

**Michael Adas, *Dominance by Design: Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission*,
Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard
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Suzanne Moon

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In *Dominance by Design*, Michael Adas investigates the place of technological ideals, assumptions, and practices in the USA's projects of nation-building, both in North America and around the world. Tracing the long-term history of American engagement with non-Western peoples, from the earliest European settlement of North America to the first Gulf War and the events following the September 11th bombings, Adas makes a compelling case that we must understand the USA's technological imperatives if we are to understand the particular character of its emergence and operation as a global power. Those who have given little thought to the role that technology has played in America's interactions with the rest of the world will find this book eye-opening, essential reading. Those who already recognize the importance of the culture and politics of technology in the USA will appreciate Adas' synthesis and the insights that his deep historical approach makes clear.

Adas lays the foundation for what is to come by providing a thoughtful reading of Admiral Perry's encounter with representatives of the Tokugawa Shogun, using this story to alert the readers to the key themes that will follow. The main narrative of the book, however, starts in the era of European settlement and transcontinental expansion in North America. In their conflicts with the indigenous peoples of North America, settlers consistently justified their own aggressive expansion by asserting the intertwined moral and technological superiority of their own culture compared to that of the indigenous peoples. The settlers' attempts both to dispossess the indigenous people, and to convert or "civilize" them to European ways, foreshadows later American practices. Adas shows how the westward expansion across North America, and the technological imperatives that informed it, translated into international interventions as the USA emerged and asserted itself as a global

S. Moon (✉)
Department of the History of Science, University of Oklahoma,
601 Elm St., Norman, OK 73019-3106, USA
e-mail: suzannemoon@ou.edu

power. He offers chapters on colonial expansion in the Philippines, and quasi-colonial interventions in the Caribbean, including the building of the Panama Canal, the influence of the Cold War and competition with the Soviet Union on relationships with the developing world, the American experience in the Vietnam conflict, the first Persian Gulf War, and an epilogue that considers the US response to the September 11 attacks in 2001.

One of the book's great strengths is the way that Adas demonstrates the repeated pairing of technological violence and technological development in America's encounter with non-Western peoples. Americans persistently, and paradoxically, use warfare and a missionary vision of prosperity through technological development in tandem in their nation-building efforts. Striking too is the profound myopia that accompanies such projects. American policymakers of the twenty-first century—like the European settlers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—assume not only the superiority of their own technology, but they also assume that the peoples they encounter are equally impressed or intimidated. Time and again, this crucial misinterpretation colors and shapes American encounters, making it difficult or impossible for them to understand the true complexity of the situations they have created. Adas helps us to see the culturally deep-seated character of this myopia as it reappears, often in subtly modified form, throughout the narrative. Some will note that the balance tilts toward greater attention to technological violence at the end of the book, particularly in the chapters on the Gulf War and Vietnam. Adas certainly pulls no punches in either case. One can detect anger towards events in recent American history, and a clear critical thrust throughout, which takes issue with America's technological "civilizing mission" and the ways that technological imperatives have been uncritically recirculated in American politics, to the detriment of the world and the USA itself. Some readers might disagree with Adas' critical stance, but the book's solid evidentiary foundation and thoughtful analysis make this a book to engage with, not to dismiss.

Throughout the book, Adas considers the role of race, class, gender, and religious thinking in America's technological imperatives. He particularly shows how ideas of technological progress drew on a white, middle-class, masculine view of both nation and society. This view was projected and embodied by the agents of American nation-building projects, often male, middle-class engineers, who displayed the zeal of secular missionaries for their work. Equally important is his treatment of the ambivalence of racial assumptions. Certainly, the characterization of other peoples as inferior is crucial to the American imagination of nation-building. At the same time, however, these projects have been predicated on an assumption that progress (and in some sense redemption) is possible, even among "backward" peoples. This assertion of technological promise rests on a rejection of inherent and unchanging racial differences, setting up a tension that—like the mixture of violence and developmentalism—is a defining characteristic of American interactions over the long term.

Readers should understand that the subject of this book is the USA. While it does provide some information about responses to American nation-building by the people involved, it is not the goal of the book to examine the complex cultural and political responses to American efforts in great depth, nor to investigate the ways that American technological imperatives have been remolded in recipient societies.

This is not a criticism, for it would be difficult (and possibly unwise) for a single book to try to do adequate justice to the culture, politics, and social characteristics of the many societies that the Adas explores here. Instead, Adas keeps his focus on explaining American actions. The opportunity to offer a similarly rich understanding of the complex responses to American, or other, technological interventions, is one that remains open to other scholars.

Adas aims for and achieves a large-scale work of synthesis, backing up his claims with solid evidence drawn from extensive secondary and some primary sources. Students of American history will probably find some familiar elements in this history. Yet, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, as his vivid portrayal of America's technological imperatives both in North America and elsewhere help us see the long-term continuities in American political, social, and cultural beliefs that have deeply informed their behavior as a global power. Stylistically, Adas' writing is lucid, and he goes well beyond standard political histories to provide us with cultural insights into Americans' portrayal of themselves and others. The result is a vividly written book that is as accessible and worthwhile for the general public as it is for scholars and students.