to domestic prosperity and world peace. He predicted that through universal free trade, nations would eventually become so interconnected and interdependent that war would become obsolete. Cobden's free-trade ideas found an avid audience among an influential group of Victorian America's liberal reformers.

The influence of American Cobdenism reached its anti-imperial height during the Democratic presidencies of Grover Cleveland. Cleveland's administrations opposed the era's imperial projects, be it forcibly prying open foreign markets, annexing Hawaii, or colonizing the Congo. Cleveland's cabinets advocated instead a Cobdenite policy of free trade, non-interventionism, and non-coercive market expansion. These Cobdenite policies provided a stark contrast both to the aggressive imperial designs of the antebellum Jeffersonian Democrats and to the postbellum Republican party, with the latter quickly discarding the remaining tattered vestiges of its more restrained antebellum Whig political tradition: that is, aside from its Whiggish dedication to protectionism.

This period's leading American protectionist intellectuals – most notably Henry C. Carey, James G. Blaine, and William McKinley – were Listian nationalists, who held an Anglophobic belief in infant industrial protectionism and internal improvements as enunciated by the German-American economic theorist Friedrich List (1789–1846). Listian nationalism was a progressive (i.e. forward-looking and reform-oriented) economic nationalist doctrine that viewed free trade as an ultimate ideal stage of economic development, and the coercive acquisition of foreign markets an eventual

necessity for surplus goods and capital. Following the global onset of the era's Great Depression in 1873, disciples of this aggressive Listian ideology would begin to stand out from the Republican party's more orthodox home-market protectionists, who instead stuck to the belief that the US economy could forever supply its own demand.[2]

Friedrich List had lived in the American protectionist heartland of Pennsylvania from 1825 to 1832, during which he updated and elaborated upon eighteenth-century Hamiltonian protectionist theories. List expounded upon the burgeoning American System of governmental protectionism and internal improvements, and left his indelible progressive mark upon American economic nationalist ideology and imperialism for decades to come. His antebellum influence effectively represented the first wave of German-American economic nationalism, followed by the more widely studied second wave that struck American shores in the last decades of the nineteenth century, which would cement the List-inspired German Historical School's position within turn-of-the-century American economic thought, political economy, and imperial debates.

The complex relationship between economic globalization, imperialism, and economic development was hotly debated in the nineteenth century, a debate that continues today along surprisingly similar lines of argument. Throughout much of the nineteenth century, American protectionist policies had been advocated with little regard for acquiring foreign markets. This began to change in the final decades of the century as Listian nationalists took control of the Republican party. American Listians believed that both state intervention and coercive market expansion were crucial for US economic development and domestic prosperity, a belief that was closely linked to their progressive regionalized vision for American economic globalization. In contrast to many of their more orthodox protectionist political allies who disdained foreign markets, the Listian's economic nationalist ideology incorporated a sophisticated long-term understanding that, as America's infant industries matured and became internationally competitive, the United States would need more access to foreign markets – and Listians were willing to use imperial means to gain them. When informal protectionist reciprocity policies failed to coerce open new markets, Listians turned to more formal imperial methods.[3]

[2] I should note that whereas "Cobdenism," "Cobdenite," and "Manchester School" were terms used by nineteenth-century contemporaries, "Listian nationalist" is my own terminology to describe this imperial strand of protectionist thought. Nor were they isolated to the United States; they can be seen as national expressions of the wider Listian influence that took on a global cast by the late nineteenth century.

[3] Although there are invariably exceptions to these classifications, Listians also generally held a more sympathetic view toward the silver question than their Cobdenite

The Victorian American Empire was in many ways an inverse of that of the British Empire. In contrast to American continental expansion westward during much of the nineteenth century, the British Empire spread across the seas and across the globe; whereas the United States absorbed its continental territories within its federal political system, the global British Empire maintained a hierarchical imperial relationship with its overseas colonies, alongside a reliance upon foreign investment; and where economic nationalism dominated the late-nineteenth-century American political economy, free trade held sway in England.

