

The background of the cover is a reproduction of a painting depicting the Statue of Liberty. The statue stands on its pedestal on the left side of the frame. In the foreground and middle ground, there are numerous ships and boats on the water, many of which are flying the American flag. The sky is filled with dramatic, white and grey clouds. The overall style is that of a 19th-century historical painting.

AMERICA IMAGINED

**Images of the United States
in Nineteenth-Century Europe
and Latin America**

Edited by
Axel Körner,
Nicola Miller,
and **Adam Smith**



America Imagined

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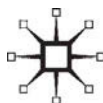
America Imagined

Explaining the United States in Nineteenth-Century
Europe and Latin America

Edited by

Axel Körner, Nicola Miller, and
Adam I. P. Smith

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AMERICA IMAGINED

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Preface

The origins of this book go back to a comparative research project hosted by the Centre for Transnational History at University College London, entitled “The American Way of Life: Images of the United States in Nineteenth-Century Europe and Latin America.” The project was generously funded for four years by the United Kingdom’s Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

The scope of the research for this book was such that it could only be done collaboratively, and one of the book’s distinctive features is that it has been devised and written collectively, including the drafting of its individual chapters. Each chapter adopts a thematic approach, focusing on specific national contexts as appropriate to the theme, but then integrates these examples into a wider comparative and transnational framework. Although each contributor took responsibility for a specific theme, hence the individual attributions, the chapters are the outcome of a comparative discussion between all of the authors of this book. As a result of this approach, our book aims to be more than an edited collection of individually composed chapters.

A number of research assistants associated with the project helped to locate and collect primary sources: Esme Cleall, Federico Mazzini, Nico Pizzolato, Katharina Rietzler, Paul Shirley, and Stephen Wilkinson. We would also like to thank UCL’s Department of History for its institutional support. We valued the opportunity to present and discuss our project at a number of workshops and seminars, including events organized by the Institute for the Study of the Americas, the Institute of Historical Research, the Central European University, the University of Jena, Brown University, the University of Warwick, and the University of St. Andrews. On all of these occasions we received valuable comments and criticisms. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Kathleen Burk, Stephen Conway, James Dunkerley, Maurizio Isabella, Donald Sassoon, and Guy Thomson, as well as the anonymous reviewers of our project application and the book proposal. We are also grateful to Karl-May-Verlag for granting permission to use an image free of charge. Some aspects of this book have been discussed previously in articles for which references are given in individual chapters as well as in the bibliography at the end of this book.

Introduction

Axel Körner

une page blanche (sauvage) où écrire le vouloir occidental

*Michel de Certeau, in his commentary on
Jan van der Straet's painting of Amerigo Vespucci¹*

America! America?

Whether as a geographical expression, a political experiment, the realization of Enlightenment ideals, or just an abstract notion of prosperity and progress, during the nineteenth century no word conjured up the idea of the future more powerfully than “America.” The metaphor has a long history, famously dating back to Thomas More’s “ideal commonwealth,” described in his *Utopia* of 1516, which was located in the South Atlantic, but read as a reflection on life in the recently discovered New World.² Explorers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the New World as an endlessly renewable source of wealth and prosperity for the Old World. For other observers America became a screen onto which to project their political concerns; for example, the Baron Lahontan used his *Voyages dans l’Amérique Septentrionale* (1705) to articulate his criticism of France’s *Ancien Régime*. By the time Turgot called for the independence of the colonies in 1750, many Enlightenment thinkers were projecting their visions of a new humanity onto the lands across the Atlantic. The US Declaration of Independence (1776)—followed by the independence of Haiti (1804), most of the Spanish colonies (1808–26), and Brazil (1822)—seemed to confirm the idea that the New World was an arena for political freedom and modern government. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the utopian promise hitherto associated with the whole of the Americas had come to be represented, at least in European discourses, primarily by the United States of America.³ In the former Iberian colonies, resistance to this appropriation of “America” by the United States persisted well into the twentieth century.⁴ Even so, the successful invention

in Spanish-speaking America during the early twentieth century of a tradition based on the idea of *Latin America* indicated a prevalent acceptance there, as in Europe, that it was the United States (rather than any of the former Iberian colonies) that symbolized the utopian potential of modernity.

Thus Alexis de Tocqueville was far from the only person who, in looking at America, “saw more than America.”⁵ Even for its critics—and there were many—the United States was a great talking point, not only among educated observers but across all strata of society in many parts of both Europe and Latin America. It was continually adduced in elite debates about social change, constitutional reform, the meaning of democracy, industrialization, and even the future world order, but it was also discussed in popular newspapers, illustrated magazines, workingmen’s clubs, labor organizations, women’s movements, and even in Cuban cane fields. Lincoln’s assassination brought crowds onto the streets to mourn not only in Britain, but also in Havana and Buenos Aires. US characters and themes were embedded in popular consciousness by best-selling literary works such as James Fenimore Cooper’s novels, which were more popular in Europe than in his native country; Charles Dickens’s *American Notes* (1842), written when he was already an internationally celebrated author; or—the most successful of them all—Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852).

