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America's Imperial Wars: a Historical Trajectory

Abstract

Keywords: imperial war, State building, nation building, coloniality.

Framing US expansionism as a dynamic and integral part of late modern imperial history, this article studies US imperial war making and coloniality in the longue durée. It shows greater continuities than generally acknowledged between the ruthless and relentless territorial expansion in the nineteenth century and the later post-1945 worldwide disciplinary operations of the United States. Following Charles Tilly's apposite remark that «wars make States», the article emphasises imperial war making as an essential component of State building and nation building over the course of the past two centuries. By normalising the American imperial experience and situating in a wider historical and comparative framework, it aims to contribute to the historical sociology of international relations and build a more inclusive understanding of late modern euro-atlantic history.
American imperialism is the term, often pejorative, for a policy aimed at extending the political, economic, and cultural control of the United States government over areas beyond its boundaries. Depending on the commentator, it may include military conquest, gunboat diplomacy, unequal treaties, subsidization of preferred factions, economic penetration through private companies followed by intervention when those interests are threatened, or regime change.