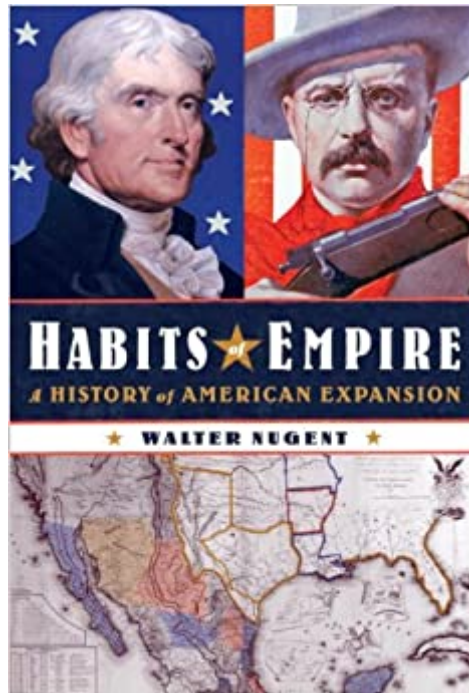


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# Habits Of Empire: A History Of American Expansion



## Synopsis

Discussions abound today about the state of the union, its place in the world, and the founding fathers' intentions. Did they want the United States to become a republic or an empire? Thomas Jefferson, after all, called the young nation an "empire for liberty." Later words through two centuries all evoked empire: "manifest destiny" in the 1840s, "benevolent assimilation" in 1898, and "our responsibility to lead" in 2002. Indeed, since Jefferson's day, Americans have proudly proclaimed liberty and cherished democracy even as they have often behaved imperially. *Habits of Empire* documents this expansionist behavior by examining each of the nation's territorial acquisitions since the first in 1782—how the land was acquired, how its previous occupants were removed or reduced, and how it was then settled and stabilized. By 1853, when the continental United States was fully established from sea to shining sea, the nation's habit of empire-building had become firmly formed. Each of the acquisitions is a story in itself. In Paris in 1782, the American negotiators—the crafty Benjamin Franklin, the crabby John Adams, and the crooked John Jay—stubbornly and with much luck pushed the new country's western boundary to the Mississippi River and almost gained southern Canada as well. Hardly any Americans yet lived west of the Appalachians, and their armies had not conquered the region, but they won it nevertheless. That allowed Robert Livingston and James Monroe in 1803 to accept Napoleon's astonishing offer to sell all of Louisiana. Through a volatile mix of leadership, luck, aggression, chicanery, rampant population growth, and self-confident ideology came the further acquisitions of Florida, Texas, Oregon, and the Southwest. From the 1850s through the 1920s, America's empire-building reached across the Pacific (from Alaska through Hawaii and Samoa to the Philippines) and around the Caribbean (from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and several "protectorates" to the Panama Canal and the Virgin Islands). After 1945, American expansion took a new global form, military and economic, and built on the need to contain the Soviet Union in the Cold War. After 2001 and the start of the "war on terror," it became both defensive and assertive. Acclaimed historian Walter Nugent shows how the United States, asserting republican virtue but employing imperial force, has long lived with the contradiction inherent in Jefferson's famous phrase "empire for liberty." Enlightening, empathetic, comprehensive, and well-sourced, this book explains the deep roots of America's imperialism as no other has done.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this compelling, controversial history, Nugent, an author (*Into the West*) and retired history professor, contends that the U.S. "has created three empires during its history," beginning with the march West, then the "offshore" acquisition of Alaska, Hawaii and the Caribbean territories, and the present era of "global/virtual" empiricism. Nugent's thorough chronicle peels back Thomas Jefferson's idea of an "empire for liberty" (which "rings just as true and right to Americans today") to find that high ideals do little to curb the aggression, deceit, cruelty and hypocrisy that have long characterized empire-building. Nugent spends most of his time examining America's achievement of Manifest Destiny, swallowing up Louisiana, Florida, Texas, Oregon, California, New Mexico and all points in between. Corrections, like the "imperfect pullback" of FDR's good neighbor policy, lead to the Cold War and, ultimately, to today's American empire, an expansion of power rather than territory. Covering a lot of ground in a short space, Nugent handles the relationships among governments and government players with clear, straightforward prose and easy-to-follow analogies: "American procurement of the Hawaiian Islands may be thought of as filibuster in very slow motion." Challenging some of America's most cherished ideas about itself, Nugent exposes an unsettling reality that outsiders-i.e., victims of American expansion-see all too well. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

