How to Hide an Empire

by Daniel Immerwahr · Language: EN

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Overview

How to Hide an Empire by Daniel Immerwahr fundamentally redefines the understanding of American history by challenging the popular image of the United States as a nation confined to its contiguous 48 states. Immerwahr argues that the U.S. has always been, and continues to be, an empire, but one that has masterfully obscured its territorial possessions and colonial history from its own citizens. He introduces the concept of a "pointillist empire," describing how the U.S. controls numerous scattered islands and territories—such as Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines (historically), American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—whose inhabitants often lack full citizenship rights and political representation. This "Greater United States" remains largely invisible to mainland Americans, fostering a collective amnesia about its imperial past and present.

The book meticulously traces the evolution of this hidden empire from its late 19th-century acquisitions through to the present day. Immerwahr reveals how these territories served crucial strategic, economic, and military purposes, often at significant human cost to their indigenous populations. He highlights the paradox of a nation founded on anti-colonial principles becoming a major colonial power itself, and how this contradiction was managed through legal fictions and cultural narratives that prioritized the "map of the 48 states" as the true America. By bringing these forgotten histories to light, Immerwahr compels readers to reconsider American identity, its global role, and the ongoing implications for the millions living under U.S. sovereignty without full equality, making a powerful case for a more honest and complete understanding of the nation's past and present.

Key Takeaways

- The United States has historically been, and remains, an empire with numerous overseas territories, not just the contiguous 48 states.
- Many U.S. territories, such as Puerto Rico and Guam, are inhabited by millions who lack full citizenship rights and political representation.
- The concept of a "pointillist empire" describes how the U.S. maintains control over scattered, often forgotten, non-contiguous territories.
- The U.S. has actively fostered a narrative that obscures its imperial history, leading to widespread ignorance about its territorial possessions.

• Understanding the history of U.S. territories is crucial for a complete and honest understanding of American identity and its global impact.

• The strategic importance of these territories, particularly for military bases and economic resources, has been a consistent driver of U.S. foreign policy.

• The legacy of U.S. colonialism continues to impact the political, economic, and social conditions of its territorial populations today.

Chapter Summaries

Introduction: The Greater United States

Immerwahr introduces the book's central argument: the United States has historically presented itself as a continental "blob," obscuring its extensive overseas "dot" empire. He challenges the common perception of American exceptionalism and anti-imperialism, revealing how territories like Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines have been integral to U.S. power and identity, yet simultaneously rendered invisible. The introduction sets the stage for exploring how this "Greater United States" was acquired, governed, and ultimately forgotten, shaping both domestic and foreign policy in profound ways. It highlights the strategic importance of these territories for military bases, resource extraction, and scientific experimentation, arguing that their erasure from national consciousness is a deliberate act of historical forgetting.

Chapter 1: The Blob

This chapter details the early expansion of the United States across the North American continent, establishing the "blob" narrative. Immerwahr discusses Manifest Destiny, the Louisiana Purchase, and the Mexican-American War, emphasizing how these acquisitions of contiguous land shaped the U.S. self-image as a non-imperial republic. He explores the displacement of indigenous populations and the expansion of slavery as integral parts of this continental growth. The chapter argues that this period solidified the idea of the U.S. as distinct from European colonial powers, even as it engaged in its own form of territorial expansion and conquest, laying the groundwork for later overseas ventures while simultaneously masking their imperial nature.

Chapter 2: The Dots

Immerwahr shifts focus to the often-overlooked early acquisitions of overseas territories, the "dots" that foreshadowed a larger empire. He highlights the Guano Islands Act of 1856, which allowed U.S. citizens to claim uninhabited islands for their valuable bird droppings, used as fertilizer. Examples like Baker Island and Jarvis Island demonstrate how the U.S. began acquiring small, strategically useful outposts long before the Spanish-American War. This chapter reveals that the legal and conceptual framework for overseas expansion was established decades earlier, challenging the notion that U.S. imperialism began abruptly in 1898 and showing a continuous, if often hidden, pattern of territorial acquisition.

