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# A Historiography of International Harvester: How a Company Helped Spread American Culture and Products Across the World

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**A Historiography of International Harvester: How a Company Helped Spread**

**American Culture and Products Across the World**

By

**Carl Sinnott**

A Major Research Paper  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through the Department of History  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
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at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2024

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A Historiography of International Harvester: How a Company Helped Spread American  
Culture and Products Across the World

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## ABSTRACT

The history of International Harvester is inseparable with American imperialism, culture, and the spread of the United States throughout the world. International Harvester had manufacturing plants in both North America and Europe, and was able to sell its products on six continents. These products included everything from cookie cutters to construction equipment, and almost everything in between. This work focuses on the historiography of International Harvester and how it relates to the American Empire. Additionally, it will focus on how America's empire, both formal and informal, benefited as International Harvester was able to bring American ideals throughout the world as they transported their products to foreign markets.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to all of my family and friends who have given me encouragement throughout my time spent in university. Without you, I would not have gotten this far. Thank you to my parents, grandparents, and Uncle Bob for supporting and helping with decisions I made that led me here, and for listening to me ramble on about some specific historical topics that you did not know or care about. I would also like to thank Bill Wellington, not only for all of the lunches, but for taking over my grandfather's role when he passed away, and for all of the encouragement you have given me throughout this process. There are too many of you to name, but know that even though you were not mentioned, you also helped me get to where I am now.

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## INTRODUCTION

In April of 1976, the first International 1086 Tractor rolled off the assembly line in Rock Island, Illinois. It was the initial 86 series tractor built by International Harvester (IH), with serial number 8601.<sup>1</sup> These tractors were originally priced at \$35,700 USD, and with over 47,000 units built from 1976–1981, it was designed for and used by American farmers.<sup>2</sup> The International Harvester Buyer's Guide from 1978 stated that it is “just the right size for handling the major work load of an average-acreage farm...” and the guide gave a list of reasons for this claim, including the cab sitting forward of the rear axle for a smoother ride, the turbocharged engine, the lighting system, the hydraulic capabilities, and the on-the-go shifting.<sup>3</sup> These tractors were mainly used in North America, but what was essentially the same tractor was manufactured in Germany during the early-to-mid 1980s for use in Europe and the rest of the world.<sup>4</sup> The 86 series is an iconic tractor design that was used across the United States, putting thousands of hours of work into fields throughout the country. This resulted in the original, serial number 8601, recently selling at an auction for almost \$62,000 USD, before auction fees and taxes. This auction also had other International Harvester products, including an IH cookie cutter, which sold for over \$1,000 USD.<sup>5</sup> All of IH's items in the auction were listed at

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan Roossinck, “Preserving History: The Story of the First IH 1086.” *Successful Farming*, September 1, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Easterlund, “International Harvester 1086.” *TractorData.com* – Information on All Makes and Models of Tractors, n.d., <https://www.tractordata.com/farm-tractors/000/3/6/367-international-harvester-1086.html/>.

<sup>3</sup> International Harvester, *1978 Buyer's Guide: International Agricultural Equipment*, n.d., 1-80.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Easterlund, “International Harvester 1056.” *TractorData.com* – Information on all Makes and Models of Tractors, n.d., <https://www.tractordata.com/farm-tractors/002/3/1/2314-international-harvester-1056.html>.

<sup>5</sup> “Offsite Pine Island, MN – Dirt Boyz September 5<sup>th</sup> Auction.” *Graves Online Auctions*, September 5, 2023. <https://gravesonlineauctions.bidwrangler.com/ui/auctions/105021>.



significantly more than an unbranded version of the same object, likely because the company is out of business and will not be making any more products. This also shows the importance that IH products have in the eyes of those who used them, as well as the cultural significance that IH still carries, even though the company closed its doors in 1984.

International Harvester was founded in 1902 in the United States when several different agricultural equipment producers merged to form one company, notably the McCormick Farm Machinery Company, and Deering Harvester Company. International Harvester expanded into foreign markets in every continent except Antarctica as early as 1914.<sup>6</sup> Also during the early 1910s, IH controlled roughly 85% of the agricultural production market within the United States.<sup>7</sup> With manufacturing plants in North America and Europe, IH had a strong hold over the agricultural industry worldwide for many years, and a large foothold in the automotive, construction, and heavy equipment industries.<sup>8</sup> IH also experimented in many other industries and product branches, from household equipment to producing vehicles and rifles for different militaries, although these ventures were not as successful as the farming and heavy equipment production lines. These different sections of IH can be seen in various different product catalogues, many of which have been digitalized by the Wisconsin Historical Society.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mona Domosh, *American Commodities in an Age of Empire* (New York, New York, Routledge, 2006), 28-29.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America* (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 56.

<sup>8</sup> Mona Domosh, "International Harvester, the U.S. South, and the Makings of International Development in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century." ScienceDirect.com, March 29, 2015, [https://www.sciencedirect-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/science/article/pii/S0962629815000190](https://www.sciencedirect.com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/science/article/pii/S0962629815000190).

<sup>9</sup> "Machine Product List – 1980." McCormick-International Harvester Collection, April 15, 2010. <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/ihc/id/26469>.

Through the spreading of International Harvester branded goods, IH also contributed to the expansion of the American Empire across the globe with their products, the ideas behind them, and American culture through the goods the company produced. They also reaped the economic benefits of American imperialism by following both informal and formal channels that had been created before the company existed. IH also benefited from the various transportation and technological improvements these agents had created, which helped IH to expand as far and as fast as it did. One of the principal aspects of improvements during the mid to late 1800s was the spreading of North American production away from the Eastern portions of the United States to the Midwest.<sup>10</sup>

International Harvester shut its doors in 1984, mainly due to a recession in the heavy equipment sector, the 1979-1980 United Auto Workers (UAW) strike, and a thin profit margin, which resulted in the collapse of IH. Because of the closure, many sections of IH's product lines still exist today as parts of other companies, or as independent companies.<sup>11</sup> Despite no longer existing, IH still appears in popular culture as well, something which will be discussed at the end of this paper.

The history of McCormick Farm Machinery Company, one of the companies which formed International Harvester, and IH, their interaction with the American Empire through both formal and informal channels, and how IH participated in the spread of American culture and ideas throughout the world until IH ceased to be a commercial

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon M. Winder, *The American Reaper: Harvesting Networks and Technology, 1830-1910* (MPG Books Group, England, 2012), 65-66.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Wallem, "Why Did International Harvester Break Up?" *Farm Equipment Magazine*, May 17, 2023. <https://www.farm-equipment.com/articles/17349-why-did-international-harvester-break-up>.

entity will be studied by this paper. A section is dedicated to examining the historiography surrounding the imperialistic forms of the American Empire, how it spread from coast to coast, then transnationally across oceans. It will also look at how the American Empire interacted with foreign countries through individuals and companies and what came of these interactions. The importance of commodities within the American Empire as it spread across the world, and why these goods were vital to the spread of American culture and imperialism will be explored as well. In order to look into the functional aspect of the American Empire, a historiography of the business history of the United States will also be explored, all of which is crucial to the historiography of IH, as the history of the United States set the stage for IH to grow and flourish as a company. Finally, this paper will discuss the historiography of IH thematically instead of chronologically, what is missing from this historiography, and what can be done to fill in the gaps that exist within the narrative of the company.

