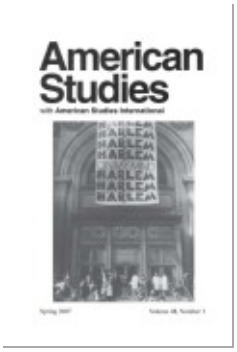
American Commodities in an Age of Empire (review)

Amy Spellacy



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in 1907 was to make history. From 1917 until 1940, Marable, the topic of Chapter Two, ran a waterborne jazz "conservatory" for black musicians that emphasized music literacy and professional discipline. Louis Armstrong, Marable's most famous "graduate" and the subject of Chapter Three, became, for three summers (1919–1921), "the focus of a highly symbolic cultural struggle between oral and literate approaches to musical performance" (75). Subsequent chapters investigate the musical cultures of Memphis and St. Louis; the riverboat careers of Bix Beiderbecke and Jess Stacey; riverboat jazz on the Ohio; and the decline of jazz on the river. Appendices include exhaustive lists of excursion boat musicians and river songs and tunes.

The book is well written and well researched. Jazz may have been born in the Crescent City and attained its first maturity in the Windy City, but it "grew up" on the Mississippi. Kenney's account of the music's little-known adolescence helps to explain its appeal and acceptance by the general public.

University of Richmond Gene Anderson

AMERICAN COMMODITIES IN AN AGE OF EMPIRE. By Mona Domosh. New York: Routledge. 2006.

In *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*, Mona Domosh explores how U.S. companies established an "informal" empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as they expanded into international markets and used images of foreign people and places to promote their products to domestic consumers. Domosh focuses on the experiences of five of the largest American international companies during this period: Singer Manufacturing Company, McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, H. J. Heinz Company, Eastman Kodak Company, and the New York Life Insurance Company.

In individual chapters on Singer, McCormick, and Heinz, Domosh considers how these companies created visual and textual images that associated their products with ideologies of civilization and progress. In the chapter on Singer, Domosh examines magazine advertisements and a series of promotional trade cards that feature people in different countries using Singer sewing machines. The cards emphasize the ways that people around the world are similar to Americans and have the potential to become "white" through the acquisition and use of American commercial products, but set limits on this idea by reasserting geographical difference in order to keep others at a safe distance.

Domosh's chapter on McCormick offers critical readings of the company's illustrated catalogs, which associate foreign spaces with premodern farming techniques and link McCormick equipment with progress. Domosh argues that the catalogs relocate the U.S. frontier narrative to foreign lands in order to show that foreigners may be able to emulate the conquest of the West in their own countries through the use of American technology.

From the 1880s on, H. J. Heinz Company emphasized the purity of their commercially prepared food and represented the company as a patriarchal family concerned with the well being of its workers and the people who consumed its pickles and sauces. In order to reinforce its family image, Heinz presented its factory as a domestic space, and encouraged American consumers to tour the factory to witness the sanitary and hospitable conditions for the workers, largely girls and women (the "girl in the white cap" in Heinz advertisements). Domosh draws on reports of corporate travels to show how Heinz naturalized their expansion into international markets by positioning foreign consumers as members of their extended corporate family. In this scenario, the Heinz representatives sent abroad

to peddle their goods were imagined as friendly visitors who enabled people around the world to share in the progress represented by their prepared foods.

Domosh connects these case studies as examples of "flexible racism," arguing that "because American companies set out to 'civilize' through consumption and because these new consumers remained, spatially and discursively, outside the bounds of political citizenship, they could be represented as historical agents in their own right, able to become white through consumption" (189). Domosh thus points to the potential for commodities to erase difference and demonstrates that racial identity and stages along the "civilizational hierarchy" were not fixed (194). Domosh's provocative and engaging study will be especially valuable for scholars interested in race and empire, the circulation of commodities, and the history of capitalism.

Harvard University Amy Spellacy

CALIFORNIA VIEJA: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place. By Phoebe S. Krupp. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2006.

California Vieja meticulously chronicles five distinct triggers that set off waves of pseudo-Spanish-Mexicanism in the cultural symbolism of Anglo California in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first is the publication of the wildly popular novel, *Ramona*, in 1884. Written by Helen Hunt Jackson and crammed with moonlight and roses romance about an ideal *rancho* society of the past, it sent winter tourists scrambling for California by train in search of picturesque adobes and souvenir shops purporting to be the place where the fictional Ramona was married. At the ranch that might have been the home of Ramona—had she been real, of course—family members dressed up as characters from the book and enacted *tableaux vivants* for the camera.

The second is "El Camino Real," the king's highway better known as the route taken by the barefoot friars who built a chain of missions from the Mexican border to San Francisco. Beginning in 1902, the road was revived (or reinvented) with the considerable help of local women's clubs and was soon espoused by local automobilists in a period in which route signs were rarer than gas stations. Harrie Forbes, one of the prime activists, joined her husband to create a thriving business out of manufacturing guideposts for the Camino: picturesque mission bells dangling from otherwise undistinguished route signage. The couple also sold smaller replicas for travelers, of course.

The third story is that of the Panama–California Exposition of 1915. The younger brother of San Francisco's Panama–Pacific fair of the same year, San Diego's was a regional show, spotlighting California products. Its buildings and ambiance, however, were steeped in a kind of neo-Spanish atmosphere, including guards in pointy sombreros, senioritas in shawls, strolling guitarists, periodic fiestas, and a wonderful pseudo-churrigueresque architectural fantasy village by Bertram Goodhue. If the Spanish could have afforded to rebuild Spain in Southern California, the San Diego Fair is undoubtedly what they would have built.

The fourth example is the planned suburb of Rancho Santa Fe, where Mary Pickford (star of the 1910 film version of *Ramona*) and Douglas Fairbanks (star of 1920's *Zorro*) settled into marital bliss in a home called "Rancho Zorro." The development itself took its name from the railroad, which owned an unprofitable tract outside San Diego. The houses—still settling the style for California homes today—were largely the work of Lillian Rice, who managed to combine all the modern amenities with the shady arcades and tile roofs of some idyllic past.