Despite these differences, the similarity of the debate between Listians and Cobdenites within the British and American empires was remarkably similar. Drawing inspiration both from the writings of Friedrich List and the protectionist turn among Britain's competitors, the British Empire's new generation of economic nationalists would evolve into formidable late-nineteenth-century imperial opponents of Cobdenism, even within Free Trade England itself. This protectionist movement within the British Empire turned to the theories of Friedrich List. From the 1860s, onward Anglophobic American implementation of economic nationalist policies in turn greatly affected the British Empire, where List's theories began to vie with English Cobdenite orthodoxy.[4] Ever more imperial American protectionist policies strengthened internal calls throughout the British Empire to curb its Cobdenite proclivities and instead create a protectionist Greater Britain in order to politically and economically tie together its geographically disparate settler colonies in South Africa, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This idea of British imperial unity was made all the more viable owing to the development of more efficient tools of global transportation and communication such as railroads, canals, transoceanic telegraphic cables, and steamship lines. By century's end, Listians throughout the British Empire demanded imperial federation, protectionism, and intra-imperial trade preference, much as US Listians sought to expand American access to global markets through a mixture of high protective tariffs, restrictive reciprocity, and imperial expansion. Politico-ideological conflict thus paralleled Anglo-American imperial expansion and economic globalization.

In bringing this conflict to light, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade* therefore seeks to answer three broad questions: how Victorian free-trade

counterparts, as Listians tended to view US adherence to the gold standard as but a further fiscal shackle tying American markets to the City of London.

[4] On the influence of Cobdenism in the British Empire, see especially Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846–1946* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

cosmopolitanism reached and influenced American domestic and foreign relations; how economic nationalists opposed Cobdenism in the United States and the British Empire; and how these conflicting ideologies shaped Anglo-American relations, imperial expansion, and economic globalization. In doing so, the book describes how American Cobdenites fought fiercely for freer trade, anti-imperialism, and closer ties with the British Empire in an era dominated by protectionism, "new" imperialism, and Anglophobia. American economic nationalists in turn considered these transatlantic Cobdenite efforts to be part of a vast, British-inspired, free-trade conspiracy. The following chapters therefore incorporate an ideological approach to understanding nineteenth-century Anglo-American imperial expansion, politics, and economic globalization.

The ideological origins of American globalization

Tracing the ideological origins of a system or idea is always tricky, as one can easily get lost in the myriad intellectual tendrils trailing back through human history. Sleuthing the ideological origins of free trade is a case in point. The first systematic enunciation of free trade is of course commonly attributed to Adam Smith. Yet the universal principles of free trade originated at least two centuries before the 1776 publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.[5] As with the opposing principles of protectionism, the ideological origins of free trade can be traced back hundreds of years.

But these ideas were not static. Nineteenth-century free traders and protectionists would continue to update and adapt their theories for an increasingly global political economy. Late-eighteenth-century free-trade advocates like Adam Smith and economic nationalists like Alexander Hamilton had expounded their ideas from within a protean international economic system quite distinct from the global one that began to arise in the middle of the nineteenth century, when Richard Cobden and Friedrich List enunciated their conflicting creeds. It was the Victorian era that bore witness to the tumultuous booms and busts of modern globalization, whereupon the problems and promises of the foreign market began to rival those of the national, and wherein the disciples of Cobden and List fought to redirect the political economic course of an ever more integrated world. And it was during this later period that present-day ideological conceptions of trade liberalization originated.

[5] Douglas A. Irwin traces the idea back to Plato, Pliny, and Plutarch in *Against the Tide: An Intellectual History of Free Trade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Cobden's and List's conflicting global visions would battle throughout the Victorian world, but most vociferously in the American political arena in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Economic nationalism came to dominate the US political economy and foreign policy, as protectionist policies, coupled with imperial expansionism, promised to help allay widely held economic nationalist fears that America's more nascent industries would prematurely be pulled into Britain's free-trade orbit.[6] American Cobdenites, in emulation of Britain's free-trade system, instead peaceably sought both an end to US protectionism and anti-imperial access to foreign markets through international trade liberalization. Their fight for freer trade was an uphill battle.