A less well-known but equally powerful example of the hold that America had on many people’s imagination concerns something that was not even visible to the naked eye. In the 1870s, a generation after the publication of Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848), a new specter was haunting Europe in the form of a parasite originating from across the Atlantic, which destroyed an ingredient seen as quintessential to European culture since the era of the Greeks and the Romans—wine. All over Europe local and national governments, chambers of commerce and agriculture, botanists, parasitologists, and agronomists debated the effects of *Phylloxera*, the parasite that, according to the International Botanical Congress in Florence and the French Ministry of Agriculture, had arrived in Europe from America, through vines specifically imported from the New World in order to cure Europe’s vineyards of another disease, mildew.⁶ Europeans looked on helplessly as substantial portions of their vineyards were destroyed, which was a catastrophe in particular for the French Third Republic, where wine had become central to the definition of the nation’s tormented identity.⁷ Meanwhile, from early on the only salvation on offer appeared to be the importation—again from America—of new vines that were claimed to be resistant to the parasite. The experience of *Phylloxera* highlighted the

widespread obsession with America as both the source of all contamination and the only hope of a miraculous cure.

Whether castigated as a threat to civilized order or held up as a promise of earthly paradise, America was ritually invoked as a compass for future developments. Yet, what was meant by “America”? From today’s perspective, over a decade after the end of “the American century,”⁸ during which certain images of the United States were powerfully promoted by US governments and corporations, it is easy to assume that there is a set of constant and fixed associations (conquest of nature, liberal democracy, industrial capitalism, mass entertainment, and so forth), whether they are celebrated or criticized. The assumption that there is such a universally understood model lies behind much of the literature on Americanization or anti-Americanism. A preliminary survey of nineteenth-century sources suggested, however, that the meaning of “America” differed, sometimes quite sharply, according to the nationality, social status, political conviction, religion, gender, or race of the person invoking the word. During the second half of the nineteenth century most of the countries that observed and discussed the transformation of the United States themselves went through a period of dramatic social, political, and cultural change, a process of modernization and of inventing and reshaping national identities. Ultimately, thinking about the United States meant to follow or to reject specific models of modernization and democracy that were at the core of debates for most of the nineteenth century and still dominated much of the twentieth century. Analyzing images of the United States in comparative perspective provides a key to the ways in which societies reflected upon their own past and future, how they experienced change, interpreted history, and fashioned ideas about selfhood and otherness. Hence, the focus of this book is not the United States itself, but Europe and Latin America and their respective experiences of becoming modern as refracted through images of the United States.

From the Mexican-American War to the Spanish-Cuban-American War

Our book’s chronological scope is the second half of the nineteenth century. The analysis starts at midcentury, when the Age of Revolution in Europe and Latin America reached its premature end. In Europe, before 1848, America was one among many points of reference for the revolutionaries and liberal reformers who were united in the aim of creating a new society, but their thinking about what was to come after the end of the *Ancien Régime* drew mainly upon European political thought. However, the end of the Age of Revolution also meant the end of this shared

liberal dream. Worries about popular democracy drove the middle classes back into the embrace of the state, with the result that liberal ideals were defeated in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Habsburg monarchy. As a consequence, the US experiment came to occupy a more prominent place in European thinking about the modern age and its liberal promise. It was no coincidence that in 1848–49 the French liberal politician and Americophile Edouard Laboulaye delivered his internationally influential lectures on the history of the United States at the Collège de France. At around the same time, James Knox Polk's ruthless policy of expansionism led to the Mexican-American War (1846–48) and the subsequent cession of Upper California and New Mexico to the United States. This moment was not only significant in the territorial consolidation of the United States but also in what it seemed to signify about the United States' lack of commitment to its own founding ideals. In Latin America, particularly, the Mexican-American War heightened already existing anxieties about the price that the other states of the Americas might have to pay for the successful consolidation of the Anglo-American republic. Moreover, it was during this period that major technological change opened up new opportunities, especially from the 1860s onward, for communication, exchange, and movement between Europe, the United States, and Latin America, notably the transatlantic cable, the increased volume of mail crossing the Atlantic, long distance travel for both business and leisure, and a wider circulation of periodicals, newspapers, and literature.

By the late nineteenth century the United States of America was increasingly perceived as a major economic power with corresponding aspirations to international influence. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, which resulted in informal American control over a nominally independent Cuba and the colonization of Puerto Rico and the Philippines, the United States became widely associated with a new form of imperialism that seemed to contradict earlier images of a republic founded on the ideas of the Enlightenment.⁹ US projection overseas became a sustained, concerted, and more deliberate process, during an era when the circulation of people, goods, and ideas was expanding rapidly. Around the turn of the century US direct investment abroad started to increase rapidly, from an estimated \$634 million in 1897 to \$2.6 billion in 1914.¹⁰ Our book examines what happened before the United States became a world power, when it was ideas and images, traveling in less willed and organized ways, that created impressions of America, rather than its foreign policy. In trying to understand the historical significance of “the American way of life,” the second half of the nineteenth century—between the end of the Age of Revolution and the Spanish-American War, when rapid change

was experienced throughout both Europe and the Americas—represents a period in itself, which deserves the focused study that has hitherto been lacking.