Chapter 3: The War

This chapter focuses on the pivotal year of 1898 and the Spanish-American War, which dramatically expanded the U.S. overseas empire. Immerwahr details the swift American victory and the subsequent acquisition of Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines from Spain. He explores the strategic motivations behind these annexations, particularly the desire for naval bases and access to Asian markets. The chapter also touches upon the intense domestic debates between imperialists, like President William McKinley, who saw expansion as a duty, and anti-imperialists, who warned against the dangers of colonial rule, marking a significant turning point in American foreign policy and national identity.

Chapter 4: The Philippines

Immerwahr delves into the brutal U.S. occupation and the Philippine-American War (1899-1902), a conflict often downplayed in American history. He describes the fierce resistance from Filipino nationalists led by Emilio Aguinaldo and the U.S. military's harsh tactics, including concentration camps and widespread atrocities. The chapter also examines the U.S. policy of "benevolent assimilation," spearheaded by figures like William Howard Taft, which aimed to "civilize" and modernize the Philippines through education, public health initiatives, and infrastructure projects, even as it denied Filipinos immediate self-governance and perpetuated racial hierarchies, highlighting the paradox of American imperial rule.

Chapter 5: The Map

This chapter explores how cartography played a crucial role in shaping and obscuring the American empire. Immerwahr discusses the challenges faced by mapmakers in representing the non-contiguous territories and how the dominant "blob" map of the contiguous 48 states became a powerful tool for national self-perception. He shows how the choice of map projections and the deliberate omission of territories from everyday maps contributed to the public's "forgetting" of the "dots." The chapter argues that these cartographic decisions were not neutral but actively reinforced a narrative of American exceptionalism, allowing the nation to maintain an empire while denying its imperial nature.

Chapter 6: The People

Immerwahr examines the legal and social status of the inhabitants of U.S. territories, focusing on the Insular Cases (1901-1922). These Supreme Court decisions established the doctrine that the Constitution does not "follow the flag" fully, creating "unincorporated territories" whose residents lacked full constitutional rights. The chapter highlights the racial and cultural prejudices underlying these rulings, which deemed many territorial populations "alien races" unfit for self-governance or full citizenship. It explores the implications for Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, and other territorial residents, who were subject to U.S. rule but denied equal rights, illustrating the inherent contradictions of American democracy in an imperial context.

Chapter 7: The Sugar

This chapter details the economic exploitation of U.S. territories, particularly focusing on the sugar industry in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Immerwahr describes how American corporations, like the American Sugar Refining Company, gained immense control over local economies, transforming landscapes and labor practices. He explains how U.S. tariff policies and trade agreements favored mainland interests, often at the expense of local farmers and workers, leading to widespread poverty and dependence. The chapter illustrates how the territories served as captive markets and sources of cheap raw materials, reinforcing their colonial status and hindering their economic self-sufficiency.

Chapter 8: The Rubber

Immerwahr explores the U.S. quest for strategic resources, specifically rubber, in the early 20th century, linking it to broader imperial ambitions. He recounts Henry Ford's ambitious but ultimately failed project, Fordlandia, a massive rubber plantation established in the Brazilian Amazon in the 1920s. This venture, though not in a U.S. territory, exemplifies the American drive for self-sufficiency in critical raw materials, especially in the context of global conflicts and reliance on foreign suppliers. The chapter highlights the challenges, cultural misunderstandings, and environmental impacts of such large-scale colonial resource extraction efforts, underscoring the global reach of American economic power.

Chapter 9: The War Again

This chapter focuses on World War II and the critical, yet often overlooked, role of U.S. territories in the Pacific and Caribbean. Immerwahr details the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor (Hawaii, then a territory), Guam, and the Philippines, emphasizing their strategic importance as military outposts and supply lines. He highlights the disproportionate impact of the war on territorial populations, who endured occupation, combat, and significant sacrifices. The chapter argues that the war underscored the vital military value of these "dots" for projecting American power and defending national interests, even as their contributions and suffering remained largely unacknowledged on the mainland.

Chapter 10: The Bomb

Immerwahr reveals the devastating impact of U.S. nuclear weapons testing on its Pacific territories, particularly the Marshall Islands. He details the displacement of islanders from Bikini and Enewetak Atolls and the long-term health and environmental consequences of numerous atomic and hydrogen bomb tests conducted from 1946 to 1958. The chapter argues that these remote islands were viewed as expendable "empty spaces" for military experimentation, with little regard for the indigenous populations or their ancestral lands. It exposes a dark chapter of American imperialism, where scientific advancement and national security came at an immense human and ecological cost to its territorial subjects.