In order to accomplish these claims, several different methods will be used to explore International Harvester's historiography. The recent historiography of the American Empire has shifted from a focus on official government programs to studying the impacts individuals and companies have had on the United States and the world, such as IH. As a result, a Marxist approach to the historiography will be used in this paper. Additionally, the way that IH was able to spread American culture was due to the power that people place on objects, something which Michel Foucault discussed, will be examined in this paper as well.<sup>12</sup> The United States wanted this cultural exchange to

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<sup>12</sup> Foucault, Michel, *Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (London, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1994).

appear organic and not from official sources, so by combining Foucault's ideas on power and the current emphasis on individuals in the historiography, this paper will discuss the historiography of IH and how American culture was spread both within the realm of American Imperialism, and outside of it in foreign empires and countries.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

International Harvester is not normally the first entity that is thought of when discussing the American Empire, yet IH played a crucial role in the spreading of American commercial interests and culture in both the domestic empire, and also abroad to foreign countries through production factories, a network of dealers, subsidiary companies and military equipment. IH, and many other companies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, viewed the spreading of technology and other commodities as a form of civilizing mission in order to bring other countries into a more industrialized state, something which can be seen in the location of their exhibit at the Panama-California Exposition, which will be discussed later in this paper.<sup>13</sup> This coincided with the belief that through American superiority, or at least the ideals of the Western world, spreading across the globe, peace would be established over time as more and more people bought into American ideas, purchased American goods, and believed in American propaganda.<sup>14</sup> This was one of the many ways the United States, primarily individual American companies and citizens, maintained their informal empire because this granted the ability to influence people across the world with American goods, and opened the

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<sup>13</sup> Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago, Illinois, The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 229-231.

<sup>14</sup> Domosh, *American Commodities*, 4.

door for American ideology to enter foreign societies.<sup>15</sup> International exports accounted for 45% of IH's total profits in 1912, or about \$51 million, not adjusted for inflation.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, from the standpoint of being a lucrative company, IH wanted to ship their products throughout the world because it meant there were more markets to tap into, more production that could be done, and more people to sell goods to, thereby creating a substantial profit for shareholders. In helping to industrialize foreign countries, IH had the ability to sell different farming instruments to the same people at various stages of their technological advancement. For example, upon entering a country without much infrastructure, IH could sell equipment like mechanical reapers and other animal drawn equipment, but as roads, markets, and the economy improved in these countries, they could then sell the same farmer, or the farmer's children, self-powered tractors, trailers, and potentially even pickup trucks.<sup>17</sup> This can be seen in IH's expansion into Mexico in the early 1900s, as they took control of the local fibre market, and increased production by 15 times.<sup>18</sup> Because of IH's involvement in the region, these farmers were able to afford better equipment, and because they were helped by IH, these farmers had loyalty towards the company, and purchased their products. This was a legitimate business decision that helped IH stay in the market for so many years.

International Harvester came into being with the merger of several different companies, with the main company being McCormick Farm Machinery Company, owned

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<sup>15</sup> Ian R. Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789* (London, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 24-25.

<sup>16</sup> Domosh, *American Commodities*, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Domosh, "International Harvester."

<sup>18</sup> Gilbert M. Joseph, and Allen Wells. "Corporate Control of a Monocrop Economy: International Harvester and Yucatan's Henequen Industry during the Porfiriato." *Latin American Research Review* 17, no. 1 (1982): 69-99.

by Cyrus McCormick. McCormick, born in 1809, was the son of a farmer and a blacksmith named Robert McCormick, and both father and son were eager to reduce the amount of labour which went into farming during their lifetime. Farming was an extremely labour-intensive practice at this time, which involved hand held tools, mainly scythes. Most farmers had a team of labourers and were only able to clear about two acres of land in a day. The first McCormick reaper was drawn by two horses, and with a team of eight labourers, could clear ten acres of farmland in one day. This design was publicly displayed in 1831, and massively changed the nature of farming within the United States, while also solving the labour shortage that the country was experiencing due to urbanization and movement of people to the West. This reaper underwent several changes over the years, but production on the perfected version began in Chicago, Illinois, in 1847.<sup>19</sup> McCormick continued to produce and reinvent his reaper until his death in 1884.

In 1902, the McCormick Farm Machinery Company merged with Deering Harvester Company and other, smaller producers of farming equipment, and they rebranded as the International Harvester Corporation. Shortly after the merger, IH began to produce Farmall tractors, which were some of the most popular tractors on the market for many years. IH also began producing personal vehicles like the Auto Wagon, the Scout, and the Travel-All. Additionally, IH produced a variety of different heavy equipment, including construction implements and different types of buses and heavy

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<sup>19</sup> Barbara Marsh, *A Corporate Tragedy: The Agony of International Harvester Company* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York, 1985), 15-21.

commercial trucks.<sup>20</sup> IH continued to grow and innovate after the merger of McCormick and Deering, and in 1914 had distribution chains in 159 countries, colonies, and independent states.<sup>21</sup> IH would remain a popular company until they closed their doors in 1984.

Before getting into the history of IH and how they influenced the American Empire, the America Empire must be defined, and how the spread of the American Empire was vital to the success of IH. The idea began with the formation of the 13 Colonies that the British Empire established on the East coast of what is now the United States. Many of these colonists left their homes in order to have access to more land. This need for land created a conflict between the governing structure and the colonists. This ultimately resulted in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), which the British Empire lost to the colonists, now Americans, who were supported by the French Empire.<sup>22</sup> After the war ended, Americans were still heavily involved with foreign empires, and they were busy setting up their own empire by pushing west from the original 13 states. Westward expansion occurred before the Revolutionary War, but the new American government sanctioned these actions, and purchased or expanded into territory in order to ensure that American citizens could move west, such as the Northwest Ordinance in 1787 which secured the Ohio River Valley from Indigenous

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<sup>20</sup> Walt Moore, "The Rise and Fall of International Harvester." *Construction Equipment* June, 2018. <https://ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/rise-fall-international-harvester-docview/2062656097/se-2>.

<sup>21</sup> Domosh, *American Commodities*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> For additional reading on the Revolutionary War, please refer to T. Cole Jones, "The Dreadful Effects of British Cruelty: The Treatment of British Maritime Prisoners and the Radicalization of the Revolutionary War at Sea." *Journal of the Early Republic* 36, no. 3 (2016): 435-465; Paul David Nelson, "British Conduct of the American Revolutionary War: A Review of Interpretations." *The Journal of American History* 65, no. 3 (1978): 623-653; Noel B. Poirier. "A Legacy of Integration: The African American Citizen-Soldier and the Continental Army." *Army History*, no 56 (2002): 16-25; John E. Shelby, "Revolutionary America: The Historiography." *OAH Magazine of History* 8, no. 4 (1994): 5-8.

peoples and the British Government, the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 from the French Empire and the purchase of Alaska from the Russian Empire in 1867. This westward movement was vital to the farming industry as it opened millions of acres of land to American settlers, and created a much larger economic market than if the United States remained as the 13 states. These farms were integral to the growing United States, as westward expansion attracted many more immigrants, meaning more mouths had to be fed. By farming these newly Americanized lands, it ensured that, excluding natural disasters, there would be enough food for every American. McCormick and IH knew this, and pushed to sell their products to these farmers. As a result of this westward expansion, the American Indian Wars were fought between the American military and most, if not all, Native Americans. These wars lasted for over 100 years from the start of the Revolutionary War in 1776 to roughly 1890, and resulted in the reservation systems that are still in use in the United States to this day.

Another conflict was the Spanish-American War (1898).<sup>23</sup> The transfer of territories at the end of this war showed the imperialistic aims that the United States had, and held onto for multiple decades. These military conflicts with foreign nations and groups of people set the stage for the United States to gain hegemonic power, first on the continent, and then on a global scale as the American military has grown considerably stronger since the Revolutionary War. The United States had many different economic interactions with foreign empires as well, both formally and informally. All of these

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<sup>23</sup> Additional information on the Spanish-American War can be found by reading the following: Nick Kapur, "William McKinley's Values and the Origins of the Spanish-American War: A Reinterpretation." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2011): 18-38; Thomas G. Paterson, "United States Intervention in Cuba, 1898: Interpretations of the Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War." *The History Teacher* 29, no. 3 (1996): 341-361; Julius W. Pratt, "American Business and the Spanish-American War." *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 14, no. 2 (1934): 163-201.



interactions with foreign powers showed the United States how empires worked, how to create, and how to defend their own empire.