Investigating these changes in perception and in particular the negative images of the United States that emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century is not the same as tracing the emergence of anti-Americanism, as Dan Diner and Philippe Roger have done for the cases of Germany and France.¹¹ Anti-Americanism is an ideology that constitutes a particular current of thought in itself. This ideology has contributed to the emergence of negative images, which this book also investigates. However, what is important for our particular approach, and where our book differs from research into the phenomenon of anti-Americanism, is an emphasis on the dichotomy of positive and negative perceptions of the United States. Concentrating on anti-Americanism would be to underestimate the field of ideas from which negative images emerge and to ignore the multiplicity of images that characterize perceptions of the United States. Our focus on images enables us to capture a range of impressions that are less structured, fixed, and also less coherent than would be implied by the ordering principle of an ideology, but which nevertheless may have been significant in shaping attitudes.

Lives of Images

By “images” we do not just mean visual representations, but also textual metaphors and concepts. Like other sources used by historians to explain the social and cultural realities of the past, images are objectifications of subjectively constructed abstractions. They are not necessarily based on any direct experience of what they represent. Some of the most powerful images of the United States were created by people who had never crossed the Atlantic, for example, William Gladstone’s famous article in the *North American Review*, “Kin beyond the Sea” (1878), or Laboulaye’s entirely imagined *Paris en Amérique* of 1863. But the fact that images are subjective constructions, rather than making them “wrong,” actually increases their value for the historian. To adopt Reinhart Koselleck’s terminology, images coalesce in certain “spaces of experience” and within certain “horizons of expectation,” thus providing a key to mentalities, perceptions, and human behavior in specific historical situations.¹² Social and political realities are always determined by individual or social perceptions, which motivate agency, which in turn confirms, reproduces, questions, or modifies social and political realities. As cultural artifacts images are no longer just objects, but can in themselves become producers of social agency.¹³ Reconstructing the particular context from which images emerged allows historians to

examine the intersection between structure and event, between individual interpretation and collective perceptions.¹⁴

Images have often been deliberately deployed to achieve a specific aim through a speech act. Antonio Gramsci argues in his *Quaderni del carcere* that certain clichés of *Americanismo* are so strongly rooted in popular mentalities that they can be used as a means of propaganda and as an ideological pretext to influence political processes.¹⁵ More recently, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit inverted Edward Said's *Orientalism* to coin the concept of *Occidentalism* to describe a discourse that consciously distorts images of the West in general and of America in particular, in order to advance certain political or cultural aims.¹⁶ Therefore, referring to America—whether as a positive or negative example—has often been a strategy by which the speaker sought to convince an audience of specific values. However, the meaning of such images was not necessarily determined by the producer or, wholly, by the receiver. Instead, they have lives of their own.

It is this complex relationship between the production and the reception of images, and the cognitive process in which images become meaningful in a specific social context, that makes them such a valuable source of historical investigation. In *The Uses of Literacy* Richard Hoggart challenged the simple concept of a passive adaptation of cultural codes, ideas, and values, emphasizing instead the socially specific “reading” of cultural products based on different life-worlds.¹⁷ Michel de Certeau developed a theory of reception that emphasizes “the creativity of the reader,” breaking with the artificial contrast between the production and the consumption of culture.¹⁸ The process of reception is an independent creative process of cultural production, in which “the reader is the producer.”¹⁹ Received images take on their own dynamic, being continuously processed and elaborated over time. In Walter Benjamin's words, images appear where “thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions”; in short, they are bearers of history.²⁰

Images of the United States were deployed and produced in the home and at school, by political parties and learned societies, in municipal councils and national parliaments, in advertising companies and at the stock exchange, in trade union meetings and at the chamber of commerce, in universities and on stage. We have surveyed as wide a range of sources as possible: political speeches and diplomatic papers; newspapers, learned journals, and popular magazines; novels, memoirs, and recollections of various sorts; theatre, music, exhibition catalogues, and so on. We are mainly analyzing national debates, in most cases articulated through capital cities, although we noticed differences between the ideas circulating in metropolitan centers and those in second cities or provincial peripheries.

It would be impossible to produce a full record of images of the United States circulating in Europe and Latin America during the second half of the nineteenth century, but our book attempts to present its findings over as wide a range as possible, without duplicating research that has been done, for instance, on travel writing or on images in literature.²¹ Those images are not excluded from our analysis, but looked at within a wider framework of sources. Our emphasis is not specifically on the image of America among immigrant communities, because extensive work has already been done on that topic, although the issue of emigration was often at the center of the debates we analyze.²²

Geographical Scope

This book deals with a truly transnational phenomenon: the construction and circulation of images across nations and continents, across natural, political, and mental boundaries. Discourse about America has always been transnational, preceding the foundation of the United States and extending back to the “naturalist assessment” of the New Continent during the Enlightenment. Although there certainly were images of America that were highly specific to certain nations, it is important to take account of this fluidity of images across borders and of the cosmopolitanism of many of their creators. Whereas most of the existing work on images of America is centered on particular countries, this book studies perceptions of the United States in a transnational as well as a comparative perspective. We aim to explain the semantic content of images through the structural comparison of their similarities and differences, in order to shed light on the contexts in which they emerged. This comparison is two-dimensional, comparing Europe with Latin America, but also individual countries within Europe and Latin America.