Chapter 11: The Bases

This chapter examines the post-World War II expansion of U.S. military bases globally, many of which were located in or near its territories. Immerwahr discusses the strategic importance of bases in places like Guam, Okinawa (under U.S. administration after WWII), and Puerto Rico during the Cold War. He explores the tensions between the U.S. military presence and local populations, addressing issues of land expropriation, environmental degradation, and sovereignty concerns. The chapter argues that these bases were crucial for projecting American power and maintaining global influence, solidifying the territories' role as vital, yet often contested, outposts in the U.S. defense network.

Chapter 12: The Satellites

Immerwahr connects the U.S. empire to the space race and the development of satellite technology. He highlights the crucial role of remote territories, such as Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, as missile testing ranges and tracking stations for the U.S. space program and military. The chapter explains how these seemingly isolated "dots" became indispensable sites for advanced technological development and national security, demonstrating the continued utility of territorial lands for cutting-edge scientific and military endeavors. It underscores how the empire adapted to new technological frontiers, maintaining its strategic importance in the Cold War era and beyond.

Chapter 13: The Commonwealth

This chapter focuses on the political evolution of Puerto Rico, particularly its establishment as a commonwealth in 1952. Immerwahr explores the complex debates surrounding its status—independence, statehood, or a unique form of self-governance. He discusses "Operation Bootstrap," an ambitious industrialization program aimed at modernizing Puerto Rico's economy, and its mixed results, including significant migration to the mainland. The chapter examines the ongoing questions of sovereignty and self-determination, arguing that commonwealth status, while granting some autonomy, ultimately maintained Puerto Rico's colonial relationship with the United States, leaving its political future unresolved.

Chapter 14: The State

Immerwahr contrasts the continued territorial status of many possessions with the admission of Alaska and Hawaii as states in 1959. He explores the reasons for their statehood, including their strategic importance during the Cold War, growing populations, and, in Hawaii's case, a significant non-indigenous population. The chapter highlights the racial and cultural factors that influenced which territories were deemed "ready" for statehood, often reflecting prevailing mainland prejudices. It underscores the selective nature of American expansion, where some territories were integrated into the "blob" while others remained "dots," perpetuating a hierarchy of citizenship and political rights.

Chapter 15: The Flags

This chapter examines the symbolic erasure of the U.S. empire from national consciousness, particularly through cartography and national symbols. Immerwahr discusses how the widespread use of maps depicting only the contiguous 48 states, and the 50-star flag, effectively rendered the territories invisible to most Americans. He argues that this "forgetting" was not accidental but a deliberate process that reinforced a continental self-image, allowing the U.S. to avoid confronting its imperial past and present. The chapter highlights the political and psychological implications of these symbolic choices, which perpetuate the marginalization of territorial citizens.

Chapter 16: The Citizens

Immerwahr delves into the complex legal and political limbo of territorial residents, who are U.S. citizens but lack full voting representation in Congress and the presidency. He explores the implications of this second-class citizenship for people in Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The chapter highlights the disparities in rights, access to federal programs, and political power compared to mainland citizens. It argues that this unequal status is a direct legacy of the Insular Cases and the ongoing "forgetting" of the empire, perpetuating a system where millions of Americans are governed without their full consent.

Chapter 17: The Migrants

This chapter explores the significant migration of people from U.S. territories to the mainland, particularly from Puerto Rico. Immerwahr discusses the various push and pull factors, including economic hardship, limited opportunities, and the desire for better education or healthcare. He examines the challenges faced by these migrants, who are U.S. citizens but often encounter cultural barriers, discrimination, and a lack of understanding about their territorial origins. The chapter connects this internal migration to the ongoing economic and political struggles in the territories, demonstrating how the "dots" continue to shape the "blob" through demographic shifts and cultural exchange.

Chapter 18: The Debt

Immerwahr focuses on the severe economic crises faced by U.S. territories, particularly Puerto Rico's devastating public debt crisis. He traces the historical roots of the debt, including colonial economic policies, lack of fiscal autonomy, and federal laws like the Jones Act. The chapter discusses the role of the U.S. federal government and the imposition of the PROMESA Act, which established an unelected fiscal control board to manage Puerto Rico's finances. It highlights how the territories' subordinate political status makes them vulnerable to economic shocks and limits their ability to implement effective solutions, underscoring the enduring economic consequences of empire.

