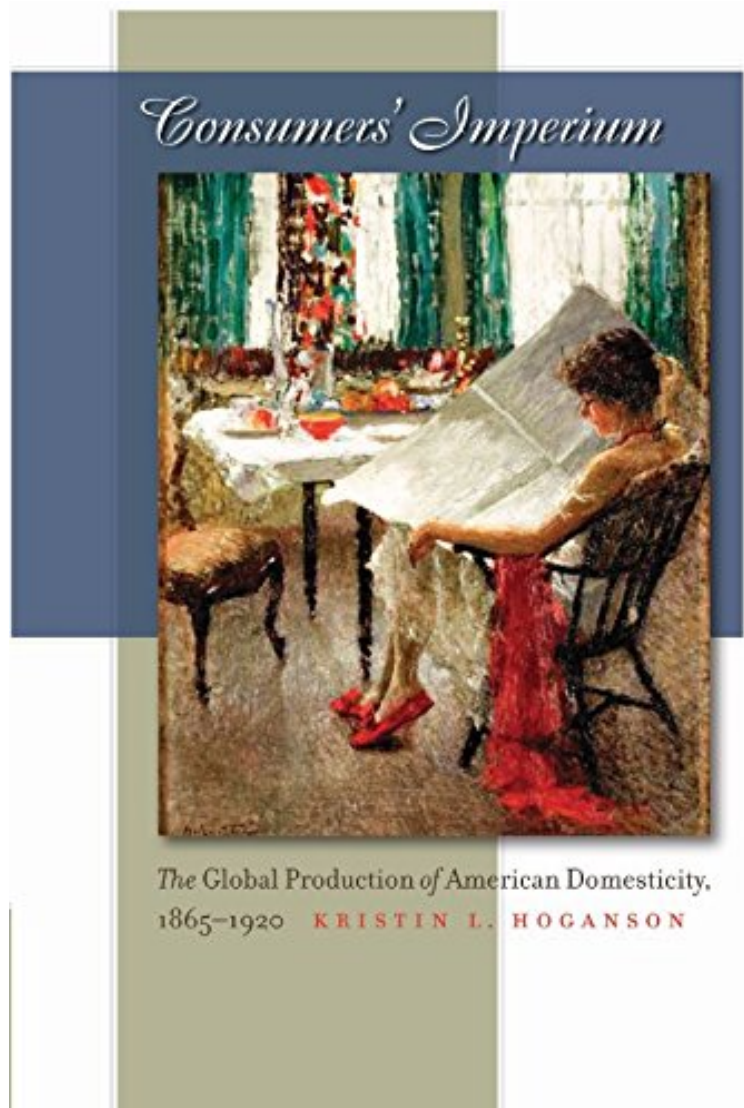


Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920

Kristin L. Hoganson

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Kristin L. Hoganson : Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Solid Trans-National HistoryBy RoccoKristin Hoganson explores international U.S. cultural connections through the experiences of "native-born, white, middle-class to wealthy women" (8). She examines the domestic spheres as well as the cultural attitudes of these particular women to show

how they interpreted foreign cultures through the accumulation of consumer goods and the practice of conspicuous consumption. These female consumers not only supplemented and perpetuated U.S. political and economic imperial expansion during the Gilded Age and early Progressive Era, but also proliferated "Americanization" through their accumulation of goods "in a self-centered kind of engagement with the rest of the world that emphasized pleasure and novelty" (12). In other words, although these women were in a sense "cosmopolitan," their respect for physical consumer goods trumped their respect for actual foreign cultures and peoples. Regardless, the American demand for imported goods such as Oriental rugs, Indian fabrics and decorative techniques of other cultures not only shaped "American domesticity," but also fueled the desire for official "policies, interventions and investments [abroad] aimed at gratifying consumer demand" in the United States (11). Furthermore, the ability of women to travel and participate in the accumulation of foreign goods was viewed, Hoganson argues, as a form of feminist empowerment. Hoganson's first chapter introduces the reader to the various home decor purchased by U.S. middle and upper class white women in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. An "Orientalist craze swept the nation" in the late 19th century, with decorators creating "cozy corners" or purchasing rugs and various other "Oriental" decorations (16). Despite the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 as well as the "Americanization" of Native Americans and American attempts to "Americanize" domestic abodes in the Philippines and China, Hoganson argues that these women yearned for imported fashions and decor due to, in part, extensive "leisure travel" during the late 1800's (21). Because women travelers appreciated the consumer goods, foreign stores from Europe to China marked and remained well stocked with trinkets for conspicuous American consumption. U.S. stores stocked items from around the world as well to fulfill the American desire for foreign decorations and products. However, Hoganson points out that "cosmopolitan decorators" were "hardly" cosmopolitan (43). Moreover, cozy corners, which were symbolic of Ottoman harems, and thus demeaning for women, may have served, for American-European women, "as a protective or delightfully eroticized space for women" (52). Hoganson's third chapter discusses the "role of culinary cosmopolitanism" in which "food and cooking" sustained international "social distinction" (150). Thus, recipes from various global regions shaped "the world views" of the aforementioned American women. Without leaving the country, middle-class and wealthy white American women received a taste of different cultures, and thus took part in the "consumer's Imperium." Her fourth chapter discusses women travel clubs, which "challenged the assumption that women's place was in the home" (154). Furthermore, travel clubs, in which women either returned from foreign ventures to share their stories, or simply engaged in conversation over foreign travel guide books, worked to create a "global consciousness" both real and imaginary (155). Hence, these female travelers were part of the rising U.S. imperialism of fin-de-siècle, placing "the United States "in a larger history of world-shrinking imperial networks" (252). The early 20th century U.S. witnessed a large influx of immigrants as well as restrictions on immigration and immigrant culture. Moreover, native-born Americans worked to "Americanize" those who were foreign born (and in U.S. colonial outposts as well). However, the homogenizing efforts of Americanists were met with an "immigrant gift giving movement" as well, which Hoganson discusses in her fifth chapter (212). However, the acceptance of "immigrant gifts" was Progressive Era wax nostalgia for "the passing of traditional cultures" in a time of unfaltering Americanization. The purchase of imported goods, acceptance of immigrant gifts and imaginings of the transnational world "contributed to the illusion that the world could be known through an assortment of decontextualized things" (254). As Hoganson attempts to convey as her major theme, "cosmopolitanism" was more of an "aspiration" than a reality, as these women held "a greater valuation of products than the workers who made them" (255). The women who participated in the consumer's imperium imported culture only to Americanize it as a product of desire, inadvertently contributing to the proliferation of American empire. Their desire for products fueled U.S. consumer domesticity and "produced a world of enabling workers" whom these women viewed as no more than "servile" (255).