With the British Empire no longer controlling those who lived in the newly formed United States of America, residents began to move further and further west. This westward movement, known as Manifest Destiny, was influential to companies like IH, because the spreading of Americans across the continent meant that millions of acres of new farmland was available for settlers, creating the need for more farm equipment. Manifest Destiny was the belief that the United States would stretch from coast to coast, and was an early contributing factor to American imperialism. This movement West happened in two major stages, with the first starting in the mid-1700s and ending in the 1820s, and the second started and ended in the 1840s.<sup>24</sup> This ultimately resulted in the United States that can be seen on the map today.

IH was able to help fill this gap by producing, transporting, and selling their products across the new American territories. Another key part that these companies played was in the spreading of Americana to the western portions of the country. As people dispersed throughout the American Empire, they were able to use the same products regardless of their location, crafting a sense of belonging and culture with others who used the same commodities. Military conflicts, annexations, and massive land purchases allowed formal American control to move closer and closer to the Pacific Ocean, which allowed IH to spread their goods farther under the relative safety of the American government. However, much like the unofficial commodity driven empire the

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Kagan. "Dangerous Nation." *International Politics* 45, no. 4, July, 2008: 403-412.

US has over much of the world now, westward expansion to the Pacific Ocean was mostly done by private citizens that wanted to expand further into the American interior to start farming, ranching, manufacturing, or any other revenue stream, and was reinforced by companies who followed the settlers. This had the effect of inadvertently expanding the American government's intra-imperial control throughout the United States by utilizing the networks within the American Empire to spread culture and goods.

The McCormick Farm Machinery Company was created in the early 1830s, and large-scale production began in the late 1840s, which was the perfect time for the company as this was when the majority of American farmers needed modern farming equipment. McCormick also used imagery in advertisements that connected his company to Manifest Destiny in an attempt to integrate into the history of the United States.<sup>25</sup> This continued until the end of the American Civil War, and in the 1870s the United States was able to exert stronger, more official control over the American west.<sup>26</sup> This also made it easier for McCormick to sell reapers in the West, because with more settlement came more infrastructure that could be used for shipping goods and culture.

Towards the end of westward expansion within the United States, the Americans were also extending their reach overseas. This was not something that was only done by the American government, but also by companies and individuals. In the 1890s, when the mechanical reaper and other farming equipment had officially reached the transnational level, the McCormick Farm Machinery Company sent their products overseas to all

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<sup>25</sup> Winder, *The American Reaper*, 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Isenberg, Thomas Richards. "Alternative Wests." *Pacific Historical Review* 86, no. 1: 4-17. 10.

continents except Antarctica.<sup>27</sup> The spreading of equipment internationally was possible due to the popularity of the reaper within the United States and at World's Fairs, which will be discussed later.

## **HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN IMPERIALISM AND HEGEMONY**

Now that a brief history of the United States has been discussed, it is crucial to understand the historiography of the American Empire. The main themes that will be discussed include the establishment of American hegemonic power, the transnational spreading of culture, the establishment of trans-imperial networks for trade, and the creation of the American Empire as a commercial entity.

A major and early part of the historiography of the American Empire's hegemony and how this history affected International Harvester is *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846*, by Francis Prucha. Highlighted in this book are many of the military conflicts the United States had within its borders, including the War of 1812, the numerous conflicts with Native Americans, the exploration of lands west of the Mississippi River, and how the American frontier advanced westward over the years.<sup>28</sup> This work is crucial because it established the hegemony the United States had within the country by showing how the American military was able to fight for, conquer, and control the area outside of the original 13 states, as well as how the military was a part of exploring these new lands. By defeating foreign empires, both European and Indigenous, and consolidating power within the domestic sphere of influence, the

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<sup>27</sup> Winder, *The American Reaper*, 27.

<sup>28</sup> Francis Prucha, *The Sword of the Republic: The United States Army on the Frontier, 1783-1846* (Toronto, Ontario: The Macmillan Company, 1969).

American Empire was at least on paper a safer place for settlers and companies to grow. This in turn set the stage for the McCormick Farm Machinery Company, and later International Harvester to flourish within America's continental empire, as American control meant American companies were free to operate without worry of foreign influence within the country.

Another key aspect to the historiography is *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* by Emily Rosenberg, which focused more on the cultural aspects of American hegemony that could be spread by companies like IH rather than the militaristic focus of Prucha. The main argument put forward by Rosenberg within this book is that the spreading of American commodities and technology was a gift that America could bestow on the world, and as a result, culture would follow. This was something that the American government subtly pushed by blending propaganda into companies and into individual citizens, but the government did not have much of an official stance until 1929 during the Great Depression.<sup>29</sup> Before this point, it was mainly done unofficially through American citizens and companies, which included International Harvester. By exploring the informal approach to American expansion, Rosenberg found that the American government created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) around the same time the United States entered the First World War. The CPI was established to guide American companies and individuals to push American culture while they were in foreign countries, to the point of influencing foreign newspapers.<sup>30</sup> These agents of empire were instrumental in the creation of an American

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<sup>29</sup> Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*, edited by Eric Foner (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 4, 229-231.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 79-81.

cultural sphere of influence that spread around the globe, something which IH was able to utilize in order to sell farming equipment outside of the United States.<sup>31</sup>

William Weeks published a book titled *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War*. In this book, Weeks discussed the way the American Empire was organized, mainly focusing on the aftermath of the War of 1812 to the start of the American Civil War.<sup>32</sup> This work is relevant to the historiography because it described the what was going on within the domestic empire during the time period that Cyrus McCormick was born into and began his business. Following in the cultural footsteps of Rosenberg, Weeks argued that the War of 1812 was able to spur a sense of nationalism within American citizens, and this feeling pushed the United States to secure more territory in order to consolidate their hegemonic control east of the Mississippi River.<sup>33</sup> In the aftermath of these events, McCormick created his mechanical reaper, which was able to spread throughout the United States because this control was established at the behest of American citizens.

The United States had to work with foreign empires within the continental United States in order to expand their territory, and this was covered in *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion, 1803-1898*, which is a collection of articles edited by Sanford

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<sup>31</sup> The term “agent of empire” is something which Rosenberg established in this context. For more reading, please refer to Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945*, edited by Eric Foner (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Duke University Press, 2003); and Emily Rosenberg, “America and the World: From National to Global.” *OAH Magazine of History* 21, no. 2 (2007): 18-22.

<sup>32</sup> William Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Chicago, Illinois, Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1996).

<sup>33</sup> Weeks, *Building the Continental Empire*, 30-35.

Levinson and Bartholomew Sparrow.<sup>34</sup> The authors of these essays referred to the Louisiana Purchase from the French Empire, the wars over Texas and explained that these events helped the United States establish and exert hegemonic power over the new territories. As stated above, this was important to McCormick and IH as it created the right conditions within the United States for the ability to expand throughout the American Empire, and as a result of the success of their intra-imperialistic spread, to branch out across the world to sell their goods and grow American culture in foreign empires.

Building on the business and political networks that existed between the United States, American citizens, and foreign countries that was examined in *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion*, Thomas Bender looked at the United States in the context of the world during the early years of the Republic by examining the global history that the United States, and therefore IH, is tied to in the book *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* by Thomas Bender.<sup>35</sup> The interconnectedness of empires within American history is put on display in this book, and this is something which International Harvester was able to capitalize on because transempirical relationships had been built in the past which benefited companies. This also allowed for American culture to expand outside of the United States borders quickly, as there were many open lines of communication and influence was spread between empires.

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<sup>34</sup> Sanford Levinson, and Bartholomew Sparrow, eds, *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 2006).

