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American Commodities in an Age of Empire

Mona Domosh

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American Commodities in an Age of Empire Mona Domosh
This is a novel interpretation of the relationship between consumerism, commercialism, and imperialism during the first empire building era of America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Unlike other empires in history, which were typically built on military power, the first American empire was primarily a commercial one, dedicated to pushing products overseas and dominating foreign markets. While the American government was important, it was the great capitalist firms of America – Heinz, Singer, McCormick, Kodak, Standard Oil – that drove the imperial process, explicitly linking the purchase of consumer goods overseas with 'civilization'. Their persistent message to America's prospective customers was, 'buy American products and join the march of progress'. Domosh also explores how the images of peoples overseas conveyed through goods elevated America's sense of itself in the world.

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