

*Once within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500.* By Charles S. Maier.

(Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. xiii, 387. \$29.95.)

The book is indeed an *opus magnus*—a work on a grand scale about imperialism, state-building, and territorial expansion across societies and time, for which the author deserves congratulations. The term “territory,” argues Charles S. Maier, “is not just land, even extensive land” but rather “global space that has been partitioned for the sake of political authority, space in effect empowered by borders.” As such it is a “*decision space*” (emphasis in the original) that implies “a bounded global space divided into sovereign polities” (1-2, 3, 237).

To explore these concepts, Maier divides the book into six thematic and temporal chapters going from 1500 to the near present. His introduction sets up his theories and methodologies; his conclusion is timely and compelling. The goal of the book, however, is neither to be “a history of places” nor a “history of the state” but rather to explore the “underlying framework that makes states and economies possible” (6). His research is admittedly derivative (xi).

Readers can discern here that the book goes all over the place to explore how territories became manifestations of power, wealth, and geopolitics. However, though Maier brings in representative examples of territorial expansion of the Ottoman Turks, the Mughals of India, the Mongols of central Asia, and the Qing Dynasty of China, most of the book deals with European expansionism. This gives the book a Eurocentric flavor with unfortunate missed opportunities to delve into native histories of many parts of the world. Maier alludes to the Comanche Empire but never mentions it again (5). There are too many allusions to “vacant” or “virtually empty” land. Native Americans, Maier correctly argues, “were not reckoned as part of the human calculus,” but nor are they much in his book (128). Africa and Latin America are treated spottily. But in his discussion of nineteenth-century territorial boundary-making, how could Maier have possibly omitted mention of Brazil’s José da Silva Paranhos, the Baron of Rio Branco whose border diplomacy added territory the size of France to the Brazilian republic? Or in the conclusion where Maier critiques President Donald Trump’s plans for the US-Mexico border wall he omits mentioning that in 2006 then Democratic senators Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Chuck Schumer voted for the Secure Fence Act that authorized such a wall, of which over seven hundred miles are currently built.

The book is written in beautiful prose with excellent transitions between topics and chapters. Yet, annoying flaws detract from the book’s overall quality. That Harvard University Press, as is becoming its trademark, included no bibliography is unforgivable, as are some unfathomably missed errors by the author and copyeditors; for example Maier’s use of the “Mexican War”—which neglects twenty years of historiographical correction of that term; “Columbia” for the South American country; “Canada’s Midwest” when no such region exists on maps or the minds of any Canadians;

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and listing “Holland” twice in a list of countries (234, 152, 202, 186). Still, *Once within Borders* would make a recommended addition to graduate-level courses on empires, borders, and state-building.

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