The United States quickly transformed from a colony to an empire, which is examined in *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* by John Darwin. By the 1870s, the American Empire was already on par with, and eventually dominated, the commercial centres of Europe. This was due to the advancements in private industry, such as McCormick's reaper, within the United States, and the willingness of both the United States and Europe to continue to trade, despite the differences between both continents.<sup>36</sup> This is something that Darwin discussed, and he argued that the American ideals of the 1800s, particularly the idea of American exceptionalism, the belief that the United States was superior to Europe, was important because Americans were not burdened with a long history or traditions.<sup>37</sup> This can be seen in the advertisements that McCormick and IH distributed during the late 1800s and early 1900s that show great technological advancements in a short period of time within the United States.<sup>38</sup> This book brought to light the way that Americans saw themselves on a world scale in reference to the technological advancements the United States had invented since becoming an independent country.

On a similar note, in a book titled, *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America*, Eric Rauchway argued that when the United States expanded west after the American Civil War, which added twelve states to the Union, it is what helped to push the United States to turn into an industrial giant. With a massive economy and a relatively small government, it stood out among the European powers for this unique situation the

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<sup>36</sup> John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (Toronto, Ontario, Penguin Books, 2007), 22.

<sup>37</sup> Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 234.

<sup>38</sup> "The Harvester World: Volume 2, Number 3, December 1910." Wisconsin Historical Society, November 11, 2008. <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/ihc/id/6446/rec/2>.

United States found itself in.<sup>39</sup> This is the world in which the McCormick Farm Machinery Company and International Harvester existed in, and it was a system that they could exploit to their advantage in order to grow within the United States. It was also a system that could be used to enter foreign markets, because with the United States as an industrial giant, foreign countries would have been more than willing to do business with American individuals and companies in order to receive some of the new technology and inventions. This is the start of a trend in the historiography towards a transnational understanding of how the United States evolved into what it is today.

In *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* by Michael Hunt, every part of the American Empire is explained, from the origins in the late 1700s to the early 2000s, including the military conflicts in the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> All of these works, and more, described the way the United States both formally and informally expanded their reach across the world. This showed insights into how IH was able to achieve the reputation that they received in a short amount of time by utilizing the networks which were available to them through their status as an American company. However, Hunt also discussed the increasing anti-imperialist sentiment within the United States, and that, despite all of the overwhelming evidence that shows the American Empire exists, some American citizens argue that the country is not imperialist, while others argue against the imperialistic tendencies of the country, including the involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s. This is relevant to the

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<sup>39</sup> Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).



historiography of IH because this work straddles the line between informal and formal empires, which is exactly what IH did as they expanded throughout the globe.

Also published in 2007, “The United States: Empire as a Way of Life?” written by Frank Schumacher and edited by Robert Aldrich explored a similar topic as *The American Ascendancy* in that it tried to understand whether or not the United States was an imperial power or an empire.<sup>41</sup> Schumacher focused on the colonization of Native American groups within the continental United States, and both informal and formal empire building practices in Asia and the Caribbean.<sup>42</sup> This work also touched on the importance of economics in the establishment of the American continental empire, by focusing on the trade routes used by individuals and companies to transport goods throughout the country in order to spread informal imperialism.<sup>43</sup> This was taking place during the same time that McCormick was designing his mechanical reaper, and these trade routes are what allowed his invention to spread across the country as quickly as it did. The trade routes also hint at the transformation of the United States from being interested in conquering land to focusing on economic ventures, changing the historiography to be more focused on private business ventures.

Another major part of the historiography of the American Empire is the work done by Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz*. Within this book, Immerman discussed the origins of the change from a territorial to a commercial empire within the United States

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<sup>41</sup> Frank Schumacher, “The United States: Empire as a way of Life?” Essay in *The Age of Empires*, edited by Robert Aldrich (London, England: Thomas and Hudson Inc., 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Schumacher, “The United States,” 280, 288-290.

<sup>43</sup> Schumacher, “The United States,” 281-285.

government, starting with the 6<sup>th</sup> American president, John Quincy Adams.<sup>44</sup> This again shows how IH could expand their business so rapidly throughout the world. This book also touched on the ideas of American identity and what this meant at different stages of the country's history, and the importance of what Americans were and what they thought they stood for.<sup>45</sup> This also shaped the advancement of IH because, as stated above, their effective marketing campaign was aimed at delivering pro-American imagery in order to attract potential customers to their brand, and to win them over with the quality of their equipment.

The historiography on the overseas portion of the American Empire has been written about in detail. One example of this is Paul Kramer's "Historias Transimperialles: Raices Espanolas del Estado Colonial Estadounidense en Filipinas," which discussed the American government's lack of official experience in overseas colonies, which fit with the way that companies like IH expanded outside of the United States, with little official oversight, and functioning mainly on their own in foreign markets. This is how the American Empire spread throughout both the continental United States and throughout the world. Kramer explained the reasons for this by examining the power given to the American Governor General of the Philippines, which were stronger than governors within the United States, with the reason being that they were not in the United States, and what worked for Americans might not work in the Philippines.<sup>46</sup> IH modeled their overseas expansion in a similar manner. This essay went on to discuss the way the United

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 99.

<sup>45</sup> Immerman, *Empire for Liberty*, 232.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Kramer, "Historias Transimperialles: Raices Espanolas del Estado Colonial Estadounidense en Filipinas" in *Filipinas, Un Pais Entre Dos Imperios*, edited by Maria Dolores Elizalde y Josep M. Delgado (Barcelona, Spain: Edicions Bellaterra, 2011), 13-14.

States went about maintaining their empire in the Philippines, and how they relied partially on the Spanish structure to maintain order within the colony, as the United States had not had to work with an overseas colony that was not primarily European at that point.<sup>47</sup> By being flexible in their approach, the United States was able to maintain control of the Philippines until the Second World War, and IH was able to expand throughout the world.

Another publication by Kramer is “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World.”<sup>48</sup> This article adds to the historiography of the American Empire because in it, Kramer argues that the focus should not be on whether or not the United States is an empire, like some of the other historiographical texts do, but instead to focus on what it does and how it operates.<sup>49</sup> In this, Kramer also argued that the United States is only an “empire” during times of crisis, and is otherwise not seen as an empire during peacetime in the historiography.<sup>50</sup> This change in identity is something that IH has also worked through as an agent of empire for the United States. During these times of crisis, IH slowed production of non-essential products, and focused on producing military equipment in order to arm the United States and their allies. In this regard, IH was a facet of the American Empire as the company aided in multiple war efforts. This focus on how the empire works is an expansion on Kramer’s article above.

*Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective Since 1789*, written by Ian Tyrrell, is applicable for both the historiography of the United States and

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<sup>47</sup> Kramer, “Historias Transimperial,” 6-10.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Kramer, “Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World.” *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (2011): 1348-1391. <http://jstor.org/stable/23309640>.

<sup>49</sup> Kramer, “Power and Connection,” 1349.

<sup>50</sup> Kramer, “Power and Connection,” 1389-1390.

IH because in this book Tyrrell explores the circumstances throughout the world that allowed American companies to expand into foreign markets.<sup>51</sup> This work places the focus of America's empire building strategy on individuals and companies in a similar fashion as Rosenberg, not on government action, following the trajectory of the historiography. This is also relevant to IH specifically because the book examined the time period during the life of Cyrus McCormick, the lifetime of his company, and IH, and gives context to the economic activity that was important to the United States. Additionally, Tyrrell is one of the first historians to truly focus on transnational history and how the United States became what it is today through interactions and ordeals with foreign countries, something which was started by Rauchway in *Blessed Among Nations*.

Finally, in "Corporate Imperialism and the World of Goods" by Nan Enstad, corporations as imperial powers are discussed instead of nation states. This is an important addition to the historiography because it explores how IH and other companies have spread across the world, and how they are treated as empires in their own right, separate from the American Empire, using the term "corporate imperialism" to describe this phenomenon.<sup>52</sup> This relates all the way back to Rosenberg's work in that it argues that the United States is not the main antagonist of the imperialistic and cultural spread across the world, and that it was individuals and companies, like IH, instead of official government action. However, this work also understands that the American government benefited from corporate imperialism, and sometimes provided resources for some of

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<sup>51</sup> Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation*, 24-25.