American economic nationalist fears of Free Trade England quickly turned into Anglophobic paranoia when American Cobdenites began to mobilize. This conspiratorial turn is not entirely surprising considering that British-oriented conspiracy theories had long been a rather ubiquitous American outgrowth of the widely held nineteenth-century fear of British encroachment in North America. So after England unilaterally turned to free trade at mid-century, American protectionists began seeing Adam Smith's invisible hand hidden behind any attempt to lower American high tariff walls. If the "paranoid style" were a Victorian American play, the alleged conspiracy of free trade would deserve top billing.[7]

The mid-century establishment of Britain's own free-trade policy – the leading source of American free-trade conspiracy theories – would also provide politico-ideological inspiration to an elite group of classical liberal abolitionist reformers in the American north like Edward Atkinson, William Cullen Bryant, and William Lloyd Garrison. The British policy

[6] Karl Polanyi described this as part of a "double movement" against the nineteenth-century British classical liberal system in *The Great Transformation* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1944).

[7] On nineteenth-century US Anglophobic conspiracy theories, see, also, Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965); Lawrence A. Peskin, "Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812," *Journal of American History* 98 (December 2011): 647–669; Kinley J. Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815–60," *Diplomatic History* 12 (January 1988): 19–37; Sam W. Haynes, *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010); Bradley J. Young, "Silver, Discontent, and Conspiracy: The Ideology of the Western Republican Revolt of 1890–1901," *Pacific Historical Review* 64 (May 1995): 243–265; Stephen Tuffnell, "'Uncle Sam is to be Sacrificed': Anglophobia in Late Nineteenth-Century Politics and Culture," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12 (March 2011): 77–99; William C. Reuter, "The Anatomy of Political Anglophobia in the United States, 1865–1900," *Mid-America* 61 (April–July 1979): 117–132; Edward P. Crapol, *America for Americans: Economic Nationalism and Anglophobia in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).

of free trade was adopted in 1846 with the overturning of England's Corn Laws, protective tariffs on foreign grain imports. Richard Cobden oversaw their overthrow as the leader of the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL; 1838–1846), even as he tied the free-trade movement closely to that of transatlantic abolitionism. In marked contrast to the conspiratorial reception among American economic nationalists, the mid-century abolitionist leaders of the American free-trade movement took encouragement from Cobden's efforts. Their transatlantic free-trade cooperation, however, would spark even more conspiratorial conjecture when Cobden's friends and disciples created the Cobden Club (1866–1982) in London upon his death for the purpose of spreading free trade to the world, but especially to the United States.

US Listian nationalists, the nineteenth century's most progressive proponents of the "American System" of economic nationalism, became ever more outspoken and influential as the century came to a close. Even as American adherents to Cobdenism increased in number following the Civil War, Listian nationalist demands for protectionism coupled with coercive foreign market access were also reaching a fevered pitch. The politico-ideological battle over the future of American economic globalization – whether it would develop through a system of free trade and non-interventionism or protectionism and imperialism – became frenzied. How the United States would approach industrialization and the "Americanization of the world," as William T. Stead famously put it at the turn of the century, hinged upon the outcome.[8]

A matter of definitions

"Coleridge once said that abstract definitions had done more to curse the human race than war, famine, and pestilence," remarked Republican Congressman James Garfield to his friend Edward Atkinson in 1868. Garfield concluded that Coleridge "must have been reading financial literature just before he wrote that sentence."[9] The Ohio congressman's observation is as apt now as it was then. "Globalization" in particular is now thrown around so indiscriminately that it runs the risk of becoming meaningless. A. G. Hopkins describes modern globalization as occurring upon the arrival of the mid-nineteenth-century nation state and the expansion of industrialization, when "the sovereign state based on territorial boundaries was filled in by developing a wider and deeper sense of national consciousness and filled out, variously, by population growth,

[8] William T. Stead, *The Americanization of the World* (New York: Horace Markley, 1901).
[9] Garfield to Atkinson, August 11, 1868, Carton 1, Edward Atkinson Papers, MHS.

free trade, imperialism, and war."[10] The only addition to the latter list would be "protectionism." Broadly defined, globalization is the process of speeding up global integration via capital flows, markets, ideas, people, and technology. Nineteenth-century advances in technology not only aided in this process, but also provided new paths toward integrating the globe.[11] They allowed for the realistic projection of two conflicting economic systems – one of free trade and the other of protectionism – for modernization, for industrialization, and for tying international markets together. The book correspondingly expands from a transatlantic to a global study as the world became ever more interconnected through steamship lines, canals, transoceanic cables, transcontinental railroads, and imperial expansion in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[12] The following pages focus especially upon this Listian–Cobdenite conflict over *economic globalization*, the accelerating process of global economic integration and market interdependence.

