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Fred Anderson & Andrew Cayton. *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000*. New York: Viking, 2005. Pp. xxiv, 520. ISBN 0670033707.

Review by John Shy, The University of Michigan (johnshy@umich.edu)

Anderson and Cayton are a pair of smart historians who write with exceptional clarity and force. They also share expertise in the earlier centuries of American history, but here they undertake a broad survey of five centuries of the North American experience of war in refuting the general American belief that we are a peaceful people.

The authors are among that embattled corner of academic historians who perceive reality in terms of empirical research and the contingent nature of acts and their consequences. To avoid losing in the sweep of five long centuries the contours of the historical forest amidst the countless trees of empiricism and contingency, they have anchored their narrative in the lives of a few prominent individuals. The deep implication of Samuel Champlain, William Penn, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Ulysses Grant, and Douglas MacArthur in the issues raised by American war makes them strong choices to humanize a multigenerational survey. But there are risks with this method, especially that something important will fall through the biographical cracks. The Mexican general Santa Anna is employed to breach one obvious crack, between the demise of Andrew Jackson and the arrival of U.S. Grant; Santa Anna's long career also allows the authors to stretch the narrative geographically to fit their subtitle. And to fill another, inevitable crack in a narrative that moves from the past into the present, they draw briefly on the career and memoirs of Colin Powell in their epilogue.

History is not biography, so this is a bold but shaky framework for their story. Alternative choices—Cortés, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Sam Houston, W.T. Sherman, A.T. Mahan, Eisenhower, Curtis LeMay, William Westmoreland, Donald Rumsfeld—suggest another version. But that other version might not be as different in the hands of these authors as we might imagine, because they develop the broader context of each life—and war—with great skill and conviction. At times one has the sense of reading a very good textbook of American history, and some readers of military history may grow impatient with lengthy digressions well beyond anything recognizable to them as military history. And their biographical choices hold up well, characters centrally important in the wars of their maturity, as well as usefully turning up in both youth and old age to have some interesting role in the last war and the next.

It is then a book about wars, not battles or strategy or operations, and it interests itself especially in the motives and guiding ideas behind American wars, and in wars' legacy in terms of postwar conditions and of how collective memory gives meaning to each war. These concerns—motives and ideas, postwar and memory—function as threads running through five centuries, stitching the biographical framework to their authors' sense of historical reality, which is a reality of actors making choices, and of consequences that invaria-

bly fail to conform to the intentions of the actors. Anderson and Cayton retell old stories, and read well-worked evidence, with fresh eyes from their perspective that war has been a crucially important part of North American history, and not a peripheral aspect of a predominantly political, economic, or socio-cultural saga.

Their emphasis is on a continuity whose nature is caught by the book's subtitle: empire and liberty. From Champlain to Bush, the cord holding all the threads and characters together is the relationship between military action and notions of freedom. Champlain's colony was too weak to hope for more than a free and profitable trade with his native neighbors, but the peaceful exchange of goods drew the French into endless conflict with the enemies of those neighbors, and over time the dynamics of that connection produced an empire stretching from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Mexico. From the pacific intentions of William Penn to the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, war was seen by many Americans as an unhappy necessity in the defense or extension of liberty, or both. Even a war of naked expansion, like the Mexican War, was cast in terms of defending the freedom of the newly annexed republic of Texas, lately a large part of the Republic of Mexico, and the liberation, if possible, of the oppressed people of Mexico. All wars entail a certain amount of hypocritical cant, and a large measure of self-delusion, but the North American variety seems exceptional for the consistent reliance over centuries on a single idea—that the extension of liberty justifies the use of military force, however cruel and destructive. Exporting democracy to Iraq is nothing new.

Santa Anna provides a proving exception. From the class revolt of 1810 onward, the main issue for Mexico was internal disorder, which was suppressed—most effectively by Santa Anna himself—only by curtailing liberty. Mexican regimes had no interest in liberating anyone beyond their frontiers nor in extending their territorial control; keeping domestic order and defending their already vast territory was challenge enough. So, was the contrasting Yanqui pattern of thought and military behavior more situational than ideological? The authors do not address the question raised by their own comparative example.