Chapter 19: The Storm & Conclusion: The Future of the Greater United States

This combined section examines the catastrophic impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico in 2017, arguing that the inadequate federal response exposed the deep-seated inequalities and

the second-class status of territorial citizens. Immerwahr details the widespread devastation, the prolonged power outages, and the significant loss of life, connecting the disaster's aftermath to the broader themes of neglect and the "forgetting" of the empire. The conclusion then synthesizes the book's central arguments about the hidden empire, reflecting on the implications of the "blob and dots" dynamic for U.S. identity and foreign policy. It discusses potential future paths for the territories—statehood, independence, or continued commonwealth—and calls for a more honest reckoning with the U.S. imperial past and present to shape a more just future for the Greater United States.

Themes

- US Imperialism
- Forgotten Territories
- Colonial History
- National Identity
- Legal Fictions
- Military Strategy

Frequently Asked Questions

What is How to Hide an Empire about?

It explores the hidden history of the United States as an empire, focusing on its overseas territories like Puerto Rico and Guam. Immerwahr argues that the U.S. has deliberately obscured its colonial past and present, leading to a widespread ignorance about millions of people living under U.S. sovereignty without full rights.

Is How to Hide an Empire worth reading?

Yes, it is highly recommended for anyone interested in American history, colonialism, and international relations. Immerwahr offers a meticulously researched and compelling argument that challenges conventional understandings of U.S. identity and power. It's an eye-opening account that reshapes perspectives.

How does How to Hide an Empire end?

Spoiler: The book concludes by emphasizing the ongoing invisibility of the U.S. empire and its profound implications. Immerwahr argues that this historical amnesia prevents a full understanding of American identity and perpetuates the unequal status of millions in U.S. territories. He calls for a reckoning with this hidden history.

Who should read How to Hide an Empire?

This book is ideal for students of American history, political science, and postcolonial studies, as well as general readers interested in a more complete and nuanced understanding of the United States. Anyone curious about the origins of U.S. global power and its territorial legacy will find it insightful.

How long does it take to read How to Hide an Empire?

The book is approximately 500 pages long. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it would take roughly 12-15 hours to read the entire book, depending on individual reading pace and engagement with the detailed historical accounts.

Best Quotes

“The United States is not an empire, but it has one.”

Introduction

This paradoxical statement encapsulates the book's central argument: while Americans often deny their nation's imperial nature, the US has historically maintained and continues to maintain significant control over overseas territories and military bases, functioning as an empire in practice. It highlights the disconnect between self-perception and reality.

“The map of the United States is a lie.”

Part I: The Map

Immerwahr argues that the standard map showing only the contiguous 48 states, or even including Alaska and Hawaii as insets, misrepresents the true geographical extent of US power. By omitting its numerous overseas territories and military bases, these maps visually erase and thereby hide the American empire from public view.

“The United States has a pointillist empire.”

Part I: The Map

This phrase describes the US empire as a collection of scattered, non-contiguous dots on the global map—islands, military bases, and territories—rather than a continuous landmass. This fragmented nature makes the empire easy to overlook and conceptually 'hide,' contributing to its invisibility in American consciousness.

“Guano was the first major product of the American empire.”

Part I: Guano

This highlights an often-forgotten aspect of early US expansion. The Guano Islands Act of 1856 allowed the US to claim uninhabited islands for their valuable bird droppings, used as fertilizer.

This marked one of the nation's earliest forays into overseas territorial acquisition and resource extraction.

“The Insular Cases created a legal limbo for the territories.”

Part II: The Insular Cases

These early 20th-century Supreme Court decisions established that the US Constitution did not fully apply to residents of newly acquired territories. This created a unique legal status where inhabitants were 'unincorporated' and lacked full constitutional rights, perpetuating their colonial status and unequal treatment under US law.

“The empire was hidden in plain sight.”

Conclusion

This phrase captures the core idea that the US empire, despite its vastness and impact, has largely remained invisible to the American public. This invisibility is maintained through cartographic omissions, legal ambiguities, and a national narrative that downplays or ignores imperial ambitions and their consequences.