<sup>52</sup> Nan Enstad, "Corporate Imperialism and the World of Goods." Essay. In *The Cambridge History of America and the World: Volume 3, 1900-1945*, edited by Brooke Blower and Andrew Preston, 539-561 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 539.

these companies.<sup>53</sup> By examining the relationship between official and informal empire, this paper shows the connections that empires had both within their empire, and outside of it, which was useful to companies as they had access to these networks.

### **IMPORTANCE OF COMMODITIES**

The selling of commodities was important for both the economic and cultural transformation of countries. The ability to spread culture with products, such as American farming practices with IH products, was vital to the expansion of the American Empire, as American goods brought American ideas across the world because these objects represented the physical version of the American government or empire.<sup>54</sup> The need to transfer commodities for this reason led to the transportation of goods becoming exponentially easier as time moved on, with an example being the adoption of steamships for overseas trading in the 1840s.<sup>55</sup> The American Empire, including citizens and companies, were also a key player in establishing trade routes. The construction of the Panama Canal was one of the greatest engineering feats of the early 1900s, and was even considered one of the seven wonders of the modern era. The completion of the canal was also a symbolic victory for the United States, as they had succeeded in building the canal where France had failed, showing the hegemonic power and technological advancement of the American Empire.<sup>56</sup> The ability of the American Empire to achieve what was needed for the betterment of the United States, and as a result, the world, was on display, and they had succeeded. The canal allowed for much faster shipping between the Pacific

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<sup>53</sup> Enstad, "Corporate Imperialism and the World of Goods," 540.

<sup>54</sup> Foucault, *Power*, 329-334.

<sup>55</sup> Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, 227.

<sup>56</sup> Marixa Lasso, "A Canal Without a Zone: Conflicting Representations of the Panama Canal." *Journal of Latin American Geography* 14, no. 3 (2015): 157-174. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43964633>. 158.

and Atlantic oceans, which was the main reason for the construction of this passage. New trading routes had been established, transportation had been improved, and relationships had been made between countries and colonies in order for American goods to be sold and distributed across transempirical lines, something which was on display in the United States and in other countries at the many World's Fairs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

World's Fairs were important not only to show national pride and host impressive events. They were also important for companies to establish relationships with their existing and potential customers. As individuals from rural areas moved to urban areas, their support system changed, or disappeared. Because rural areas tended to support more face-to-face discussions and the ability to see events firsthand, the lack of certainty of events and claims in urban areas made many people untrustworthy.<sup>57</sup> This uncertainty meant that companies had to earn the trust of their customers. The best way to do this during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would have been public displays, and fairs brought a significant number of spectators to them.<sup>58</sup> McCormick Farm Machinery Company and International Harvester had displays, products, and functional farms to put their equipment on display for all to see. American President McKinley also described these fairs as a way for the United States to advance in different markets, create networks to find resources, and to help the spread of American civilization throughout the world.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Kieth Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 85.

<sup>58</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 4.

International Harvester took advantage of this, and used the fairs to help popularize and spread their products throughout the United States and the world.

The 1876 Centennial Exposition was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This was a celebration of the 100-year anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, and it was also the first World's Fair to be held within the United States.<sup>60</sup> Many different companies, including the McCormick Farm Machinery Company, used this celebration of culture as a way to exhibit their goods to the American public, and more importantly, to European visitors. This event was the tip of the iceberg for American companies to expand deeper into European markets, as American manufacturing had increased in production ability so that it was able to satisfy Europe's need for cheap goods, at a profit for Americans.<sup>61</sup> Even though the United States was already trading with many European countries, the ability to cheaply manufacture goods in more efficient ways meant that relations between countries would remain positive in order to continue trading. Commodities played a major role in international relationships because the states involved in the transfer of goods would only trade if they were able to benefit from the deal. By keeping both sides accommodated, the goods would continue to flow. Additionally, this exposition was unique in that most of the exhibits and landscaping was finished before the opening day.<sup>62</sup> This reflected the ability and attention to detail which was present in American manufacturing during this time period, something which helped American companies attract foreign business.

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<sup>60</sup> Yan Liu, "Imagining and Construction of Cultural Identity: A Comparative Study of Different Reports on the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition." *Comparative Literature: East and West* 1, no. 1 (2017): 11-24.

<sup>61</sup> Domosh, "American Commodities, 1-3.

<sup>62</sup> Rydell, *All the World's a Fair*, 13.

Another celebration, the 1893 Columbian Exhibition, was held in Chicago to celebrate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the “discovery” of America. Cyrus McCormick Jr., the eldest son of Cyrus McCormick, inherited the company after his father’s death, and was instrumental in getting this fair held in Chicago. The location was crucial to McCormick as the McCormick Farm Machinery Company was located in Chicago, which meant if this city was chosen, McCormick would have to spend significantly less time and money in order to erect an exhibit, and because Chicago held the headquarters of the company, this meant greater access of McCormick and his company to individuals visiting the city.<sup>63</sup> This is something which would have resulted in more business than if the fair was held elsewhere in the United States. This fair was also held to show the cultural prowess and sophistication of American lives.<sup>64</sup> This was something which visitors from foreign countries would have taken home with them, and some would have implemented these American ways of life into their own daily lives.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, the importance of these celebrations was that it put the power of the United States on display. The industrialization, financial superiority, and the American ability to sell their goods across the world was evident when these two events are compared.<sup>66</sup> The advancement of American interests on the world stage was not something that the rest of the world could ignore, as the United States industry was advancing at a rapid pace, and had reached a point where they had surpassed much of the rest of the world, something that would be shown with the American victory in the Spanish-American War.

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<sup>63</sup> Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 42.

<sup>64</sup> Domosh, “*American Commodities*, 11.

<sup>65</sup> Daniel Ott, “Producing a Past: McCormick Harvester and Producer Populists in the 1890s.” *Agricultural History* 88, no. 1 (2014): 87-119. 89-90.

<sup>66</sup> Domosh, “*American Commodities*, 11-12.



One final American exposition to discuss is the Panama-California Exposition, which lasted from January 1, 1915 until January 1, 1917. This fair was held in order to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal and the power of the American Empire, but also displayed many racist ideologies throughout.<sup>67</sup> One example of this can be seen with International Harvester. IH had an exhibit which was a fully operational farm in order to display IH merchandise in practical, everyday use. This exhibit was located directly across from exhibits which depicted various North and South American Indigenous peoples as racialized stereotypes. The placement of these exhibits was intentional, in order to show the “stages of progress” between different civilizations.<sup>68</sup> The idea of this civilizing mission to improve the world is something that was also noted at previous fairs, can be seen in McCormick’s advertising and catalogues, and also in how the fairs placed a heavy importance on agricultural cultures.<sup>69</sup> This was the same civilizing mission that was important to McCormick during the founding of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, and will be discussed later in this paper.

International Harvester also spread their products and by association, American culture, at foreign fairs. In 1851, the Great Exhibition (also known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition) was held from May 1 to October 15 in London, England. This was supposed to display British superiority over other European countries, but many participants and visitors were surprised by the various American companies present, including McCormick and his mechanical reaper. In fact, many of these American companies received awards from the Exhibition judges instead of their British counterparts. This

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<sup>67</sup> Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 209-211.

<sup>68</sup> Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair*, 229-231.

