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The Obama administration's engagement with the Cuban government has led politicians and pundits of all stripes to reflect on the relationship between commerce and politics and, in so doing, to reanimate the concept of 'the open door.' Marc-William Palen, a Lecturer in Imperial History at the University of Exeter, argues that this concept has been misunderstood and misapplied by historians of American foreign relations from the 1960s to the present. Building on his work on the global impact of the highly protectionist McKinley Tariff of 1890, Palen sets out to rethink the characterisation of American power at the end of the nineteenth century by outlining what he describes as the "imperialism of economic nationalism," as distinct from the "imperialism of free trade" (163).¹ What is striking, he suggests, is not the American commitment to liberalised trade and the free movement of goods, people and capital, but rather the tenacity with which a band of influential Republican statesmen married their commitment to a high tariff to a programme of reciprocity and, ultimately, to an imperial foreign policy in the late nineteenth century. Convinced of the maturity of American industry but anxious that the U.S. domestic market had become saturated, these statesmen sought a solution in what Palen calls "an expansive closed door," as administration after administration "coercively enforced a policy of closed colonial markets in Hawaii, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba." (163).

¹ Marc-William Palen, "Protection, Federation and Union: the Global Impact of the McKinley Tariff upon the British Empire, 1890-1894," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38:3 (Sept. 2010): 395-418.

Palen opens this sharp article with a smart pair of quotations. The first is from William Appleman Williams, arguably the single most influential historian of American foreign policy in the second half of the twentieth century. “The Open Door Policy,” he writes, “was America’s version of the liberal policy of informal empire or free trade imperialism” (157). The second person quoted is Benjamin B. Wallace, long-time member of the U.S. Tariff Commission, who would not have recognised Williams’s characterisation. “The open door does not and should not mean free trade,” he bluntly stated in March 1924 (157). These two interpretations offer a neat frame for Palen’s study, and highlight a basic but important historiographical insight that informs the article. Historians have long noted the protectionist credentials of the late-nineteenth-century Republican Party, yet the analytical purchase of ‘free trade imperialism,’ formulated in the context of British imperial history by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson and imported to American historiography by Williams and others, has endured.² Why have so many insightful historians persisted with such an obviously ill-fitting concept?

Palen’s answer is a little generous. He argues that three factors have contributed to the remarkable shelf-life of the open door concept. First, he suggests, historians have been seduced by the provocative, totalising nature of Williams’s argument, which reframed anti-imperialist discourse as a form of “imperial anticolonialism” (160). Second, he argues that the cultural turn, productive as it has been of innovative and interesting histories of American imperialism, has “largely ceded the economic imperial impetus” to Williams and his followers (160). Finally, he argues that “the all too common mischaracterization” of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century has warped conceptualisations of American imperialism (161). The first and second of these strike this reviewer as persuasive. The third seems a stretch; no serious historian would now describe this period as one of laissez-faire political economy. More persuasive would be the argument that historians have simply been inattentive to the international implications of tariff policy. This has the additional virtue of underlining the importance of Palen’s own work in this surprisingly under-researched area.

Not that Palen would have us trade-in our copies of Robinson and Gallagher. One of the great virtues of their 1953 article was that it forced historians to think seriously about the variety of different modes of imperial action available to contemporaries.³ Likewise, Palen suggests that his protectionist-minded, outward-looking, ‘progressive’ Republicans “worked hard to extend American imperial power through informal means of high tariff

² John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review*, 6:1 (Aug. 1953): 1-15; William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1959).

³ Gallagher and Robinson, “Imperialism of Free Trade.” The importance of ‘thinking with the imperial’ rather than fixating on a normative of model of ‘empire’ is something that Paul A. Kramer recently (and usefully) emphasised in his “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World,” *American Historical Review*, 116:5 (Dec. 2011): 1348-1391.

walls, closed U.S.-controlled markets, and retaliatory reciprocity, if possible, by formal annexation and military interventionism when necessary” (163). Palen, like those he critiques most directly here, has no interest in reheating arguments about the aberrant or uncharacteristic nature of American imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century. Rather, he convincingly argues that we should think of Republican policy-makers turning to a variety of means that served the end of projecting American power overseas.

Palen is equally persuasive in sketching out a picture of contest and division over the course of American foreign policy at the turn of the century. Here he echoes the writings of a distinguished line of scholars who have argued against flattening out the debates over imperialism that took place in the 1890s.⁴ Palen gives us a twist, however: most historians who have argued for a contested imperial turn use the administrations of Glover Cleveland (1885-1889, 1893-1897) to make their case. This makes a great deal of sense; Cleveland’s more sober geopolitics was evident in his repudiation of Republican statesman James Blaine’s Pan-American projects, his restrained approach to the construction of a transisthmian canal, and his opposition to Hawaiian annexation. Palen’s focus, however, is not Democratic but Republican. The division that he is most interested in is that between ‘progressive’ (not to be confused with ‘Progressive’) Republicans and those in the party who “yet feared or disdained foreign markets and colonial acquisitions” (162). We do not learn quite as much about these “recalcitrant home-market Republican protectionists” as we might; a brief profile of the kind of constituencies they represented would be helpful, as would a fuller account of their opposition to accessing foreign markets. (173).

“The Imperialism of Economic Nationalism” is an important contribution to a growing literature that revives the questions posed by William Appleman Williams and his fellow Wisconsinites.⁵ Few would now turn to *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* as their first port of call when seeking to understand the contours of American foreign policy, but the relationship between U.S. diplomacy and American political economy - in both past and present - remains salient and important. In this regard, Palen raises a question that the article does not fully answer. He asks us to recast the way that we characterise American imperialism between 1890 and 1913; his argument for doing so is historiographically sound, analytically important and, fundamentally, convincing. But it is not an argument

⁴ See, for instance, John A. Thompson, “William Appleman Williams and the ‘American Empire,’” *Journal of American Studies*, 7:1 (April 1973): 91-104; Frank Ninkovich, *The United States and Imperialism* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2011); and Ian Tyrrell and Jay Sexton (eds.), *Empire’s Twin: U.S. Anti-Imperialism from the Founding Era to the Age of Terrorism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

⁵ See, for instance, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin, *The Making of Global Capitalism: the Political Economy of American Empire* (London, Verso Books, 2013) and Perry Anderson, ‘Imperium’ and ‘Consilium’, both in *New Left Review*, 83 (Sept-Oct. 2013). On the revisionist historians themselves, see James Morgan, *Into New Territory: American Historians and the Concept of US Imperialism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014).

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about causation and motive. Specifically, it is not immediately obvious how the programme of economic nationalism that James Blaine and Republican Presidents Benjamin Harrison and William McKinley translated into a policy of imperialism. Palen notes that ‘progressive economic nationalists’ were at the forefront of the drive to secure a formal and informal empire in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, though it is not clear that their motivations for doing so were economic (171). Indeed, the commitment to preserving the political economy of protectionism threw up as many questions as it did answers, as Palen deftly details in his discussions of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Cuba after 1898. If Republican statesmen had few intellectual qualms about reconciling protectionism and imperialism, in practice the two did not always fit so neatly.

I opened by noting that this article elaborated on earlier research that Palen conducted on the impact of the McKinley Tariff. It also briefly nods to a second article of his, “Foreign Relations in the Gilded Age: a British Free-Trade Conspiracy?”, which again highlights the value of paying close attention to contemporary debates in political economy for historians of American foreign relations. This article completes a triumvirate of important and intellectually rich studies that suggest that Palen’s forthcoming book, *The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade: the Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalization, 1846-1896*, will be one to look out for.

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