“The United States has two histories: one of continental expansion and one of overseas empire.”

Introduction

Immerwahr distinguishes between the familiar narrative of westward expansion across North America and the less acknowledged history of acquiring and governing overseas territories. He argues that both are crucial to understanding the full scope of US development, power projection, and its global identity.

“The territories were not just places; they were laboratories.”

Part II: Laboratories

This refers to how the US used its overseas territories as sites for various social, political, and scientific experiments. From public health initiatives in Puerto Rico to governance models in the Philippines, these places served as testing grounds for American ideas and policies, often with significant consequences for local populations.

“The United States is an empire of bases.”

Part III: The Empire of Bases

This describes the modern form of the US empire, particularly after World War II. Instead of formal colonies, the US maintains global power through a vast network of military bases,

projecting its influence and protecting its interests worldwide without direct territorial ownership, a more subtle but equally potent form of control.

“The United States acquired more territory in the Spanish-American War than in any other conflict.”

Part II: 1898

This factual statement underscores the immense territorial gains made by the US in 1898, including Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. This acquisition marked a significant turning point in the nation's emergence as a global imperial power, fundamentally reshaping its geographical and political footprint.

Questions & Answers

What is the central argument of 'How to Hide an Empire'?

The central argument is that the United States has always been an empire, but its unique form—first as scattered overseas territories and later as a global network of military bases—has allowed it to remain largely hidden from public consciousness and its own national self-perception. Immerwahr contends that this 'hidden empire' is crucial to understanding American history and global power.

What does Immerwahr mean by the 'pointillist empire'?

Immerwahr uses the term 'pointillist empire' to describe the US empire as a collection of scattered, non-contiguous dots on the map, primarily islands and military bases, rather than a continuous landmass. This fragmented and dispersed nature makes the empire easy to overlook, contributing to its invisibility compared to traditional contiguous empires like the British or French.

How did the common map of the United States contribute to hiding its empire?

The common map of the United States, typically showing only the contiguous 48 states and sometimes Alaska and Hawaii as insets, visually erases the vast network of US territories and military bases. By omitting these 'dots' from the main representation, cartography played a significant role in making the empire seem smaller, less connected, and ultimately less visible to the American public.

What were the Insular Cases, and why are they important to the book's argument?

The Insular Cases were a series of early 20th-century Supreme Court decisions that determined the constitutional rights of residents in newly acquired US territories. They established that the Constitution did not automatically 'follow the flag,' creating a legal framework for 'unincorporated territories' where inhabitants lacked full constitutional protections, thus

solidifying their colonial status and unequal treatment.

What role did guano islands play in the early American empire?

Guano, or bird droppings, was a valuable fertilizer in the 19th century. The Guano Islands Act of 1856 allowed the US to claim uninhabited islands rich in guano, marking one of the nation's earliest forays into overseas territorial acquisition. These islands represented the first major product of the American empire, highlighting an often-forgotten aspect of early US expansion and resource extraction.

How did the US acquire the Philippines, and what was the immediate aftermath?

The US acquired the Philippines from Spain for $20 million as part of the Treaty of Paris following the Spanish-American War in 1898. The immediate aftermath was the brutal Philippine-American War (1899-1902), as Filipinos, who had been fighting for independence from Spain, resisted American rule, resulting in significant casualties and a prolonged conflict.

What is the significance of the shift from territorial empire to an 'empire of bases'?

Immerwahr argues that after World War II, the US largely divested from formal colonies but expanded its global network of military bases. This shift allowed the US to maintain and project imperial power without direct territorial ownership, making its influence more flexible, less visible, and less susceptible to anti-colonial critiques, effectively transforming its imperial strategy.

Why does Immerwahr argue that the US has a 'long history of denying its imperial nature'?

The US narrative often emphasizes its anti-colonial origins, democratic ideals, and role as a liberator, making it difficult for Americans to acknowledge their own country's imperial practices. This denial is reinforced by cartographic omissions, legal ambiguities, and a focus on continental expansion, allowing the nation to maintain a self-image distinct from traditional European empires.

What does the book reveal about the experiences of people living in US territories?

