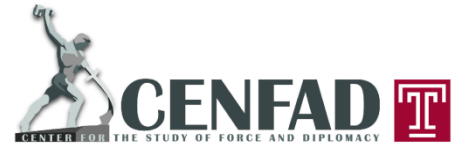


Immerwahr, Daniel. *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019. vii + 516 pp. ISBN 978-1784703912.

Imagine a map of the United States. Now, with that map conjured in your mind, open your Internet browser and search for maps of the country. Chances are that these maps, both mental and physical, represent the continental United States of America. Some may have an inset that includes Hawaii and Alaska. Few, if any, may represent the claims to Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands. It is doubtful that either includes the hundreds of overseas U.S. military bases or scant island territories currently under U.S. jurisdiction. One would be hard-pressed to find a historical map of the United States that includes its colonies and holdings in the Philippines, Guam, Panama, or Samoa. In his provocative and enthralling *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States*, Daniel Immerwahr seeks to correct these “logo map” projections. Instead, as Immerwahr implores, Americans need to reconcile with their lack of self-awareness towards empire and see how the history of these *hidden* territories is requisite knowledge for any understanding of the nation’s history.

Immerwahr establishes the United States as an imperial nation defined by a tension between its stated citizens and its territorial subjects. From the days of the early republic, the U.S. has grabbed land from other peoples, subjugated minority populations, spread its economic power, and used its military to defend its interests (10-11; 30-31). Applying this framework to continental expansion and overseas excursions, Immerwahr demonstrates how the U.S. manoeuvred its way to becoming the fifth largest empire by 1940. In building this empire, Americans not only obtained resources and bases that facilitated this growth of U.S. power, but also encountered struggles that would come to define the nation. Racial tensions between mainlanders and subject populations would create the legal framework that granted white territories statehood while barring non-white territories from constitutional rights. Questions surrounding the place of territorial expansion in a republic led to legal gymnastics that separated spaces “appertained” to the United States from the colonies of European powers (51). The need for strategic markets and bases masked the realities of imperialism occurring under the U.S. flag. In this light, the mainland United States was able to envelop its



territories into its fold without disrupting the popular narrative of exceptionalism that defines many aspects of U.S. politics and history. This is how the U.S. has hidden its empire, a phenomenon that Immerwahr suggests has developed a “chronic confusion” in Americans about the nation’s borders and its imperial identity (19). By reframing U.S. history as the history of the Greater United States, Immerwahr challenges us to shed our mainland bias and recognize the overseas territories as an inextricable part of the U.S. national story (400).

Immerwahr ties together some captivating concepts – guano, cartography, *Little House on the Prairie*, Godzilla, birth control, chemotherapy, and currency – to create a distinct portrait of the American empire. The discussion of the mid-nineteenth century guano islands not only commands the reader’s attention, but also serves as an interesting departure in how scholars can analyze changing U.S. interests and the rise of a pointillist empire. Immerwahr uses familiar characters, such as Daniel Boone, Emiliano Aguinaldo, Douglas MacArthur, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt to engage with themes of colonialism, violence, citizenship, and globalization. His seamless use of anecdote and analysis provides for a lively read that is somewhat elusive in academic history.

Immerwahr’s chapters on the Philippines and Puerto Rico stand out among the rest. Here, Immerwahr demonstrates how the United States used these territories to bolster its twentieth century ascendance while simultaneously keeping them outside the “charmed circle of national life” that bound the nation together (112). Puerto Rico, while excluded from constitutional rights under the Insular Cases, became a secret laboratory for U.S. service members and doctors testing chemical weapons and researching new treatments for hookworm and cancer. The contested legacy of Cornelius Rhoads, an American oncologist in Puerto Rico, reveals the hidden nature of the island’s place in national history. Once celebrated on the mainland for his developments in chemotherapy, Puerto Ricans reviled the man for his documented racism and inhumane

medical experimentation on islanders (142-146). It has taken the better part of a century for mainlanders to grasp Rhoads's contributions to American chemotherapy as the result of racial hatred towards U.S. citizens who, because of their status as colonized peoples, could never vote or access the same level of citizenship.

Once used as a testing ground for Progressive ideas on tax reform, land development, and urban policing, the Philippines became an inconvenient, and forgotten, part of national history. Immerwahr shows how Franklin Roosevelt grappled with the inclusion of Japanese attacks on the Philippines in his war message, believing that Americans would not support military intervention there. Although the largest American colony, its distance from the mainland coupled with its relative lack of white settlers made it less amenable to U.S. sympathies. The military campaign to retake the archipelago was even more damning. Immerwahr highlights how American commanders elected to bomb densely inhabited areas in Manila rather than risk the lives of U.S. soldiers in urban combat (210). A distinction between the American mainland GI and the Filipino U.S. national marked decisions made in what Immerwahr contends was the deadliest series of events to occur on U.S. soil. In a striking anecdote, a U.S. soldier encounters an English-speaking Filipino child, baffled by their linguistic acumen. When the GI learns that this child's English skills are due to the American colonial education system, he is shocked to hear that both he and this dishevelled child share a president. This is empire hidden.

In a book so readable and articulate, finding criticism is difficult. Nevertheless, this reviewer has some small quibbles with this study. Immerwahr curbs the nation's empire fever throughout his analysis of early twentieth century conceptions of national direction. Although it is true that war in the Philippines diminished imperialist zeal, many individuals and organizations still championed the overseas accomplishments of Washington. A look into the Panama Canal Zone, a territory of great import yet neglected in Immerwahr's study, would have complicated the author's view that the nation was indifferent to its empire. Instead, the premise could be adapted to identifying how and why Americans hid or overlooked certain parts of the empire in favor of other outposts. Immerwahr tends to draw more from academic literature and cultural sources. Although salient, there are multiple parts of the book where it appears as though the author favors these sources over



research conducted in the official archives of the countries under study. These flaws aside, *How to Hide an Empire* is a riveting and noteworthy book that belongs on the shelf of anyone interested in the history of the United States in the world. It will certainly change how this reviewer teaches American history.

Graydon Dennison  
Temple University Graduate Student