The history of foreign relations and economic globalization includes the history of ideologies.[13] "Ideology" therefore also needs defining: a belief or doctrine that forms the basis of an ideal political, economic, social, or cultural system.[14] In the case of Listian nationalism and Cobdenite cosmopolitanism, these bases frequently overlapped.

Certain studies of the turn-of-the-century tariff in turn have taken a semantic stand regarding the label of "free trade." These works take an

[10] A. G. Hopkins, "Globalization – An Agenda for Historians," in *Globalization in World History*, ed. by A. G. Hopkins (New York: Norton, 2002), 7.

[11] For globalization in the long nineteenth century, see Jurgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Dwayne R. Winseck and Robert M. Pike, *Communication and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860–1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Roland Wenzlhuemer, *Connecting the Nineteenth-Century World: The Telegraph and Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Emily S. Rosenberg, ed., *A World Connecting: 1870–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2012).

[12] On "global history" and the "history of globalization," see especially A. G. Hopkins, ed. *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York: Norton, 2002); Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Bruce Mazlish and Akira Iriye, *Global History Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

[13] Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); John Gerring, "A Chapter in the History of American Party Ideology: The Nineteenth-Century Democratic Party (1828–1892)," *Polity* 26 (Summer 1994): 729–768.

[14] On political ideologies, see, also, Frank Ninkovich, "Ideology, the Open Door, and Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 6 (September 1982): 185–208; Judith Goldstein, *Ideas, Interests, and American Trade Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993);

extreme view by suggesting that, in the nineteenth century, free trade entailed the complete and immediate elimination of tariffs, customs houses, and other trade barriers. As the liberal tariff reformers under examination here fought primarily for a "tariff for revenue only" and increases to the list of duty-free raw materials but rarely for a complete elimination of tariffs, historians like Tom Terrill and Paul Wolman prefer the label "tariff revisionist" rather than "free trader."[15]

However, this stark categorization of free trade is misleading. Throughout the nineteenth century, most governments, including those of the United States and England, obtained much of their revenue from tariffs.[16] Everett Wheeler, who helped establish the influential New York Free Trade Club, described what they meant by "free trade": "we did not advocate the repeal of the tariff. That was not our view of the meaning of free trade." Rather, free trade meant a "Tariff for Revenue only."[17] Nineteenth-century free traders, including Cobden himself, therefore predominantly sought a low tariff for revenue only, or what J. S. Mill and other political economists sometimes called a "free-trade tariff."[18]

American Cobdenites well understood that the country's political environment of the day would only allow for modest revisions and a gradual elimination of protective duties. The vast majority of them were therefore moderate – or gradualist – free traders, meaning they wanted a minimal tariff revenue system in imitation of the British free-trade system, but realized it might take decades to establish. Much fewer in number were absolute free traders, dogmatic doctrinaires who wanted immediate implementation of direct taxation and an elimination of all customs duties, although their numbers began to swell as the nineteenth century

Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

[15] Tom E. Terrill, *The Tariff, Politics, and American Foreign Policy, 1874–1901* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 10ff; Paul Wolman, *Most Favored Nation: The Republican Revisionists and U.S. Tariff Policy, 1897–1912* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xi.

[16] Even Adam Smith ceded the need for tariffs to provide revenue for national defense. See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. by Edwin Cannan (New York: The Modern Library, 1937 [1776]), 429–432; Jacob Viner, "Adam Smith and Laissez-Faire," *Journal of Political Economy* 35 (April 1927): 198–232; Irwin, *Against the Tide*, 78–83.