One of the reasons for the strong interest in the United States among Europeans and Latin Americans was their understanding of the United States as a descendant from the same European civilization—seen as distant but at the same time related.²³ As Tocqueville confessed, “in spite of the ocean that intervenes, I cannot consent to separate America from Europe.”²⁴ Consequently, observers tended to measure the United States against European realities rather than evaluating the United States in their own right. In this respect the United States had much in common with Latin America, which unlike Africa or Asia was viewed as in many ways related to Europe. Moreover, Europeans often looked at North and South America comparatively as two experiments in forming new civilizations based on European origins.²⁵ This gives a specific significance to research on images of the United States in Europe and Latin America rather than,

for instance, Asia or Africa, or indeed in regions on the periphery of Europe, such as Russia or the Balkans, where kinship with the United States was felt to a lesser degree.²⁶ While Europeans and Latin Americans understood the United States as a younger descendant of the same culture, for Russians or the populations of the Ottoman Empire it was at best a rather distant relative.

The degree to which the United States mattered to national debates also varied within both Europe and Latin America. Spain, France, and Britain were all directly involved in the US War of Independence, had colonial possessions in the Americas, and remained in a position to influence developments in the United States, which was not the case for the German states, Italy, or the Scandinavian nations. Individual Norwegians and Swedes played a pivotal role in expanding the American frontier, but their collective influence on American politics remained marginal. In nineteenth-century debates on the relationship between church and state, Belgium was often cited alongside the United States, but its young history as a nation-state was so closely bound up with the Netherlands and other European countries that the United States played on the whole a rather limited role in Belgium's own political and cultural debates. Likewise, despite Huizinga's acute descriptions of American society in the early twentieth century, during the nineteenth century the Netherlands showed scant interest in the United States, even during the Civil War. The case of Switzerland is somewhat different, because it sometimes appeared as a fellow federal republic, but Swiss sources on the United States are relatively limited. This is not to say that a study of images of America among smaller national communities and emerging states, or those on the periphery of Europe, would be of no interest, but it would constitute an altogether different piece of research. The promise of a new golden land among European Jews constitutes a truly transnational subject, but it is only indirectly relevant to this book and there are already numerous specific studies of the topic.

The beginning of modern France coincides with the history of the United States, and the American Revolution preceded the French Revolution by just a few years. This made discussion of the American experiment in France almost inescapable. Both countries shared republican experiences and in particular Tocqueville and, later, Laboulaye discussed their own ideas about France's political development through continual reference to the United States. Meanwhile, the making of French national identity, especially after the defeat of 1870, always needed a counterpart, which the French often found in the Anglo-Saxon race, in which they included the United States.

Britain and Spain both had colonies across the Atlantic, which means that their respective histories were closely intertwined. Moreover, Spanish images of the United States influenced debates in Latin America, making Spain a key link between both Americas. While Britain had to come to terms with its early experience of decolonization before accepting the United States as its closest ally, Spain had a more antagonistic relationship with the United States, remaining wary of US expansionism throughout the century, not least because of the question of Cuba. However, Democrats, Liberals, and Republicans in both countries looked to the United States as a constitutional, political, and social model. In Britain these feelings toward the United States were strengthened by a sense of ethnic and political kinship, while Spaniards, like their neighbors to the north, more often turned to notions of Latin and Anglo-Saxon difference to explain their present place in the world.

Italy had no tradition on which to build a modern nation-state, but its political unification coincided with the election of Abraham Lincoln as sixteenth president of the United States. The country's revolutionary tradition since the Napoleonic period resulted in several generations of Italian exiles negotiating concepts of a nation-state from abroad. European and American experiences helped Italians to shape their own concepts of republicanism, federalism, and liberalism. Becoming Italians meant becoming modern, a process in which the United States became a constant point of reference. However, unification did not result in the political and economic prosperity the patriots had hoped for, leading to a constant flow of Italians leaving the country. Although until the early twentieth century other countries in Europe or Latin America constituted the preferred destinations of Italian emigrants, ideas about life in the United States influenced them in their decision to leave.