Perhaps the other available case for comparison, that of Canada, neglected by the authors once they have finished with Champlain, can be helpful. The Anglophone population of Canada is a direct result of the American Revolution, when thousands of “loyalist” refugees fled the nightmare of a republic independent of British protection to what are today the Maritime provinces and the province of Ontario. They brought with them a lightly conservatized version of the same so-called “Whig” ideology that undergirded the thought expressed in the Declaration of Independence. Within this “new”, anglicizing Canada, the original French people of Quebec posed a problem. Governing both English and French from London proved difficult. During the War of 1812, pro-American collaborators were another problem in “Upper Canada” (Ontario), and a few had to be summarily hanged. Revolts broke out during the 1830's in both Ontario and Quebec, but London chose to focus on the problem posed by the French. Thinking very much like Yankees, royal inquisitors could not imagine any choice between expulsion and assimilation. The Quebec French were too numerous and well entrenched to be expelled, so assimilation was deemed to be the solution. The same kind of thinking characterized humane Americans pondering their own problem with the Indians: expulsion was violent and unjust, so assimilation, the underside of liberation, must be the right answer, and similar binary logic dominated

enlightened American thinking about enslaved African-American slavery. Assimilation invariably failed, in Canada and the United States, but as Canada expanded westward in tandem with U.S. expansion, it did so without much military force and in time the obvious third choice emerged—coexistence—an option that slowly and pragmatically came to apply as well to the ever-troublesome problem of Quebec. During the same decades, a comparable distaste for coercive measures brought about a devolution of imperial control, giving Canada effective autonomy without enduring a war of independence. Of course the big difference in the United States was that leaving very large areas, like north Georgia and east Tennessee or Oklahoma or much of the Dakotas, as Indian land was unthinkable. And in this comparison there is also the issue of discrepant levels of power; as a Canadian author once explained to a Harvard audience, the main difference between Canada and the United States is that south of You is Mexico, but south of Us is You.

The case of Canada, however interesting, can prove nothing. The peculiar situation of the United States (at least until the last century)—remote from Europe, a vast and temperate territory luring farmers, speculators, and miners ever onward, and a weakening if annoying native resistance to these mobile Americans—combined readily with the ideas pronounced in the Declaration of Independence to create a “liberation theology” that seemed eminently realistic and flexibly applicable to every American resort to war. By 1900 there was no way to disentangle national belief from the conditions of national life. War after war had confirmed the moral and strategic rightness of the doctrine.

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While the book has an argument, that wars in North America since the onset of European colonization have been bound up with ideas of liberty and liberation—enemies in these wars seen as lacking the quality vital to peaceful behavior—the authors do not belabor the evidence to make their case. Instead, the argument emerges readily from the biographical structure of the book, from the words of the principal subjects and their contemporaries. Most of the general story is familiar to the reader, who can relax and attend more closely to the particulars, of how Grant as an ex-Army officer and a struggling Illinois farmer regretted his participation in the “wicked” Mexican War and thought slavery only emerged as an issue with the annexation of Texas and the war that followed—in no sense a political radical, but thoroughly fed up with a Federal government dominated by the slaveholding faction in the Democratic party, though he himself had voted for James Buchanan in 1856. Of how Woodrow Wilson justified American entry in 1917 into the world war by saying we were the champions of the rights of mankind, while at that moment U.S. troops occupied portions of Mexico, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Nicaragua, Cuba, and the Philippines. And of how MacArthur stood before the Philippine Congress in 1945 and said that nothing but the American “passion for liberty” had propelled them to victory over Japan. The general argument may have a few small holes in it, which the reader can look for, while enjoying a well-crafted excursion through familiar territory along with fresh observations of well-known figures of the military past—and present.