[17] William Graham Sumner, *Protectionism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1888), 16; Everett P. Wheeler, *Sixty Years of American Life: Taylor to Roosevelt, 1850 to 1910* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1917), 152. See, also, David Ames Wells, "'A Tariff for Revenue': What It Really Means," *Forum* (September 1892): 51–66.

[18] Revenue tariffs are levied for gathering state revenue, not to discriminate against foreign imports. In contrast, protective tariffs are high import taxes designed to discourage or entirely prohibit foreign imports, thereby hindering foreign competition, normally for the purpose of artificially stimulating domestic industries.

drew to a close. It should therefore be kept in mind that free trade in practical application did not mean a complete absence of tariffs. Britain itself maintained a tariff revenue system at the height of its free-trade empire in the mid-nineteenth century.

Misunderstandings surrounding nineteenth-century free trade have also created confusion surrounding "reciprocity." The free-trade concept of trade reciprocity was epitomized in the 1860 Cobden–Chevalier Treaty, an Anglo-French agreement wherein Britain extended to the rest of the world without discrimination or conditions the same tariff concessions it offered to France through what has become known as the unconditional most-favored-nation clause. The postbellum Listian-Republican conception of trade reciprocity was very different; it was one of discrimination and retaliation, whereby imperial Republicans would seek to prize open new markets in Latin America and the Pacific through restrictive, conditional, bilateral reciprocity treaties, coupled with the coercive threat of massive tariff retaliation against foreign signatories. This restrictive reciprocity policy was enshrined within the Republican imperial playbook through the 1890 McKinley Tariff, which turned reciprocity into a protectionist tool for informal imperial expansion for many years to come.[19]

The majority Republican ideological adherence to economic nationalism became entrenched during the Civil War, which, as Richard Franklin Bensel has shown, brought about the rise of central state authority. Republicans thereafter instituted an economic system that involved a majority adherence to a national market and a protective tariff.[20] From its inception, a large proportion of the Republican party, controlling the executive for much of the time under consideration, subscribed to economic nationalism, an economic doctrine designed to protect the national market from international competition and crises through governmental control of trade, most commonly by way of protective tariffs, import restrictions, currency manipulation, and subsidization of domestic agriculture and industry. This economic nationalist doctrine

[19] A. A. Iliasu, "The Cobden-Chevalier Commercial Treaty of 1860," *Historical Journal* 14 (March 1971): 71; Jacob Viner, "The Most-Favored-Nation Clause in American Commercial Treaties," *Journal of Political Economy* 32 (February 1924): 117–118; James Laurence Laughlin and H. Parker Willis, *Reciprocity* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Co., 1903), chaps. 1, 6.

[20] Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859–1877* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Bensel, *The Political Economy of American Industrialization, 1877–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). The most accessible treatment of nineteenth-century US tariff legislation to date remains F. W. Taussig, *The Tariff History of the United States* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1931 [1892]).

historically has also been closely associated with political nationalism and a "realist" approach to international affairs.[21] For their part, American Cobdenites remained an independent cosmopolitan minority within the Republican party from the 1850s to the early 1880s, and became Mugwump party "traitors" after 1884 when they threw their support behind the Democratic presidential candidate, Grover Cleveland.

In correcting the era's common laissez-faire portrayal, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade* offers the first detailed transatlantic study of the free-trade movement in late-nineteenth-century America. The book also offers a reinterpretation of the Republican party's formation and ideological reorientation. In the United States, this new free-trade movement arose from among the leaders of the mid-century Liberal Republican movement. They were American subscribers to Cobdenism – sometimes referred to as the "Manchester School" – seeking a liberal world of free men, a reining in of protectionist-inspired monopolies and political corruption, and the establishment of world peace through global free trade. The book's online Appendix accordingly includes a detailed biographical list of American Cobdenites, many of whom were the politico-ideological leaders of free-trade, anti-imperial, abolitionist, and other liberal reform movements throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.[22]

These American Cobdenites struggled but, in the short term, largely failed in their cosmopolitan goals. Their failure owed much to their independent spirit. They were too often unable to agree on a cohesive strategy to accomplish their shared goals, which helps to explain why the growing Cobdenite influence in the United States only rarely correlated with successful political reform. Their short-term failure owed even more, however, to the sizeable intellectual and political opposition of American economic nationalists.