There were multiple connections between Germany and the United States. While German movements for social reform frequently influenced ideas in the United States, after 1890 the process was reversed when German women's movements found inspiration in the United States.²⁷ The American university system first took the Scottish system as a model, later the German.²⁸ A number of recent studies examine specific German debates about the United States, relating, for instance, to the revolutions of 1848 or the early years of Germany's Americanization.²⁹ While the book refers to some of these debates, Germany's late unification makes it problematic to speak about a national discourse on America, with Prussia, Saxony, or Bavaria presenting very different circumstances from the smaller political units in the southwest or in the merchant city-states of Lübeck, Bremen, or Hamburg. Likewise, the relatively late awakening

of national sentiment in Central Europe makes it difficult to include the Habsburg Empire in this book. While Kossuth's popularity in the United States has generated historical interest in Hungarian images of America, it would be challenging to undertake research beyond the Magyar-speaking elites. Regarding the Slavonic languages the source material is scattered and often difficult to separate from the existing German or Hungarian accounts of America in the region.³⁰

In colonial Cuba, patriots felt compelled to look to the United States, not only for inspiration but also for practical support in promoting their own various projects for Cuba's political future. This Cuban tendency was reinforced by reciprocal interest from the United States: Thomas Jefferson famously stated in 1820 that Cuba would be a valuable addition to the Union, and four years later John Quincy Adams used the notorious "ripe fruit" analogy to suggest that such an outcome was inevitable. US goods and people were present in Cuba far earlier and more extensively than anywhere else in Latin America, including Mexico. Moreover, many Cubans, not only from the elites, had firsthand experience of living and working in the United States, there, especially, in the tobacco factories of Tampa and New Orleans, but also in New York and Philadelphia. To a greater extent than anywhere else in Latin America, including Mexico, the policies of the United States were a central factor in Cuban politics and the two countries shared a sense that they were part of each other's history. Cuban imaginings about the United States have to be understood in this context. Yet, it will be argued, Cuba was only an enhanced example of what was happening across Latin America, which was that politicians, activists, and intellectuals were all comparing their own experience of modernity with that of the United States.

For Argentina the United States symbolized what was meant by its own *Revolución de mayo* of 1810, namely, the Enlightenment of the masses. Argentina is often thought to be the Latin American country most closely comparable to the United States, and there are indeed valid points of comparison: similarly structured economies based on temperate agriculture, initiatives to attract immigrant workers from Europe, and racist policies, including war, to exclude the native peoples from the national community. It is widely held that the Argentine Constitution of 1853 drew in important respects on the US Constitution and that the US model of primary education had particular resonance in Argentina, but that beyond those two factors Britain and France were far more important reference points throughout the nineteenth century. This view persists mainly because of the attention given to the leading liberal intellectual Domingo F. Sarmiento, who was president of Argentina from 1868 to 1874. Sarmiento is still widely characterized as an imitator of the United States,

but he was actually highly selective about the aspects of US life that he introduced into Argentina; moreover, he was unusual—if not unique—among the Argentine ruling class in his enthusiasm for *norteamérica*. The role of images of the United States in nineteenth-century Argentina was both more extensive and less positive than an exclusive focus on Sarmiento has suggested.

Brazil shared with Cuba, Spain, and the United States the problem of the abolition of slavery as a central challenge to its political life. The late foundation of the republic in 1889 gave Brazil a wide range of US experiences to draw upon in building a counterweight to Spanish America. Like Argentina, Brazil saw itself as a rival embodiment of modernity in the Americas, as a South American version of the US experience of modernity. This aspiration was fed in part by historic similarities: continental size, colonial experience, and displacement of native peoples linked to European immigration. The image of the United States encapsulated what Brazil itself wished to become—an industrialized civilization—but Brazilians also saw themselves as more civilized, more humane, and more authentic than the United States.

As this discussion has shown, this is mainly a book about Europe and about Latin America. However, its subject is also relevant for our understanding of US history. Situating the American experience within a transnational framework of responses to its own development, the book also contributes to the growing body of literature that tries to globalize US history, moving beyond the limiting concept of American Exceptionalism.³¹ Part of that story is a reexamination of the direction of intellectual and cultural transfers, which was never just a one-way street. Therefore, the book's thematic focus also generates questions about the United States' own sense of self, which was throughout its history affected and even constituted by nationally and culturally diverse influences and understandings of its own character. As is now increasingly being argued, transnational images of the United States were at the core of its own history.³²

Themes: Prosperity, Domesticity, and Barbarity

The chapters of this book are organized thematically, grouping together a range of images and discourses across countries and decades as is most appropriate to each of our themes, which are prosperity and progress; constitutionalism and civic culture; barbarity and the absence of civilization; kinship and foreignness; race and slavery; domesticity and gender.

The opening chapter—"Land of Opportunity?"—discusses the extraordinarily powerful and durable idea that America was a place where

ordinary men and women could make a new and better life. The popular faith that America offered social mobility (or the “right to rise”) was based upon both an economic conception of natural abundance, especially of land, in the United States and a political analysis of the open society created by American democracy. Thus these images had important spatial connotations. In the final three decades of the nineteenth century, however, these ideas were challenged in a more profound way than ever before. In its “Gilded Age,” the United States became increasingly associated with a vision of modernity that was still technically advanced and large in scale, but that seemed far less appealing to workers and radicals than the democratic modernity of the artisans’ and small-holders’ republic of the antebellum era.

