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As riots in Seattle during the recent meeting of the World Trade Organization illustrate, the subject of trade can be a polarizing issue. Not only is it an important economic issue, but it is also defines relationships between nations. As Edward Crapol argues, James G. Blaine designed a blueprint for an American “empire” built upon the foundations of trade. Although Blaine died before his plans could be executed, he charted a course followed by future statesman, including William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Herbert Hoover, and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Crapol tells us that Blaine did not envision a territorial empire in the fashion of contemporary European powers. Only very late in his career – 1889 to be exact – did Blaine espouse the acquisition of Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Cuba as insular territories. Instead, Blaine proposed constructing a “commercial empire” in which American agricultural and industrial products conquered overseas markets. In this Blaine followed the course of empire suggested by his childhood idol, Henry Clay. As a fulcrum to pry open foreign markets Blaine brandished reciprocity. Prior to 1873 the “Plumed Knight” dismissed the concept of reciprocity. But after he witnessed the ill effects of the 1873 depression on farmers in America’s heartland, he concluded that exportation of surplus agricultural commodities would restore economic vitality to the region. Moreover, Blaine and James Garfield both sought to build an enduring GOP base in the Midwest by tying the economic well being of the farmer to the Republican policy of expanding overseas markets through reciprocity. Blaine argued that reciprocity would allow the United States to protect its home market and industry with high tariff barriers, but open up overseas markets needing American goods.

Blaine believed his policies would be most effective in the Western Hemisphere.

Throughout his life he vigorously championed the cause of Pan Americanism. He believed that the United States and its Latin American neighbors would both benefit from expanded trade, which, in turn, would promote social and political stability. Resulting economic growth would keep meddling European powers from trespassing upon the Monroe Doctrine. Great Britain represented the greatest threat to American supremacy, Blaine argued, and much of his famed twisting of the lion's tail can be traced to this sense of competition. However, Crapol argues that during Blaine's second stint as Secretary of State, President Benjamin Harrison acted more belligerently and frequently ignored his senior cabinet member's plea for restraint.

Structurally, the book is short, consuming less than two hundred pages. There is a detailed chronology at the beginning that is very useful. Source notes appear at the end of each chapter. *James G. Blaine: Architect of Empire* is divided into six chapters beginning with Blaine's "Years of Preparation" at college and as Editor of the *Kennebec Journal* and continue to his second term as Secretary of State. Crapol focuses on all phases of his subject's entire career because in each Blaine advocated his plan for commercial empire in a manner fit for that station. For example, as a Senator Blaine advocated subsidization to an American steamship company to increase trade with Brazil. This occasion, however, led to accusations of political corruption. Throughout his career the "plumed knight" found himself subjected to such taunts. His handling of the Mulligan Letters and his plea "to burn this letter" which fueled the partisan press of the day does leave Crapol a little suspicious. Crapol, however, does not spend much time discussing Blaine's possible collusion in tainted political processes. Instead, he concludes that Blaine's thinking superseded any political favoritism, which was more of a byproduct of his plans for empire, and less a motivation. Through all the controversy, Blaine's blueprints for American

commercial supremacy remained his number one priority, and that friends might benefit from this was, at best, only a secondary consideration. Perhaps Crapol could have expanded a little more on this theme. When discussing the Bering Sea Controversy, the author does not mention that Blaine allowed the North American Commercial Company (NACC) to kill over sixty thousand seals, even though the “modus vivendi” he negotiated with the British government suspended sealing on the Pribiloff Islands. Stephen Elkins, Blaine’s campaign manager in 1884, and Whitelaw Reid, a confidant, both held significant positions of the NACC, which was granted monopoly rights in the sealing business in Alaska, and thus stood to lose substantial income during the suspension. While Blaine did submit the matter to international arbitration, he did not “take the high ground” as Crapol argues. Instead, Blaine’s desire to eliminate the harmful practice of killing seals at sea (pelagic sealing) also served to protect the financial interests of his friends.

Included is a chapter summarizing Blaine’s effect on future policy makers and the manner in which he prepared a younger generation to handle the challenges of the new century. This book is easy to read and will fit well into any class covering the late nineteenth century or the history of American diplomacy. In the end, the reader comes away convinced that James G. Blaine was not the supreme political hack that he is often thought to be, but that he was a profound thinker who deeply pondered his nation’s future and charted a course that shaped American history.

By Gregory Dehler, Lehigh University