8 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Great History of Consumption, Poor History of Empire By Customer Hoganson's latest work shows a historian that continues to be engaged by questions of gender and its relationship to empire. Consumers' Imperium moves seamlessly over the different manifestations of bourgeois interiority from home decor, to fashion, to cooking and finally festivals to show how consumption of "foreignness" was central to homemaking in the metropole. The analysis of consumption Hoganson provides is a sophisticated one that shows the often contradictory and complex meanings that middle-class white women created through the processes of taking possession of objects. However, despite a relatively sophisticated notion of consumption that goes beyond mere shopping, Hoganson uses post-colonial theory in an incredibly careless fashion. Her use of Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "contact zone" implies that the bourgeoisie interior was a place of transculturation, yet the complete absence of actual colonized subjects and their replacement by objects in Hoganson's book generates a situation where not only does the subaltern not speak, but Hoganson's misunderstanding of Pratt leads her to a problematic interpretation that empire was somehow liberating for white middle-class women. In the end she fails to prove that the world produced American domesticity. Instead what she really shows is that American middle-class women produced the world discursively, and by so doing, produced their own domesticity. It is only by misunderstanding post-colonial theory that Hoganson is able to draw the conclusions that she does about the global production of American domesticity.

Histories of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era tend to characterize the United States as an expansionist nation bent on Americanizing the world without being transformed itself. In *Consumers' Imperium*, Kristin Hoganson reveals the other half of the story, demonstrating that the years between the Civil War and World War I were marked by heightened consumption of imports and strenuous efforts to appear cosmopolitan. Hoganson finds evidence of international connections in quintessentially domestic places--American households. She shows that well-to-do white women in this era expressed intense interest in other cultures through imported household objects, fashion, cooking, entertaining, armchair travel clubs, and the immigrant gifts movement. From curtains to clothing, from around-the-world parties to arts and crafts of the homelands exhibits, Hoganson presents a new perspective on the United States in the world by shifting attention from exports to imports, from production to consumption, and from men to women. She makes it clear that globalization did not just happen beyond America's shores, as a result of American military might and industrial power, but that it happened at home, thanks to imports, immigrants, geographical knowledge, and consumer preferences. Here is an international history that begins at home.

Offers important additions and qualifications to the prevailing interpretations of turn-of-the-century America. . . . A rich, eloquent, and very useful description of the outward behavior of international shopping.--*Journal of Social History*[A] gracefully written survey. . . . Hoganson's research is meticulous.--*Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*Escapes our usual parochial categories, and that is one of the highest compliments to give any work.--*Journal of American History*Hoganson has written a rich and academic flavored book that is thought provoking because it pushes one's thinking in both new and old directions.--*Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*An insightful narrative. . . . Highly recommended.--*CHOICE*Adds a convincing counterweight to the somewhat tired arguments about United States nationalism and imperialism in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.--*The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society**Consumers' Imperium* is a tour de force. Hoganson takes a relatively superficial set of practices--late nineteenth and early twentieth-century food, fashion, and immigrant gift fairs--and demonstrates that they lie absolutely at the foundation of a formidable U.S. utopianism during this time of gathering and sweeping historical change. Our understanding of relations between the personal and the political, the domestic and the cosmopolitan, the family dinner table and the national turf will never again be quite the same.--Laura Wexler, Yale University In a wealth of imaginatively turned analysis and novel detail, Hoganson shows how turn-of-the-century American women reimagined themselves as consumers of the world. By installing a 'Turkish' cozy corner in their parlors, learning to boil macaroni, or joining a travel reading club, they refashioned themselves as partakers of a new, imperial cosmopolitanism--even as they stayed at home. Rich in material, originality, and insight, Hoganson's *Consumers' Imperium* is certain to leave a strong mark on women's studies, studies of material and consumer culture, and the new field of transnational history.--Daniel T. Rodgers, Princeton UniversityPowerfully argued and deeply researched. . . . Advances the field of American studies further by integrating gender and the global into the story of American nationalism and consumerism.--*Journal of Contemporary History*From the Inside FlapHistories of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era tend to characterize the United States as an expansionist nation bent on Americanizing the world without being transformed itself. Hoganson reveals the other half of the story, demonstrating that the years between the Civil War and World War I were marked by heightened consumption of imports and strenuous efforts to appear cosmopolitan. Shifting attention from exports to imports, from production to consumption, and from men to women, Hoganson makes it clear that globalization did not just happen beyond America 's shores, as a result of American military might and industrial power, but that it happened at home, thanks to imports, immigrants, geographical knowledge, and consumer preferences.About the AuthorKristin L. Hoganson is associate professor of history at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, and author of *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars*.