The second chapter explores the image of the United States as a model—or anti-model—republic, analyzing differing perceptions of the relationship between US founding documents and institutions and its civil society. Debates among the political and intellectual leaders of Europe and Latin America about the United States’ particular brand of republicanism and democracy were both shaped by and in turn helped to reshape national political discussions about the form and future of their own systems of government. While some observers, particularly in Spain and Cuba, focused on the American Constitution as the model *par excellence* of self-government and a potential panacea for their own democratic deficit, others followed the lead of Laboulaye, declaring that what was significant about American style democracy was not its constitution but rather its civil society—the myriad alliances, networks, and associations that agitated for political, social, and economic change at the local, as well as state and federal, level.

The third chapter analyzes perceptions of gender and domesticity associated with life in the United States. Europeans and Latin Americans alike were fascinated by stories about these intimate aspects of American life. The chapter explores themes such as education and work; social and sexual freedom; beauty and sexuality; confidence and respect; comfort and convenience. It illustrates both the international competition of images (US women were often compared and contrasted with French and English women) and the importance of disaggregating areas of the United States (gracious and seductive Southern women contrasted with bold, tomboyish Northern women). The chapter also sets the reception of images of US womanhood in the context of the broader question of the gendering of modernity, arguing that by the end of the nineteenth century US idealism had widely come to be seen as confined to the domestic sphere.

The fourth chapter explores images of the United States as a “barbarous” and ultimately “uncivilized” country. For Europeans the

self-identification as *Kulturnation* was often viewed in dramatic contrast to the absence of similar markers of civilization in the United States. Widespread embrace of idealism in Europe and Latin America contrasts with the perceived crude materialism of the United States and the supposed grossness and vulgarity of its citizens. One of the turning points in the evaluation of the American model were European debates on the issue of slavery, reaching from learned journals to popular literature, and including stage adaptations of Beecher Stowe's best seller, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. They set the scene for the subsequent coverage of the excesses of the Civil War, which seemed to confirm both the impracticality of federalism, as well as the uncivilized nature of American society. Throughout the late nineteenth century news about corruption, lynching, and mediocrity supported the idea of America as a profoundly barbarous nation.

The fifth chapter analyzes the widespread use of the concepts "Latinity" and "Anglo-Saxonism" in images of the United States, providing a terminology to describe oneself and the "other," while shaping perceptions of the different countries of the Americas. Exactly because of their vague and malleable nature, Latinity and Anglo-Saxonism became handy catch-all designations in the quest to make sense of the modern world. Both were almost equally shorthand for "progress" and "decadence," "civilization" and "barbarism," or to put it crudely, "good" and "bad"—always dependent on author and context.

The last chapter compares the impact of US models of abolition in Brazil, Cuba, and Spain, the three countries within our remit that still operated slavery. The experiences of the United States were the most significant ones deployed both by defenders of slavery and by abolitionists in these three contexts, although British and French models were also discussed. In ways that stood out even more clearly than in many of our other themes, images of US abolition were refracted through domestic political concerns. Even among supporters of abolition, there was very little consensus about the conclusions to be drawn from the US experience, with very different examples being employed to advocate, at different times and in different places, gradual or immediate abolition. Those who resisted it pointed to the inextricability of abolition and civil war in the United States as evidence that this was precisely how not to go about ending the practice of slavery.

Historiographies

Most historians interested in perceptions of the United States abroad have concentrated their research on individual countries.³³ These works form an important basis for our transnational and comparative approach, but they

also differ from our own objectives.³⁴ Likewise, we draw upon, but have different aims from, the large body of scholarly work analyzing images of America in nineteenth-century European literature.³⁵ The works of Mrs Frances Trollope, her son Anthony Trollope, Charles Dickens, and Karl May (whose adventure novels of the American West found 300 million readers worldwide) all transmitted images of America well beyond their countries of origin and represent a truly transnational phenomenon.³⁶ Furthermore, American authors such as James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, Jack London, the Irish-American Thomas Mayne Reid, and—the most popular of all, in Latin America as well as Europe—Edgar Allan Poe were translated into all the major European languages and widely influenced debates about the United States. Some of these images nurtured the dream of American freedom, but in many instances their attraction seemed to lie in their apparent confirmation of many of their readers' doubts about the American way of life. As with all our other images, we try to map the full social context in which literary images were created, looking beyond text, genre, and author.