<sup>69</sup> Winder, *The American Reaper*, 173.

resulted in a British government inquiry into the technological advancements within the United States.<sup>70</sup> This was an interesting result, because it showed the success of American industry, and also had Europeans interested in American goods, and by extension American culture. Fifty years later, McCormick's reaper was at the forefront of the Paris Exposition Universelle carrying an American flag. This event, and the subsequent advertising, attributed to the spreading of Americana throughout Europe as McCormick's reaper was superior to all others that it was tested against. This spectacle was also something relatively uncommon at the time, as the majority of empires kept their secrets from each other, especially when it came to technology.<sup>71</sup> Because the American Empire was mostly informal, and established by individuals rather than a government, this allowed McCormick's reaper to spread internationally quickly, as there was less bureaucratic red tape to wade through in order to sell products internationally. World's Fairs were used by the McCormick Farm Machinery Company and later International Harvester as effective ways to advertise their products internationally by putting them on display to prove their worth.

Finally, it was vital for IH to stand out, both in the field and at the fairs in order to catch the eyes of potential customers, and non-customers because it would help spread brand identity. IH tractors are an iconic red colour, something which is easily recognizable, and so visibly striking that Case IH, the agricultural portion of International Harvester that was sold to CNH International when IH closed, has trademarked the logo

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<sup>70</sup> Peter Shulman, "Technology and US Foreign Relations in the Nineteenth Century." Essay in *The Cambridge History of America and the World: Volume 2, 1812-1900*, edited by Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, 337-360 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 354-355.

<sup>71</sup> Winder, *The American Reaper*, 147-148.

and colour scheme.<sup>72</sup> This is something that fans and users of IH products have adopted into their daily life, and IH merchandise exists that shows this. One example is a sticker that can be purchased online that states: “There are 2 colors of tractor. IH red and Ugly,” with the word “ugly” printed in John Deere green, which shows the brand loyalty that the users have towards IH.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, IH red paint is sold at hardware stores like The Home Depot.<sup>74</sup> By effectively marketing their logo and colour, anyone with a knowledge of tractors or agricultural goods would know at a glance if a piece of equipment was produced by IH or not.

### IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

International Harvester goods were produced in America, or at the least produced by an American owned company, and because of this, IH branded goods symbolized Americana and American ideals in part because the state is not a physical object. As a result, physical items represented the state. The reason why commodities can be the base of empires is because people give power to objects, sometimes unconsciously and sometimes intentionally. This can have many different outcomes, some better than others. Michel Foucault claimed that the ability for the power of objects came from the rise of the state.<sup>75</sup> In this case, International Harvester goods were a physical representation of America both within the United States, and in foreign countries. The power that IH goods

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<sup>72</sup> “Legal Notices: Case IH.” Legal Notices Case IH, n.d. <https://www.caseih.com/en/asiapacific/legalnotices>.

<sup>73</sup> “Red Tractor Sticker.” IH Gear, n.d. <https://ihgear.com/collections/ih-logo-stickers/products/ih-red-tractor-sticker>.

<sup>74</sup> “International Harvester Red – Tractor Paint – Automotive Paint.” The Home Depot, n.d. <https://www.homedepot.com/b/Paint-Industrial-Paint-Automotive-Paint-Tractor-Paint/International-Harvester-Red/N-5yc1vZcgodZ1z19xoj>.

<sup>75</sup> Foucault, *Power*, 329-334.

held was also a representation of the relationship between individuals and the culture of the United States because individuals allowed this power dynamic to exist, primarily because the relationship of communication was present. This aspect of communication opened the door for Americana to follow IH into foreign countries. IH production facilities and dealerships were organized so managers were in communication with the American headquarters, and as a result the American way of producing, selling, and farming were easily transferred across the globe.<sup>76</sup> After these American commercial ideas were entrenched within foreign distributor networks, it was simple for more American ideology to enter these foreign countries, as there was already an established ideological pipeline through IH's supply chain. Ultimately, even though IH is no longer a company, their legacy is still strong within the United States, partly due to the nostalgia that IH products conjure. The power people unintentionally give to objects can dictate relationships and shape cultural transformations across the world from where these goods were produced.

The United States government eventually understood that this cultural exchange was something that could be controlled through propaganda and government programs, but also through unofficial channels like International Harvester. In 1938, the United States government created the Division for Cultural Relations, and after the Second World War, more programs relating to the spreading of American culture were established, including the United States Information Agency and the Fulbright Exchange Program. This was done in order to influence foreign countries to adopt American and

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<sup>76</sup> Foucault, *Power*, 337-338.

Western ideology as a way to combat Soviet influence in the Cold War.<sup>77</sup> These programs placed a heavy influence on exporting American culture as the West fought for influence as the Cold War began in the years after the Second World War.<sup>78</sup> Media influence was also a large part of the spreading of American culture, because America was one of the largest producers of media in the 1960s when television reached global popularity. American media was used to influence foreign citizens, especially children, in an attempt to win them over, or at the least, help bolster the American economy by selling culture to the largest audience they could reach. This cultural imperialism tied directly into the United States informal way of conducting their empire, as there was no formal connection between the media and the American government.<sup>79</sup> Much of the cultural exchange that took place between the United States and the rest of the world can be seen as American cultural propaganda. During the early years of the Cold War, the American government under the Truman Administration discussed the “struggle for the minds of men.”<sup>80</sup> If this could be done through informal channels such as television or other American goods like International Harvester, the Americanization of the world would appear organic, and not something planned by the government. The influence of IH in American popular culture will be discussed later in this paper.

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<sup>77</sup> Jessica Geinow-Hecht, “Shame on US? Academics, Cultural Transfer, and the Cold War – A Critical Review.” *Diplomatic History*, vol 24, no. 3 (2000), 465-494. 466-467.

<sup>78</sup> Additional information on the Cold War can be found in the following citations: Gordon Johnston, “Revisiting the Cultural Cold War.” *Social History* 35, no. 3 (2010): 290-307. <http://jstor.org/stable/27866662>; Arthur Schlesinger, “Origins of the Cold War.” *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 22-52.

<sup>79</sup> Geinow-Hecht, “Shame on US?” 472-475.

<sup>80</sup> Richard T. Newman, “Propaganda: An Instrument of Foreign Policy.” *Columbia Journal of International Affairs* 5, no. 2 (1951): 56-64. <http://jstor.org/stable/24354541>. 56.

## BUSINESS HISTORIOGRAPHY

The historiography of American business history and the American economy is something that has been written about extensively. This area of study began with Alfred Chandler, and one of the subjects within this area Chandler looked into was the development of the railroad within the United States, the main way McCormick shipped their goods. Before the 1880s, it was deemed too costly and too much of a hassle to operate a rail line that was more than 500 miles long.<sup>81</sup> When the change came into effect in the 1880s, it meant that more and more people had access to rail systems, and the ability to spread goods became easier, and more cost effective for both the consumer and the rail operators, which rapidly increased the consumer base for many companies located within the United States. As the rail lines grew, so too did the reach of American companies. Before IH, the McCormick Farm Machinery Company was able to spread their commodities, mainly mechanical reapers to the Western United States through the newly constructed railway system. This allowed for easy and relatively cheap shipments to farmers. While slower than modern travel, the railroad was a massive improvement over the older system, such as by horse and buggy or wagon. This meant that McCormick was able to spread their products quickly across the vast distances of America's domestic empire. Right as IH's predecessor companies were entering the commercial market, thousands of miles of railway were being laid down. The timing on this worked perfectly for companies like the McCormick Farm Machinery Company, as this was one of the

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<sup>81</sup> Alfred Chandler, Thomas McCraw, Richard Tedlow, *Management Past and Present: A Casebook on the History of American Business* (Cincinnati, Ohio, South-Western College Publishing, 1996), 2-38.

first times in history that goods could travel to so many different people both quickly and safely in a country the size of the United States.