The book reveals that people in US territories often experience a form of second-class citizenship. They lack full voting rights in federal elections, have limited representation, and are subject to US laws without full constitutional protections. Their economies are often dependent on the mainland, and their cultures are shaped by American influence, highlighting the enduring impact of colonial rule.

How did cartography and mapping influence the perception of the US empire?

Cartography played a crucial role in shaping and often distorting the perception of the US empire. By creating maps that omitted territories or depicted them as small, distant insets, mapmakers reinforced the idea that these places were not truly part of the United States. This visual marginalization contributed significantly to the empire's invisibility and the public's

unawareness of its full extent.

What is the 'empire by invitation' concept discussed in the book?

The 'empire by invitation' concept refers to instances where the US established military bases or influence at the request of host nations, particularly during the Cold War. This allowed the US to project power globally, often under the guise of mutual defense or assistance, rather than through direct conquest or colonial rule, making its imperial reach seem less coercive.

What is the author's perspective on American exceptionalism?

Immerwahr challenges the notion of American exceptionalism by demonstrating that the US, despite its unique historical context and anti-colonial origins, engaged in imperial practices akin to European powers. He argues that while the form of American empire was distinct, its impact on subject populations and its pursuit of global power were fundamentally imperial, debunking the idea of a uniquely non-imperial America.

How did World War II impact the US's relationship with its territories?

World War II profoundly impacted the US's relationship with its territories by highlighting their strategic importance. Territories like the Philippines and Guam became battlegrounds, underscoring their vulnerability and the sacrifices of their inhabitants. While the war brought some promises of independence (like for the Philippines), it also solidified the strategic value of other territories and bases, reinforcing the imperial structure.

What does the title 'How to Hide an Empire' signify?

The title 'How to Hide an Empire' signifies the various deliberate and incidental mechanisms—cartographic, legal, political, and narrative—that have rendered the United States' extensive overseas empire largely invisible or downplayed in American consciousness. It refers to the ways the nation has obscured its imperial nature from itself and the world, maintaining a self-image of a non-imperial power.

Spoiler: How does the book conclude regarding the future of the US empire?

Spoiler: The book concludes by emphasizing that while the formal territorial empire has largely diminished, the 'empire of bases' persists and continues to evolve. Immerwahr encourages readers to acknowledge this hidden history to better understand the present and future of US global power, suggesting that the imperial legacy remains a defining, though often unacknowledged, aspect of the nation's identity and foreign policy.

What is the significance of Puerto Rico in the book's narrative?

Puerto Rico serves as a crucial case study of a long-standing US territory, illustrating the complexities of its colonial status. Immerwahr uses Puerto Rico to highlight the legal ambiguities of the Insular Cases, the economic dependence fostered by US rule, and the ongoing debate over statehood, independence, or commonwealth status, embodying many of the book's core themes

about the hidden empire.

How did the concept of 'unincorporated territories' emerge, and what does it mean?

The concept of 'unincorporated territories' emerged from the Insular Cases in the early 20th century. It designates territories not intended for eventual statehood, meaning the US Constitution does not fully apply to them. Residents are mostly US citizens but lack full constitutional rights and representation, existing in a unique legal limbo distinct from both states and foreign nations.

What is one key lesson readers can take away from 'How to Hide an Empire'?

One key lesson readers can take away is the importance of critically examining national narratives and recognizing that history is often more complex and contradictory than commonly presented. The book teaches readers to look beyond the familiar map and official stories to uncover the significant, often overlooked, imperial dimension of American history that continues to shape its identity and global role.

How did the Cold War influence the expansion and nature of the US empire?

The Cold War profoundly influenced the US empire by transforming it from one primarily focused on territorial acquisition to a vast global network of military bases and alliances. The need to contain communism led the US to establish strategic outposts worldwide, often through 'empire by invitation,' expanding its influence and projecting power without necessarily acquiring formal colonies, thus solidifying the 'empire of bases.'

What is the author's background, and how does it inform his writing?

Daniel Immerwahr is a professor of history at Northwestern University, specializing in US foreign relations and global history. His academic background provides a rigorous, evidence-based approach to re-examining American history. This expertise allows him to synthesize vast amounts of historical data and present a compelling, nuanced argument that challenges conventional understandings of US power and its imperial past.