Perhaps it is this lack of tangible success that helps explain why scholarship on the nineteenth-century free-trade movement in the United States has been minimal until now. Another reason certainly lies with the complexity of economic controversies that plagued the era. Just on the issues of protectionism and free trade alone – so often connected with nineteenth-century monetary issues surrounding the gold standard, international bimetallism, and the free coinage of silver (national bimetallism) – one

[21] Eric Helleiner, "Economic Nationalism as a Challenge to Economic Liberalism? Lessons from the 19th Century," *International Studies Quarterly* 46 (September 2002): 307–329; David Levi-Faur, "Friedrich List and the Political Economy of the Nation-State," *Review of International Political Economy* 4 (Spring 1997): 154–178; Robert Gilpin, *Global Political Economy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[22] The Appendix, along with the full bibliography for the book, can be found online at www.cambridge.org/9781107109124.

can easily become lost in the vitriolic maze of contradictions, counter-arguments, bogeymen, and obfuscations used by all sides.

One desired end result is to clarify these subjects: to acknowledge their complexity without making them needlessly complicated. Protectionists promised high industrial employment and high wages for laborers, both of which would expand the market for farmers' and manufacturers' products. Free traders asserted instead that protectionism, unlike free trade, artificially increased costs for consumers, made American products internationally uncompetitive, and diminished agricultural exports for the sole benefit of a small segment of domestic industries, monopolies, and trusts.[23]

The tariff issue permeated nineteenth-century US politics like no other. Tariff disputes absorbed enormous quantities of congressional time and reflected the shifting balance of political power at any one time. As a result, it quite often divided the United States at a national, sectional, and local level. Free-trade outlets and organizations were promptly met with protectionist counterparts throughout the nation. Horace White's free-trade organ the *Chicago Tribune*, for instance, found a strong protectionist adversary in the *Chicago Inter Ocean*, as did William Cullen Bryant's *New York Evening Post* in Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. Nor was this a battle purely between intellectual elites. The ideological struggle over the road to domestic prosperity and global economic integration expanded from the east coast to the west, and both sides propagated propaganda campaigns, not on behalf of some mercurial hegemonic interest of the capitalist marketplace, but in the hopes of winning over the American people by making their respective economic ideologies an indelible part of American civil society and foreign policy.[24] Labor unions, manufacturers, and local farmers throughout the country aligned themselves with one side or the other. With less tangible success, both sides also sought the support of African Americans, women, the grassroots Granger movement, and its Populist successor.

As these different facets of the tariff issue demonstrate, internal divisions existed within both the free-trade and protectionist camps. Arguments for and against freer trade and protectionism were often amorphous, depending upon the time, place, and audience. Those seeking freer trade ran the gamut from a few of the most extreme, idealistic, absolute free-trade intellectuals; to more realistic pragmatists who sought

[23] Edward C. Kirkland, *Industry Comes of Age: Business, Labor, and Public Policy, 1860–1897* (Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books, 1967), 187.

[24] Whereas economic nationalism reigned triumphant in the United States, Frank Trentmann has argued in *Free Trade Nation* that before the First World War, England could lay claim to a free-trade civil society.

moderate reductions as gradual steps toward ultimate free trade; to those who, bereft of ideological motivations, self-servingly desired reductions on particular duties that would favor their own business enterprises. The vast majority of the free traders within this study fall within the first two groups, since it focuses primarily upon the intellectual leadership of the free-trade and economic nationalist movements.

Protectionists similarly found themselves in internal disagreement over dutiable rates, dutiable goods, the efficacy of trade reciprocity and foreign markets, and the ultimate future of America's infant industries. More conservative protectionists believed the home market and insular freedom of trade among the states would forever guarantee high wages for the laborer and forever supply the demand for American goods, whereas progressive Listians argued that American products would eventually need foreign markets as outlets for American surplus goods and capital. Small businessmen looking for temporary tariff fortifications could easily find themselves at odds with other American businessmen in rival enterprises. The rise of trusts, monopolies, and combinations in turn led to powerful protectionist special interest groups and lobbyists that wielded great influence upon government policies and agencies. While it was generally understood that, theoretically, infant industries must one day reach adulthood, it thus became advantageous for some to stunt, or at least stubbornly deny, American industrial maturation. Nor was protectionism solely an issue in the more industrial Northeast. Kentuckians long sought protection for hemp, Louisianans for beet sugar, and Westerners for wool.[25]