A look into more modern business marketing practices has been studied through a series of textbooks published by A.J. Faria, Joseph Hair, Charles Lamb, Carl McDaniel, and William Wellington, entitled *Marketing*. Stated simply, Faria et al. described marketing as “an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.” Another key aspect discussed in *Marketing* is the idea of a relationship marketing strategy, which is the way companies form a long term relationship with their customers in order to better serve their customers’ needs, and to ensure that profits stay up.<sup>82</sup> This is a concept IH knew and understood well, as they marketed farm equipment to the people who made their livelihoods in the fields across the globe, and it is how IH grew to be one of the biggest producers of farming equipment in the world, at one point controlling 85% of production related to farming equipment.<sup>83</sup> Marketing is something that every company needs in order to survive, and IH was effective in their marketing and business practices, which can be seen in the many old advertisements that IH published.

In 2017, Sven Bekert discussed the “American danger” as it was seen from Europe.<sup>84</sup> One major reason for this was because of an idea in capitalism during the

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<sup>82</sup> Faria, A.J., Charles Lamb, Joseph Hair, Carl McDaniel, and William Wellington. *Marketing*. 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Toronto, Ontario: Nelson Education, 2012), 4, 10. For more information on how marketing has changed over the years, see editions 1 through 4 of the same textbook.

<sup>83</sup> Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations*, 56-57.

<sup>84</sup> Sven Beckert, “American Danger: The United States Empire, Eurafrica, and the Territorialization of Industrial Capitalism, 1870-1950.” *The American Historical Review* 122, no. 4 (2017): 1137-1170. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26576994>.

1870s that saw the control of territory as the ability to utilize raw materials, which in turn meant labour, and market control. The United States had recently acquired millions of acres of land through westward expansion, and this frightened several European powers, including Germany and France. This resulted in many leading capitalists to believe that this would swing the economy into the United States favour. In order to compete, Europe would have to change their economies to mirror what was going on in the United States.<sup>85</sup> This can also be seen in the industrialization of America and McCormick's reaper succeeding, with similar European inventions not reaching the same heights.<sup>86</sup> The success of the Americanization of what is now the United States forced Europe to react to improve their own commodity distribution abilities, but it was not something that Europe could copy, as the United States had a better manufacturing output than the United Kingdom, France, and Germany combined by 1914.<sup>87</sup> The United States was able to change the economies of North America and Europe by their capitalistic success.

Additional information on American history relating to business is Dael A. Norwood's "The United States and Global Capitalism."<sup>88</sup> Throughout this paper, Norwood argued that the American citizens and companies explored many different "commercial and financial flows as forms and means of engagement with the world..."<sup>89</sup> This ultimately resulted in the American government attempting to create a bank for foreign traders in order to benefit the United States. This forced many American citizens

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<sup>85</sup> Beckert, "American Danger," 1137-1139.

<sup>86</sup> Shulman, "Technology and US Foreign Relations in the Nineteenth Century," 354-355.

<sup>87</sup> Beckert, "American Danger," 1140.

<sup>88</sup> Dael Norwood, "The United States and Global Capitalism." Essay in *The Cambridge History of America and the World: Volume 2, 1812-1900*, edited by Kristin Hoganson and Jay Sexton, 267-294 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

<sup>89</sup> Norwood, "The United States and Global Capitalism," 269.



into more dangerous positions as middlemen and smugglers in order to hide their wealth from authorities. These unofficial transactions occurred throughout Asia, with a concentration on China and the British opium trade, as well as Latin America.<sup>90</sup> This is relevant to International Harvester not because they smuggled goods in and out of countries, but because these merchants created a network of contacts and foreign countries that were used to receiving American goods. By the time McCormick began selling his reaper, these connections were decades old, and a reliable form of transaction between empires and nations. Through both formal and informal connections, IH was able to grow into the massive company it became.

Business history and cultural history are connected, even though they may not appear so, and IH can be used as an example to show this. Business and culture open the door for each other, and this concept can be related to nation branding, and how influence is spread throughout the world. Much in the same way that effective marketing is needed in order to sell products, effective nation branding is required in order for culture and ideas to be exported to foreign countries. Nation branding focuses on how culture can be spread without violence, how this is accomplished both formally and informally, and how the marketing of a nation or idea can be spread, both within and outside of a country's borders.<sup>91</sup> IH, an informal influencer on a global scale, helped to spread American ideals and culture because of their extensive business and consumer network that was able to

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<sup>90</sup> Norwood, "The United States and Global Capitalism," 271-272.

<sup>91</sup> Jessica Geinow-Hecht, "Nation Branding." Essay in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, edited by Frank Costigliola and Michael Hogan, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 232-244 (New York, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016), 237.

transcend national borders.<sup>92</sup> These business transactions resulted in a cultural trade as well, as companies were likely to cross international borders to sell goods in foreign places.

## INTERNATIONAL HARVESTER HISTORIOGRAPHY

The history of IH is vast and encompasses many different disciplines within the fields of history, but the overall historiography of the company is lacking. One of the first actions that IH and the companies that merged to make IH did in order to become involved with the United States domestic empire was to send their goods to the western portion of the United States. This fit into Manifest Destiny and the ideology surrounding it, as the spread of Americana followed the settlers, similar to the historiography that was examined in *The Louisiana Purchase and American Expansion*. These settlers were able to colonize and take control of the western portion of the United States from the Indigenous groups that lived there, something which the American government helped with. This became easier with the improvements to transportation in the late 1800s as it became much more cost effective to send goods over long distances. Wherever settlers went, McCormick products followed. This is something which is discussed in great lengths in Mona Domosh's *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*. Domosh examined how the McCormick Farm Machinery Company inserted themselves into the ideology surrounding the western push within the United States. Another major aspect to this is that Domosh discussed was the importance of spreading "civilization" by McCormick, and later IH. The goal was to civilize America and the world with American products,

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<sup>92</sup> Emily Rosenberg, "Considering Borders." Essay in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, edited by Frank Costigliola and Michael Hogan, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 188-202 (New York, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016), 193.

and the best way for McCormick to do this was with farming products.<sup>93</sup> Farmers are an extremely vital part of society because everyone needs to eat, and by targeting this group of people with American goods, the spreading of Americana would start with the food on people's plates. This work by Domosh adds to the historiography of IH and the cultural transfer that happened within the United States as American settlers approached the Pacific Ocean by combining both of these topics. This is something which is discussed in *The American Reaper: Harvesting Networks and Technology, 1830-1910* by Gordon Winder, particularly how advertising and product placement, as well as a good quality product, helped propel McCormick's farm equipment to be successful on the international stage.<sup>94</sup> With an effective marketing strategy, McCormick Farm Machinery Company, and later International Harvester, was able to establish themselves in the founding mythos of the settling of the western United States and Manifest Destiny. Additionally, Domosh explored the when and how of IH's globalization, and based much of the research on primary sources from International Harvester, or newspaper reports of the time. One key aspect which Domosh found was that IH mainly wanted to expand production into foreign markets mainly to avoid tariffs, and the amount of sales in Europe made up roughly 45% of total sales in 1914. Branch plants established outside of the United States were an important part of IH's economic strategy, as it was cheaper to build products in some countries than to ship completed products into them due to tariffs.<sup>95</sup> One example of a branch plant used to avoid tariffs was in Hamilton, Ontario. This factory was important for many reasons, including breaking into the Canadian market,

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<sup>93</sup> Domosh, *American Commodities*, 96-99.

<sup>94</sup> Winder, *The American Reaper*, 46.

<sup>95</sup> Domosh, *American Commodities*, 28, 45-46.

and the plant's location close to the Great Lakes, enabling easy shipping throughout this region.<sup>96</sup> Foreign production of IH goods was also prominent for more than just monetary reasons. In addition to saving money on tariffs, building their goods in other countries created jobs in foreign markets, employing many non-Americans. This is relevant because it meant the further spreading of American ideals within foreign countries through IH and the work culture that was present in their factories. Because IH was an American company, American ideals and work culture would have been present within IH production facilities.

