

**S. MAX EDELSON. *THE NEW MAP OF EMPIRE: HOW BRITAIN IMAGINED AMERICA BEFORE INDEPENDENCE*. CAMBRIDGE, MA: HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017. (ISBN : 978-0-674-97901-7)**

S. Max Edelson assesses the importance of geographic representations to Britain's plans for North American expansion after the Seven Years' War with his 2017 publication, *The New Map of Empire: How Britain Imagined America Before Independence*. Edelson, who earned his PhD from Johns Hopkins University in 1999, has worked in the University of Virginia's History department since 2009. His body of work, which includes his first publication *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (2006), explores space and culture in colonial North America and the Caribbean. While this and other publications place Edelson's work within the realm of British imperial and Atlantic world histories, his dedication to maps makes his work an important part of the developing field of critical cartography. The field first emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a graphic methodology to analyse maps as primary sources capable of describing more than physical geography. As this historiographical shift continues to develop today, historians engaged in critical cartography integrate maps into their studies across historical disciplines to better understand the past.

Between 2007 and 2008, Edelson researched in the Library of Congress' collection of American manuscripts and maps as the Kislak Fellow in American Studies. Edelson explains in his introduction that he was surprised to find that a disproportionate number of the maps in the collection represented new territorial holdings acquired after 1763 rather than Britain's older settlements. Following the Seven Years' War and Peace of Paris, Britain acquired a substantial amount of territory in North America. This prompted the creation of a new series of colonial maps at the behest of the Board of Trade to better understand and subsequently control their new holdings. Therefore, such a large part of the Library's collection

is dedicated to these maps because “out of all proportion to their immediate commercial value and population, imperial officials as well as metropolitan merchants focused their attention on these frontiers in order to gauge the perils and promise of British America.”<sup>1</sup> Edelson argues that Britain reenvisioned their North American empire through this cartographic information, with the Board of Trade supplanting settler control in the colonies in favour of their own regulated and regionally specific systems coordinated from London and guided by contemporary theories of political economy. The book evaluates these systems, and their impacts in specific geographic locations.

Edelson divides Britain’s territorial gains into five zones to better assess the Board’s reformed empire: the Gulf Coast, the Maritime northeast, the trans-Appalachian interior, peninsular Florida, and the southeast Caribbean. Each zone tells the story of Britain’s desire for geographic information, and the Board’s individualized plans for colonization in each region. Edelson tracks metropolitan plans for the empires’ new frontiers in individual zones using a variety of state-sponsored maps and supported by other contextualizing primary sources. Edelson bases his analysis of maps on “the importance of scale to Britain’s attempts to recolonize America,”<sup>2</sup> arguing that the maps manipulated scale to create spatial order that could rationalize and control frontiers. Edelson effectively separates imperial dreams from colonial realities through his analysis, making the argument that Britain’s visions of empire were incompatible with frontier life in North America. The overarching story Edelson presents is the rise and fall of Britain’s North American empire in the second half of the eighteenth century. This division of areas into clear-cut boundaries, reinforced by Edelson’s organization of chapters into geographic regions, attempted to place limitations on colonial expansion. What’s more, the Board’s plan to

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<sup>1</sup> S. Max Edelson, *The New Map of Empire: How Britain Imagined America Before Independence*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), xi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, xiii.

control the development of the frontier chafed against settler expectations of relatively unmitigated expansion.

While the Board was unable to realize their visions of empire, Edelson argues that their attempts to reshape America ultimately informed “a language of empire that framed every serious discussion of American policy around a historical narrative of colonial disorder.”<sup>3</sup> The Board contended with issues of centralized administration, the remodeling of colonial systems, diverse Atlantic interests, and the application of political economy across an empire. Once mainland Americans had secured their independence, they took up these same ideas and attempted to use them for their own ends. Ultimately, Edelson argues that regardless of the outcome, the Board of Trade’s visions for North America significantly impacted the course of empire. Maps enabled this reimagining of empire and then allowed an Independent America to set its own course when the time came.

In addition to his points about the significance of geographic representations in the Board’s larger plans for empire, this book makes a case for increased access to maps. Instead of including images in his book, Edelson created a companion website for *The New Map of Empire* that acts as a repository for the maps and visualizations.<sup>4</sup> These visuals are laid over current satellite images to allow readers to better contextualize the maps and critique their representations. By overlaying the predominantly eighteenth-century maps over satellite imaging, Edelson reinforces the surveyors’ manipulation of scale as well as the challenge of accurately representing frontiers. It is therefore easier to argue that the maps at the Board’s disposal represented the imagined rather than the real empire. Edelson’s use of an online database marks a shift in the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 337.

<sup>4</sup> The website is open-access and can be found at <http://mapscholar.org/empire/>.

publication of cartographic histories that indicates possibilities for a more inclusive future.

*The New Map of Empire* tracks Britain's bid to reconceptualise its empire following the Seven Years' War, taking distinct geographic zones and relating them within a larger imperial narrative. This follows wider trends in the study of the Atlantic world where scholars have developed increasingly global perspectives of empire. Edelson's global approach created a larger context to discuss the significance of maps as imperial tools and supports a critical cartography approach to history. While important for its development of ideas of British empire and mapmaking in the late eighteenth century, Edelson's book is a unique example of the ways in which technology can be integrated into historical publications. Developing new avenues to access primary sources allows for more widespread engagement that is integral to the continued study of history.

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**CHARLES-PHILIPPE DAVID ET FRÉDÉRIK GAGNON  
(DIR.). THÉORIES DE LA POLITIQUE ÉTRANGÈRE  
AMÉRICAINNE. AUTEURS, CONCEPTS ET APPROCHES.  
2<sup>E</sup> ÉDITION REVUE ET AUGMENTÉE, MONTRÉAL,  
LES PRESSES DE L'UNIVERSITÉ DE MONTRÉAL, 2018  
(2012). (ISBN : 9782760638587)**

Dans un contexte où les débats entourant les divers agissements des États-Unis sur la scène internationale ne cessent de prendre de l'ampleur, faisant déferler passions et réactions irrationnelles, l'apport d'un ouvrage axé sur les théories et les structures de la question complexe qu'est la politique étrangère américaine apparaît comme une véritable nécessité. C'est dans cette optique que les professeurs en science politique Charles-