The other main focus of the existing literature on international perceptions of the United States is popular culture, technological innovation, and the appeal of the United States as a consumer paradise, often looking specifically at the first half of the twentieth century.³⁷ Within this perspective the United States appears solely as the unchallenged epitome of modernity, without much reference to the wider context of political and social debates that our approach emphasizes. This is largely a consequence of the historians' chosen periodization: for example, Victoria De Grazia's *Irresistible Empire* makes it explicit that "America's advance through Europe" was a process characterizing the twentieth century.³⁸ There is also a widespread assumption that Americanization can be explained mainly in terms of what the United States chose to project into the outside world. Even when presenting an extensive panorama of Americanization, from politics to economic development and popular culture, most historians pay relatively little attention to what other nations actually made of this particular culture they encountered as a consequence of economic globalization. Diplomatic, economic, and political histories of the United States often include an interesting cultural dimension, but again the focus here is usually on economic, intellectual, and cultural developments during the twentieth century.³⁹

A pioneering exception is Robert W. Rydell's and Rob Kroes's *Buffalo Bill in Bologna* (2005), which deals specifically with the workings of transatlantic American mass culture, adopting a perspective inspired largely by critical theory and the theoretical assumptions of the cultural studies approach. Although the book deals more with the export of culture

than with the responses to it, the authors show the ways in which mass culture served to construct cultural hegemonies, thereby blunting the edge of class conflict.⁴⁰ Some of these ideas can be applied to the reception of American culture elsewhere. Related to this field of research are works on the representation of the United States in World Fairs and on the Chicago exhibition of 1893.⁴¹ Most of these works concentrate on a particular form of representation: the images with which the United States wished to represent itself, celebrating the religion of progress during the industrial age. While we use some of the same sources, we aim to interpret them in the context of wider debates on the United States, incorporating responses to the images America sought to project of itself and thereby historicizing them more effectively. As Paola Gemme has argued in relation to Italy, the idea of America as a model for the Italian Risorgimento was at least partly an American projection.⁴²

Our project takes up some of these arguments and places them within a comparative perspective. An agenda closely linked to some of the objectives of our enterprise was outlined in the collection edited by Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (2002). While Bender's book deals with the United States itself (rather than its images abroad), it sets out to challenge the boundaries of any national histories and tries to reconfigure the United States by framing its history through the "plenitude of its narratives."⁴³ Our book wishes to contribute to the agenda of those historians who take an increasingly global approach to US history in order to break the mold of American Exceptionalism. This is a very contemporary debate, which also reflects how the relationship of the United States to other countries has changed over the centuries and even in our own time.

Notes

1. Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 9–10.
2. The main works in a large literature are (ordered by date of publication) Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World*; O'Gorman, *The Invention of America*; Chiapelli, ed., *First Images of America*; Bitterli, *Die "Wilden" und die "Zivilisierten"*; Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man*; Todorov, *La Conquête de l'Amérique*; Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*; Brading, *The First America*; Rabasa, *Inventing America*; Madsen, ed., *Visions of America since 1492*; Turgeon, Delàge, Ouellet, ed., *Transferts culturels et métissages Amérique/Europe*; Caesar, *Reconstructing America*; Canizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World*; Fernández Armesto, *The Americas*. Craiutu and Isaacs, eds., *America Through European Eyes*.
3. On the history of the incremental identification of the United States as "America," see Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings*.

4. See Belnap and Fernández, eds., *José Martí's "Our America"*; Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*.
5. Tocqueville, "Introduction," *De la démocratie en Amérique*.
6. A. Zannetti, "Notizia Scientifica. La Phylloxera Vastatrix," in *Nuova Antologia*, January 1875, 212–215.
7. Almost 2.5 million hectares in France alone were destroyed: Richard Smart, "Phylloxera," in *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, ed. Jancis Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 525. See also George Ordish, *The Great Wine Blight* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1972), 294ff. The authors are grateful to Kathleen Burk for her help with this part of their research. See also Maike Thier, "Paris en Amérique." *French Images of the United States, c.1848–1886*. PhD thesis, University of London, 2009, ch. 5.
8. Alan Brinkley, "The Concept of an American Century," in *The American Century in Europe*, ed. Moore and Vaudagna, 7–21.
9. Wehler, *Der Aufstieg des amerikanischen Imperialismus*.
10. Rydell and Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*, 15.
11. Diner, *Verkehrte Welten und Feindbild Amerika*; Roger, *The American Enemy*. See also, on European examples, Henningsen, *Der Fall Amerika*; Strauss, *Menace in the West*; Lacorne, Rupnik, Toinet, eds., *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism*; Sebastian Balfour, "The Lion and the Pig: Nationalism and National Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Spain," in Mar-Molinero and Smith, *Nationalism and the Nation in the Iberian Peninsula*; Schwaabe, *Antiamerikanismus*; Markovits, *Amerika dich hasst sich's besser*; Stephan, ed., *The Americanization of Europe*; On Latin America McPherson, *Yankee No and his Anti-Americanism in Latin America*; for an overview: Grandin, "Your Americanism and Mine."
12. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, 351.
13. Archer, *Culture and Agency*.
14. Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, 57.
15. Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), vol. 1, 347.
16. Buruma and Margalit, *Occidentalism*.
17. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, 238.
18. Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, vol. 1, 249.
19. *Ibid.*, 250.
20. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 475.
21. The representation of American life in European literature is a large and rapidly expanding field of research. For a general introduction, see Evans, *America*.
22. It would go beyond the scope of this introduction to give even a brief survey of the field of immigration studies, but there are a few works that focus in particular on images of America among migrants. For an overview, see Friedman, "Beyond 'voting with the feet.'" Billington, *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise* brings together materials from immigration agencies with travel literature. On Italy: Franzina, *Dall'Arcadia in America and his L'immaginario degli emigranti*. On Germany: Helbich, Kamphoefner, Sommer, eds., *Briefe aus Amerika*.