Both Listians and Cobdenites were becoming ever more mindful of foreign markets during this time, covering as it does the interrelated rise of an integrated global cotton and food system, the "first age of globalization," and what some call America's second industrial revolution – the US development of widespread urbanization, consumption, innovation, and industrialization.[26] In the latter half of the nineteenth century, British investment in the United States skyrocketed; capital investment in manufacturing increased tenfold; the number of wage earners nearly fivefold; the amount of people living within cities increased by a third; and the total

[25] Entire books have been dedicated to these subjects. See, for example, Chester Whitney Wright, *Wool-Growing and the Tariff: A Study in the Economic History of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1910); Roy Gillespie Blakey, *The United States Beet Sugar Industry and the Tariff* (New York: Columbia University, 1912).

[26] Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review* 109 (December 2004): 1405–1438; Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation*, 15; O'Rourke and Williamson, *Globalization and History*. For the Second Industrial Revolution, see especially the work of Alfred Chandler.

population of the country more than doubled. Technological advances in turn drastically increased productivity. For instance, between 1865 and the end of the century, wheat production went up by 256 percent, sugar by 460 percent, corn 222 percent, coal 800 percent. During this same period, exports rose from $281 million to $1.231 billion, imports increased from $239 million to $616 million, and, as the turn of the century approached, American companies and missionaries spread throughout the globe.[27] The United States was fast closing in on Britain as the dominant industrial economy.

But with massive urbanization, innovation, immigration, trade, investment, and industrialization came as well a host of new problems, many of which entered debates over the tariff and global market expansion. Issues surrounding labor, wages, economic depressions, and trusts became particular areas of contention between American free traders and protectionists. Added to which, sectional demands of the Northeast, South, and West quite often conflicted, leading to further disagreements over what was truly in the national interest.[28]

Adding to the confusion, American historians have long mistaken Cobdenism for Jeffersonianism, despite their stark differences. For one thing, Cobdenism took root within the American manufacturing and financial centers of the Northeast – New York City and Boston – rather than the agrarian locales of the Jeffersonian South. For another, northern Cobdenism was tied closely to abolitionism, whereas the southern Jeffersonian free-trade ideology became associated with the defense of plantation slavery. Finally, American Cobdenites were Anglophiles, where Jeffersonians were Anglophobes. With the post-Civil War New South undergoing tremendous postwar social, political, and economic upheaval, it was left to the Cobdenite abolitionists to take charge of the postbellum free-trade movement.

In *Global Dawn*, Frank Ninkovich has drawn much-needed attention to the myriad cultural manifestations of late-nineteenth-century liberal

[27] Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era, 1837–1873* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005); P. L. Cottrell, *British Overseas Investment in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1975), 11–15; Joseph A. Fry, "Phases of Empire: Late-Nineteenth-Century U.S. Foreign Relations," in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. by Charles W. Calhoun (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1996), 262; David M. Pletcher, "1861–1898: Economic Growth and Diplomatic Adjustment," in *Economics and World Power: An Assessment of American Diplomacy since 1789*, ed. by William H. Becker and Samuel F. Wells, Jr. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 120, 122; Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion 1890–1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 14–37.

[28] Peter Trubowitz, *Defining the National Interest: Conflict and Change in American Foreign Policy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

internationalism. Along these lines, Cobdenism's Anglo-American "free-trade culture" was indeed rich, and both men and women took part in it. The rhetoric of antislavery permeated the postbellum free-trade debate, acting as a linguistic bridge between the ante- and postbellum eras. Cobdenite cosmopolitans, many of whom were leading radical abolitionists, viewed the "unshackling" of the fetters of trade as but the next step in the universal emancipation of mankind and as a tool for "civilizing" less advanced societies.[29] Listian nationalists in turn believed that premature free trade kept society in a barbaric uncivilized state. They argued with similar antislavery language that free trade respectively enslaved American manufactures and laborers to the British market and European pauper labor. The free-trade debate even found outlets in the literature of Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Edward Bellamy. African Americans and women, although a small minority of the late-nineteenth-century free-trade and protectionist movements, also began to play a larger role as the century came to a close, as did the culture of manliness. These cultural aspects of the US controversy over free trade – its free-trade culture – would become ever more pronounced by the time of the late-1880s "Great Debate" over American tariff policy.[30]

