

Imperial Metropolis: Los Angeles, Mexico, and the Borderlands of American Empire, 1865–1941. By Jessica M. Kim. (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2019. xvi þ 288 pp.)

In *Imperial Metropolis*, Jessica Kim presents the transnational history of Gilded Age Los Angeles elites as the city became an economic empire of the western United States. Kim’s story follows the economic and political engagements of economic power brokers in the years following the Civil War through the mid-twentieth century, paying special attention to the events and aftermath of the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Drawing on research conducted in the United States and Mexico, with a focus on financial networks and the political networks which emerged from them, Kim locates what conditions contributed to an increased and sustained investment in businesses and properties across the international border as Los Angeles leaders sought to create their own version of an empire.

Kim engages with historiographies of borderlands and urban-hinterland studies as well as United States empire. Her work unites these fields in an important and interesting intersection. Kim’s intent is to stretch where historians locate the borderland, suggesting to expand the lens for borderlands as far as Mexico City and Los Angeles to acknowledge their broader reach of influences and effects. In her methodological re-envisioning, Kim argues that the Los Angeles elite in the late nineteenth-century “imagined and manufactured a transnational network of investment and trade emanating from Southern California, extending across the border into Mexico, and eventually circumnavigating the globe.” (207) As the West’s most important city, Los Angeles was poised to be not only the gateway to the Pacific and Latin America, but the unique site of transnational capitalist expansion and empire-building with Mexican lands and labor in its sights.

The first chapter considers the early growth of Los Angeles, a city “born of empire” (22) as the perfect location for growth in southern California, with northwest Mexico as its hinterland. The second chapter situates the capitalists’ ideas on labor and race as they built new financial networks reaching into Mexico, relying on a racialized view of Mexican labor as passive, happy, and hardworking while also playing into a perceived whiteness of *Porfiriato* elites in building critical business partnerships. A most interesting argument comes in the third chapter, which centers Los Angeles as a borderland of the Mexican Revolution due to the residency of the Flores Magón brothers, whose writings influenced and encouraged Revolution, and the reactions of the Los Angeles elites whose investments were affected by their employees’ participation in Revolutionary ideas and events. The lasting effects of Revolution for this story come in the investors’ tightened control of their investments and a call on the United States government to intervene militarily on their behalf. The fourth chapter further examines these calls for US intervention in Mexico as a logical continuation of US expansion into Cuba, the Philippines, and Hawaii. The investors’ attempt at empire-building failed to convince President Wilson, who declined to be “the President of a handful of landowners.” (141) The fifth chapter shows the pivotal role everyday citizens of Mexico played in US-Mexican relations during and after the Revolution, expressing their own power by expropriating their ancestral homes taken by US investors. The final chapter considers how investors reimagined what empire could look like

despite their failure to build an empire. They shifted their pursuits to building a cross-border infrastructure and a global trade empire, metaphorically represented in the construction of the Los Angeles-to-Mexico City highway system.

Kim's central figures are the Gilded Age business investors, Lewis Bradbury, Griffith J. Griffith, William Rosecrans, and Henry A. Crabb, who made the city of Los Angeles and its recognizable landmarks as important as they are today. She gives extra emphasis to the roles of the Chandler and Otis families, Edward Doheny, William S. Windham, and Thomas Gibbon for building an economic empire through business and land investments, developing the hinterlands across the border, and leveraging Porfirian-era and post-Revolutionary political power and diplomacy. One of her strengths is demonstrating not only their influences and successes, but their failures as well. This resulted in a revised approach to their metropolitan empire after the Revolution. She makes an interesting argument for Los Angeles's role in the Revolution, showing that part of the rebellion against foreign investment was directed towards these specific investors and landowners. This argument could have been strengthened by paying attention to Mexican actors throughout the book instead of relegating them to the fifth chapter, and expanding her focus on Revolutionary employees and land reclamations with a bottom-up model. I was also left with further questions on the relative power of *Porfiriato* elites to Los Angeles investors. Some of the effects of the book's approaches were that Mexicans were relegated to nameless subjects in the face of these Los Angeles investors. However, her argument for expanding borderlands studies to include Los Angeles is compelling, as she successfully demonstrates that, through both population demographics and spheres of influence, Los Angeles and its hinterlands, regardless of if they were located in Mexico or the Inland Empire of California, were a part of a space in contention.

Kim's book skillfully engages with the tradition of William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis*, applying his approach to Los Angeles and its hinterlands. It thoroughly engages new works in US imperial history by showing the change of economic empire-building into Latin America over time, from direct land and business ownership to the more present forms of globalization and tourist economy which have emerged since the Revolution and more recently NAFTA. This book should be an engaging read for any historian interested in the study of urban history, borderlands, capitalism, and the United States empire.

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