

St. Louis and Empire: 250 Years of Imperial Quest and Urban Crisis

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miners banded together through fledgling unions to provide death benefits in a communal effort to maintain human dignity in death, paving the way for the creation of the United Mine Workers of America, one of the most powerful unions in the nation. In western Pennsylvania, steel workers provided mutual aid through churches and fraternal organizations, although these were often segregated by ethnicity after steel unions were crushed in the wake of Homestead.

Much of the book features a labor-versus-capital narrative that oversimplifies the fluid nature of class, casting doubt on the explanatory power of its case studies. Whether at Homestead or Haymarket or in southern Illinois, Rosenow draws fairly strict battle lines between capitalist owners and exploited workers. One wonders, however, how much the rituals of death hold up when class lines break down. In Iowa coal country, for example, class lines could be obvious when miners lived in coal camps while managers and owners lived elsewhere. The lines were not so obvious in places like Boone and Madrid, where miners often lived in the same town as managers, attended the same churches, played on the same baseball teams, and joined the same lodges. Both groups mingled with farmers and the town's middle class. Catastrophes in the mines affected the whole community, sometimes leading to cross-class reform movements. When miners died, they were buried in the same cemeteries as teachers, artisans, and politicians, often irrespective of ethnicity, unlike the examples of Chicago and Union Miners Cemetery in Illinois. This is not to question the validity of the author's case studies but to wonder how much of a "barometer" (98) they are for the larger working-class experience with death, especially in the Midwest.

The author offers a tantalizing and well-researched glimpse into the rituals of death for workers whose lives held little value outside their own communities in industrializing America. How suggestive they are for the broader working-class experience remains to be seen.

St. Louis and Empire: 250 Years of Imperial Quest and Urban Crisis, by Henry W. Berger. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015. xi, 353 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.50 hardcover.

Reviewer Thomas J. Gubbels is associate professor of history at Lincoln University. His research and writing focus on Missouri history and the history of transportation.

Students of American foreign policy often ignore the Midwest, assuming that the region has played no role in establishing the nation's international goals. Henry Berger's *St. Louis and Empire*, however, places

St. Louis at the forefront of America's historic quest to establish itself as the heart of a global economic empire. Berger, professor emeritus of history at Washington University in St. Louis, applies his expertise in foreign policy history to his own local community.

Drawing heavily on the work of William Appleman Williams and other "New Left" historians, Berger argues that St. Louis has been an outward-looking city since its founding. Early leaders such as Jean Pierre Chouteau and Thomas Hart Benton saw St. Louis as the potential site of an international trade and commercial network that would facilitate the shipment of Missouri-made products throughout the world. Later in the nineteenth century businessmen such as John Cahill and Henry Clay Pierce worked to improve the industrial infrastructure of St. Louis and looked to foreign nations as both potential markets and investment opportunities. As the twentieth century approached, St. Louis businessmen actively supported the Spanish-American War and sought to tap into growing markets, such as those in Asia and Latin America, making them some of the first practitioners of dollar diplomacy. After World War II, St. Louis's civic and business elites fully embraced the Cold War and sought to establish the city as one of the economic hubs of the military-industrial complex. While this international economic focus shaped America's foreign policy and allowed many St. Louis businessmen to establish great personal fortunes, it also led to an unstated policy of benign neglect of domestic issues. Critical social issues such as labor unrest, racial tensions, and urban decay seemed less important than potential economic profit abroad, and many St. Louis leaders believed that building an international economic empire would inevitably lead to civic growth and local prosperity. However, as recent events in Ferguson, Missouri, show, St. Louis's outward focus has failed to produce widespread domestic prosperity and has left the city in a state of urban decay and decline.

Intellectually, Berger borrows heavily from an established "New Left" school of thought that sees the central goal of American foreign policy as establishing an economic empire abroad while either ignoring critical domestic social issues or assuming that they will be resolved via the growth of international trade and commerce. Berger supports this position throughout his work, deftly weaving together biographies of St. Louis's civic and business leaders while simultaneously tracing the international growth of several famous St. Louis companies, such as McDonnell Aircraft, Mallinckrodt Chemical, and Emerson Electric. However, Berger fails to draw a clear connection between the international focus held by the city's economic elites and the community's seemingly ceaseless domestic calamities. He mentions several urban

problems that St. Louis faced over the years, such as the city-county divide and the post-World War II problems of segregation and white flight, but his focus is primarily on the “imperial quest” part of St. Louis history, while the “urban crisis” story receives much less attention. Perhaps future work will more clearly illustrate exactly how an international economic focus, especially during the Cold War era, led to a willful abdication of civic responsibilities by the city’s elites.

Nonetheless, Berger’s book offers an insightful reinterpretation of St. Louis’s history and clearly shows that the city deserves a spot at the table when discussing the historical evolution of American foreign policy. One may hope that it will serve as a catalyst for additional studies to see if similar historical patterns can be found in other midwestern cities, such as Des Moines, Omaha, Chicago, or Kansas City. Civic leaders in those communities likely shared a common outlook with their historic St. Louis contemporaries, and those cities no doubt also played a role in the growth of America’s international economic empire.

The Wisconsin Historical Society: Collecting, Preserving, and Sharing Stories since 1846, by John Zimm. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015. vi, 152 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. \$25.00 hardcover.

Reviewer John D. Krugler is professor emeritus of history at Marquette University. His most recent book is *Creating Old World Wisconsin: The Struggle to Build an Outdoor Museum of Ethnic Architecture* (2013).

Writing history that is readily accessible to general audiences is not easy. To succeed, the author must be an accomplished storyteller, someone who does not get bogged down in endless detail. John Zimm, an associate editor at the Wisconsin Historical Society Press, the publisher of this book, has produced a very readable, condensed account of the creation and development of the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS). The book, a revision of an article Zimm published in the *State of Wisconsin Blue Book* for the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, will appeal to readers who know little about the society.

In many ways, this is a remarkable book. At 169 years old, the WHS has a rich and fascinating history that does not lend itself to a 123-page text. Zimm makes no pretense to offer an in-depth critical analysis of the society. Rather, he shares a number of stories from the society’s long past. He does not have a thesis. Not surprisingly, he presents the society in very positive terms. Nasty battles over budgets, the complicated relationship with the state, and the financial battles over the growth of historic sites, for example, are given short shrift.