American history as imperial history

Imperial historian Stephen Howe has observed how the "free-trade character" of late-nineteenth-century American imperialism has become the "dominant view."[31] The so-called Wisconsin School of diplomatic historians that rose to prominence in the 1960s and 1970s deserves due credit for this free-trade or open-door historiographical orthodoxy. Drawing inspiration in part from Marxist theories of economic imperialism, these revisionist foreign relations historians sought an overarching American imperial narrative: "empire as a way of life," as W. A. Williams, the founder of this radical school, put it. Revisionists provocatively

[29] Eric Williams controversially drew connections between the English free-trade and antislavery movements in *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

[30] These aspects also complement the new socio-cultural histories of American capitalism and internationalism. See Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundation of American Internationalism, 1865–1890* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), esp. 59–69; Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith, eds., *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012). On England's free-trade culture, see, also, Ayse Celikkol, *Romances of Free Trade: British Literature, Laissez-Faire, and the Global Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[31] Stephen Howe, "New Empires, New Dilemmas – and Some Old Arguments," *Global Dialogue* 5 (Winter/Spring 2003), worlddialogue.org/content.php?id=216.

suggest that late-nineteenth-century imperial presidents, with broad business and agrarian support, embarked upon a bipartisan quest for foreign markets that culminated in the acquisition of both a formal and informal American Empire. Williams termed this "Open Door imperialism," an American manifestation of John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson's "imperialism of free trade."[32]

In seeking an all-encompassing open-door imperial narrative, however, revisionist studies have tended to overlook the prevalence of economic nationalism in the United States. They have also tended to minimize the sizeable ideological and political conflicts over American imperial expansion between and within the Democratic and Republican parties.[33] They have thus recast postbellum American free traders – previously considered among the most vocal critics of American empire building – as advocates of informal imperialism.[34] Williams termed this seeming contradiction "imperial anticolonialism," and various other revisionists have similarly suggested that there was only a tactical difference between imperial and so-called anti-imperial commercial expansionists.[35]

[32] In their groundbreaking 1953 article Gallagher and Robinson revolutionized imperial studies by arguing that England's adoption of free trade from around 1850 onward had helped promote an informal British Empire that historians had previously overlooked. Robinson thereafter added that it entailed "coercion or diplomacy exerted for purposes of imposing free trading conditions on a weaker society against its will." John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* 6 (August 1953): 1–15; Ronald Robinson, "Imperial Theory and the Question of Imperialism after Empire," in *Perspectives on Imperialism and Decolonization*, ed. by Robert F. Holland and Gowher Rizvi (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 48.

[33] Other influences included Charles Beard and an opposition to the Vietnam War. See, for instance, William Appleman Williams, *The Great Evasion: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of Karl Marx and on the Wisdom of Admitting the Heretic into the Dialogue about America's Future* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964); Emily S. Rosenberg, "Economic Interest and United States Foreign Policy," in *American Foreign Relations Reconsidered, 1890–1993*, ed. by Gordon Martel (London and New York, 1993); James G. Morgan, *Into New Territory: American Historians and the Concept of US Imperialism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

[34] For the anti-imperial interpretation, see E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); David Patterson, *Toward a Warless World: The Travail of the American Peace Movement, 1887–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 12–13, 32–33, 74–75, 80.

[35] William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland, OH: World Pub., 1959), 29, 46–47; Thomas McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1967), 45, 63; Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1963), 412–417; Schoonover and Crapol, "Shift to Global Expansion," 140, 171–172; Thomas McCormick, "From Old Empire to New: The Changing Dynamics and Tactics of American Empire," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. by Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 69–72. Such revisionist work