\*Starred Review\* As military history attests, the logistics and support side of war is no small matter, and now it's mega-big business. Halliburton, the Texas-rooted corporation headquartered in Dubai and formerly managed by Dick Cheney, has spearheaded the rise of the private contractor

in U.S. military affairs and brazenly conflated privatization with profiteering. Investigative journalist Chatterjee, winner of the Lannan Cultural Freedom Award, charts the full extent of the company's corruption and transgressions in an impeccably matter-of-fact yet staggering work of military-industrial true crime. Chatterjee begins with the company's revealing history and tracks key players Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld as they alternate between CEO positions and seats of power in the federal government. Chatterjee then presents a meticulously documented litany of Halliburton scams and crimes. He cites epic waste and a lack of accountability and the suspicious failure to repair Iraq's oilfields. He chronicles the tyrannical treatment of the army of migrant workers from Southeast Asia who outnumber the U.S. soldiers they serve in bases resembling upscale American towns. Hope resides in Chatterjee's portraits of the courageous whistleblowers who have exposed the company's heinous opportunism and brutal disregard of human rights. Time will tell if justice will follow. --Donna Seaman

Walter Nugent's book on American expansion is a sober commentary on how the U.S. government has had a habit of being aggressive when it came to territorial acquisitions or exerting its influence around the world. Nugent points out that even in its infancy, the government tried to expand into what is now Quebec and Eastern Ontario. The book also chronicles events such as the Louisiana Purchase, the takeover of what was northern Mexico, the expulsion of Indians from their rightful lands and temptation of obtaining Cuba from Spain. It was in this era that Nugent called America Empire I. Empire II consisted of obtaining territory outside of the continental U.S. including Samoa, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Alaska, Midway Island and Hawaii, the last acquisition was indeed very unlawful and was tantamount to a coup over Queen Liliuokalani. Empire III was described by the author as the time where America did not obtain land but rather used its influence to dominate areas of the Middle East and South Asia with its foolish dreams of imposing Democracy in areas of the world that never heard of such of thing and the results of which have been disastrous. The book was well thought out with the history being detailed in an orderly, chronological manner. We should be careful to wish for a powerful government to influence the world, for it might well push its influence on US for the worse. Five stars.

Because of this book I learned that "Remember the Alamo" was all about preserving slavery in Texas and not necessarily a valiant stand against an oppressive dictator. The information provided by the author is excellent and I learned a lot. However, he does analyze the past in terms of present

day political correctness. There was a context for America's actions in the past that may be difficult to understand in the present. While Exceptionalism, open immigration policy, and Manifest Destiny are part of that context, America also invested heavily in transportation and communication infrastructure and had a vibrant, widely accessible, and strong free press that contributed to a strong sense of a nation. Other countries and territories that were in the path of America's expansion simply didn't have the means or the societal structure to stand up against it.

If you enjoy the illusion and arrogance that we as a people are morally superior, this book may be disturbing. We were and still are an imperialist nation. But we were no worse than the others. The details of how we achieved our expansion, by force, lies, diplomacy, illegal immigration, legitimate purchases, but most of all by rapid population growth are fascinating, in many ways better than fiction.

Nugent covers a lot of ground in this book, but it is unfortunately well-trodden ground. Other works on American expansion studied this same subject with more analytical weight. But his ability to synthesize information is commendable.

Short and sweet. If you are wanting to read a book that glorifies American expansion as the heroic spread of democracy and the bringing of "civilization" to the barbarians...don't buy this book. This is a very dry but informative look at the facts. No glorious tales of The Alamo defenders or American liberation of enslaved peoples here. The facts speak for themselves and this book is obsessed with documenting names, dates, numbers and quotes from many sources. It is also really nice that it has lots of maps that show not only the various geographical regions and the stages of US expansion but also the identity of the peoples from whom we took those regions. This is an excellent resource and reference book.

If you love American history, this is a great read on our country's history with foreign policy. Interesting facts you never learned in school. Even if you disagree with the author's premise of America being an empire, it is a fascinating read.

Candid and engrossing!

Outstanding. Excellent and very informative. Great read. The downside is that you may not have the

same view of this country after reading it. Pay particular attention to the Polk/George W. comparison. Our country has not been kind to non-whites and Catholics over the past 300+ years. What really surprised me was that a very high birthrate allowed us to conquer new territories.

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