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Outside In: The Transnational Circuitry of US History ed. by
Andrew Preston and Doug Rossinow (review)

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of American life. Although it reaches conclusions that are not in themselves shockingly novel, *American Niceness* offers a coherent, nuanced, and richly textured reading of the power of words to discipline the traumas and misuses of power in nineteenth-century America. In doing so, Bramen considers more carefully the asynchronous accents in works as varied as those of Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin), Melville, the Beechers, Frederick Douglass, and Horace Bushnell—to name a few of many. Bramen has thus repositioned *niceness*, a term of banal virtue, as an important key to explicating the elusive meaning(s) of American identity. As we would say in the South, bless her little heart!

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Outside In: The Transnational Circuitry of US History. Edited by Andrew Preston and Doug Rossinow (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017) 296 pp. \$105.00 cloth \$24.95 paper

For at least a quarter of a century, American historians have sought to recast the history of the United States in a transnational frame. It is unprofitable, the argument goes, perhaps even impossible, to understand U.S. history without considering connections, comparisons, and contexts that go beyond its borders.¹ Thus, diplomatic history has become the history of the “U.S. in the world,” a change designed to highlight concern with interactions that go well beyond the realm of diplomacy. Immigration history has moved past its early focus on the experiences of immigrants within U.S. borders to view migration through transnational and even global lenses. New fields, such as Atlantic history or borderlands history, have emerged, dedicated to reframing American history in ways that transcend the nation’s borders.

This shift in the study of U.S. history reflects a “transnational turn” in the historical profession as a whole. Once split up into national or regional specializations, many historians have sought to discard methodological nationalism in favor of more capacious approaches. But making sense of how these new approaches fit together remains a challenge. Terms like *international history*, *world history*, *global history*, or (as in the title of this volume) *transnational history* are often invoked without a clear definition of what they mean.² Are these terms essentially synonyms to be used interchangeably, or do they represent entirely distinct approaches? Or do they partially overlap, in something like a Venn diagram?

1 See, especially, Thomas Bender (ed.), *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, 2002).

2 See, for example, the “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American History Review*, CXI (2006), 1441–1464, which opens with a participant stating, “In general, I think that the distinctions between world, global, and transnational history have never adequately been explained.”

Beyond the issue of definitions, there is also the question of purpose: What is the ultimate goal of eschewing “methodological nationalism” in writing the history of the United States? Is it simply to unsettle the received narrative of U.S. history, expose its lacunae and its inadequacies, and leave it at that? Or is the ultimate goal the construction of an entirely new narrative of U.S. history, this time from a fully transnational perspective? The implications of this question are concrete (as I was recently reminded when finding little evidence of a transnational perspective in a high-school-history textbook). Thus far, efforts to produce new, fully transnational narratives of the expanse of U.S. history have served to highlight both the benefits and the difficulties of such an enterprise.³

In the volume under review, the editors’ goal is more modest—not to recast U.S. history but simply to show how international and transnational approaches can enrich it. Their introduction, among other things, usefully distinguishes international history, which “privileges relations among states,” from transnational history, which focuses on non-state actors (3). These approaches, though distinct, are complementary and intertwined. Many historical topics call for careful attention to both state and non-state actors; the book does not privilege one over the other.

The eleven chapters that follow offer a rich sampling of recent work in this vein, covering themes ranging from foreign policy and political economy to gender, race, religion, and migration. One intriguing chapter traces the connections between oil, politics, and faith across the U.S.–Canada border in the mid-twentieth century; another, perhaps the most methodologically interesting, uses the career of Luther Hodges—textile executive, Rotarian, southern governor, and secretary of commerce—to trace the “transatlantic circuitry” of the New South. Notably, with a few exceptions, the transnational circuitry traced in this volume largely runs within the Anglophone world. Surely, the history of the United States is more connected with Asia, the Middle East, or Latin America than the scope of this volume seems to suggest, but it remains to others to explore precisely how.

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Bound in Wedlock: Slave and Free Black Marriage in the Nineteenth Century.
By Tera W. Hunter (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2017)
404 pp. \$29.95

The refusal of states to recognize the marriages of enslaved people legally was among slavery’s most significant cruelties, mocking deep ties of

3 Bender, *A Nation among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York, 2006); Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (New York, 2015; orig. pub. 2007).