23. See, for instance, Kroes, "America and the European Sense of History."
24. Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, vol. 2, 48–49.
25. The most famous example is Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, 107ff. See also, on the Italian veteran of 1848 Quirico Filopanti, Fiorenza Tarozzi, "Filopanti Professore Universitario e Insegnante Popolare," in *Un democratico del Risorgimento: Quirico Filopanti*, ed. Alberto Preti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), 93–119, 112.
26. The historical idea of the United States among Afro-Americans constitutes an even more complicated issue for historical investigation. See, for instance, Robin D. G. Kelly, "How the West Was One. The African Diaspora and the Re-Mapping of U.S. History," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Bender, 123–147.
27. Schüler, *Frauenbewegung und soziale Reform*.
28. Löser and Strupp, eds., *Universität der Gelehrten—Universität der Experten*. Between 1812 and 1914 about 10,000 US Americans studied in Germany.
29. Lerg, *Amerika als Argument*; Klautke, *Unbegrenzte Möglichkeiten*; and Czaja, *Die USA und ihr Aufstieg zur Weltmacht*.
30. Bracewell and Drace-Francis, eds., *Under Eastern Eyes*, esp. 61–120 and 195–222. For a European perspective also see *Amerika und Europa—Mars und Venus?*, eds. von Thadden and Escudier.
31. For a review of the scholarship, see Sexton, "The Global View of the United States."
32. Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation*; idem, "Reflections on the transnational turn in United States history: theory and practice." Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History*; Thelen, "The Nation and Beyond."
33. Exceptions are Vann Woodward, *The Old World's New World*; Thaller, *Studien zum europäischen Amerikabild*.
34. Along with the works cited above see, for Italy, Spini, *Risorgimento e Protestanti*; and Comitato italiano per la storia americana, *Italia e America dall settecento all'età dell'imperialismo*. For French views of the United States: Rémond, *Les États-Unis devant l'opinion française*; Portes, *Fascination and Misgivings*; Villerbu, *La conquête de l'Ouest*; Gavronsky, *The French Liberal Opposition and the American Civil War*. On French liberalism see Gray, *Interpreting American Democracy in France*; Jaume, *Tocqueville*; Brogan, *Alexis de Tocqueville*; Mélonio, *Tocqueville and the French*. The most recent survey for Britain is Burk, *Old World, New World*. For Spain and Latin America: Englekirk, *Bibliografía de obras norteamericanas en traducción española*; Lanero and Villoria, *Literatura en traducción*; Oltra, *La influencia norteamericana en la Constitución Española de 1869*; García Montón, *Viaje a la modernidad*. Reid, *Spanish American Images of the United States*.
35. Similar images in literature have also been discussed by historians of emigration. For Germany: Berger, *Amerika im XIX. Jahrhundert*. For Italy: Franzina, *Dall'Arcadia in America*. The scholarship on English literature about America is vast.
36. Billington, *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise*, xii, 39.

37. See (ordered by date of publication) Christopher W. E. Bigsby, ed., *Superculture: American Popular Culture and Europe* (London: Elek, 1975); Ralph Willett, *The Americanization of Germany, 1945–1949* (London: Routledge, 1992); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colanization and the Cold War. The Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). Alf Lütke, Inge Marßolek, Adelheid von Saldern, eds., *Amerikanisierung. Traum und Alptraum im Deutschland des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1996). Axel Schildt, "From Reconstruction to Leisure Society," *Contemporary European History* 5, no. 2 (1996), 191–222; Reinhold Wagnleitner and Elaine Tyler May, eds., "Here, There and Everywhere." *The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture*; Moore and Vaudagna, eds., *The American Century in Europe*; Dall'Osso, *Voglia d'America*.
38. de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire*.
39. Volker Berghahn, *The Americanisation of West German Industry, 1945–1973* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1986); J. Leo Wollemborg, *Stars, Stripes and Italian Tricolor: The United States and Italy 1946–1989* (New York: Praeger, 1990); Thomas Alan Schwartz, *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Peter Duignan and Lewis H. Gann, *The Rebirth of the West: The Americanization of the Democratic World 1945–1958* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Reiner Pommerin, ed., *The American Impact on Postwar Germany* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1994); Volker Berghahn, *America and the Intellectual Cold Wars in Europe: Shephard Stone between Philanthropy, Academy, and Diplomacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
40. See the bibliographical essay in Rydell and Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*, 47, 175–188.
41. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*; Gilbert, *Perfect Cities*; Harris et al., *Grand Illusions*; Rydell and Gwinn, eds., *Fair Representations*; Kretschmer, *Geschichte der Weltausstellungen*.
42. Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles*. Dall'Osso, *Voglia d'America*, 13, notes that Europe's *americanismo* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was often "prefabricated" by the American elites.
43. Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History*.