In addition to spreading west, IH also brought their goods and American culture to the southern United States in the 1910s. Mona Domosh's article "International Harvester, the U.S. South, and the Makings of International Development in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century" explores this topic.<sup>97</sup> This work is relevant to the historiography of International Harvester and the transfer of Americana within the domestic part of the American Empire because it sheds light on the how the American government viewed farming practices, yields, and culture within the domestic empire when compared to the rest of the world, and how IH played a major role in the spreading of this information, both for the increase in sales and the betterment of the farming community within the United States and abroad. Part of the reason for the concern within the American government for domestic farm practices was that some parts of the country, mainly the Southern United States, did not perform as well as other parts of the country. A large

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<sup>96</sup> Robert N. Pripps. "History of International Harvester of Canada," Farm Collector – Dedicated to the Preservation of Vintage Farm Equipment, n.d., <https://www.farmcollector.com/tractors/tractors-company-history/made-in-canada-zmrpz19mayzhur/>.

<sup>97</sup> Mona Domosh, "International Harvester, the U.S. South, and the Makings of International Development in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century." ScienceDirect.com, March 29, 2015, <https://www.sciencedirect-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/science/article/pii/S0962629815000190>.

factor in this discrepancy was due to the Jim Crow laws within the United States, which meant many African American farmers did not have access to the same farming equipment and technological advances as white farmers in this region. This was represented in an IH publication titled *100 Harvest Scenes Around the World* where an African American family from Alabama was shown using the same farming equipment and practices as those in Egypt.<sup>98</sup> This involvement of IH with the American South coincided with the American government's own attempt at developing better farming practices and yields across the country. This included support from the United States Department of Agriculture, which funded educational programs for farmers, instructional farms, and other educational programs in the early 1910s in order to help advance farming practices within the United States. The American government believed that if this program was successful, it would create better, more technologically developed citizens. Shortly after the creation of this government program, IH created a service bureau in 1912, which was run by an agricultural professor named Perry Holden from Iowa State University. The service bureau published many different articles aimed at helping farmers in order to make their lives easier.<sup>99</sup> IH had their own reasons for offering these services, as they could educate new or existing farmers, and sell them new equipment. Through two different parts of America's domestic empire, IH and the American government had practice in spreading American culture and goods at the same time, which helped to spread ideas and products overseas.

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<sup>98</sup> Domosh, "International Harvester," ScienceDirect.com.

<sup>99</sup> Domosh, "International Harvester," ScienceDirect.com.

The reputation of International Harvester has been analyzed at great lengths, but not as much by academics as it has been discussed by amateur historians or IH enthusiasts. One academic example can be found in “Producing a Past: McCormick Harvester and Producer Populists in the 1890s.”<sup>100</sup> In this paper, Daniel Ott explored how the McCormick Farm Machinery Company built their reputation throughout the United States, and more importantly, overseas with different international conventions within the United States, like the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Illinois. Ott argued that the displays McCormick Farm Machinery Company had at these expositions were vital in shaping the image of the company as a civilizing giant, and that the world was better off because of McCormick’s reaper. This paper also discussed the idea of the civilizing mission, which was built on the earlier work of Domosh and “Corporate Imperialism and the World of Goods” by Nan Enstad because it was a company spreading American culture instead of the government. The advertising at the Columbian Exposition showed McCormick as the leader in agricultural advancements, and that because of him, the rest of the society was able to advance on a world stage.<sup>101</sup> Ott’s paper adds to the historiography of McCormick Farm Machinery Company and International Harvester because it explores the ideology and cultural importance that was presented to those who visited the McCormick or IH booth at World’s Fairs.

*The American Reaper: Harvesting Networks and Technology, 1830-1910*, written by Gordon M. Winder adds to the historiography of the McCormick Farm Machinery Company and International Harvester because it shows the different networks that existed

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<sup>100</sup> Daniel Ott, “Producing a Past: McCormick Harvester and Producer Populists in the 1890s.” *Agricultural History* 88, no. 1 (2014): 87-119.

<sup>101</sup> Ott, “Producing a Past,” 90-94.

domestically and internationally that are the reason why these companies could expand as far and as fast as they did.<sup>102</sup> This builds upon the earlier works of both *After Tamerlane* by John Darwin due to the technological advancement that the United States had at the time relative to the rest of the world, and on *Empire for Liberty* by Richard Immerman because of the expansion of networks that were created to transfer goods into foreign markets. The intrapersonal and transnational relationships were important because they created a network of individuals that could spread culture and products throughout the world. Another major cultural aspect of IH is that the majority of American sales of the mechanical reaper came from the Midwest, which was full of European immigrants. Many of them did not speak English, so the manuals and reading material for McCormick products were published in many different languages.<sup>103</sup> This gave McCormick and IH an advantage when they turned to foreign sales because the preexisting networks communicated in many different languages, which helped both cultural and economic transfers.

With the success of their earlier product lines, IH decided that they should begin to design, build, and sell street vehicles, which were growing greatly in popularity within the United States. IH produced several different kinds of pickup trucks, SUVs, and other unique vehicles. Despite this, the historiography on this section of IH is almost non-existent. The writing that does exist is mainly primary sources, or publications by International Harvester. One example is *International Harvester Automotive Vehicles – 1947*, and adds to the historiography by explaining the differences between early models,

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<sup>102</sup> Winder, *The American Reaper*, 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> Winder, *The American Reaper*, 153.

as well as a brief overview of vehicle production at IH.<sup>104</sup> This source is problematic, however, as it was published by International Harvester. The company would not intentionally publish any material that would discredit any claims to reliability of their products. Additionally, because this work was published not long after the end of the Second World War, IH would have been attempting to capture a portion of the civilian market in order to recoup some of the money that they would have been making if the United States military was still buying vehicles for the war effort. Because this source can only tell part of the story, independent, academic work needs to be done on this particular topic.

IH produced vehicles, while good and reliable, never exceeded Detroit's "Big Three": Chryslers, Ford, and General Motors. This is something discussed in the article "The Demise of International Harvester," written by Peter Cassel, which adds to the historiography by going in depth on the failure of the vehicle branch of IH. Cassel stated that even in the best year that IH vehicles had in the 1960s, they were only able to take over 9.5% of the vehicle sales market, and they generally only held 4.5% of the market.<sup>105</sup> This source is also problematic, as it is non-academic and does not list any sources for the information provided. Despite the fact that these pickup trucks and SUVs were sold throughout North America for many decades, with some making it at least as far north as Churchill, Manitoba (see Appendix for pictures), IH vehicles have largely been forgotten by the general public and the historiography.

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<sup>104</sup> "International Harvester Automotive Vehicles – 1947." Wisconsin Historical Society, October 31, 2008. <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/ihc/id/5743/rec/13>.

<sup>105</sup> Peter Cassel, "The Demise of International Harvester." Offroad.com, October 1, 2005. <https://www.off-road.com/trucks-4x4/tech/the-demise-of-international-harvester-19310.html>.



Unlike personal vehicles, IH produced commercial trucks were popular, and sold well. However, similar to street vehicles, not much has been written about the commercial trucks and busses that IH produced. One book, titled *Motor Trucks of America*, published in 1979, described the different types of heavy trucks, which included everything from milk tankers to school buses and everything in between.<sup>106</sup> This book is problematic, however, as it does not contain citations or any sort of bibliography. As is the case with the majority of IH products, not much research has been done in an academic sense, and the research which has been done has been compiled by amateur historians and International Harvester enthusiasts. Many primary sources exist from International Harvester and other sources such as newspapers and reviews of vehicles, but the academic sources are non-existent.

IH did not stop at only producing vehicles for private citizens and companies, but produced trucks for both the American military and America's allies. The academic sources for this are also few and far between, but Navistar, the company which was formerly International Harvester's heavy truck branch, has a page on their website dedicated to their contributions to the United States military during both World Wars. The website states that they produced vehicles in both the First and Second World War, and their vehicles were well known and renowned for their toughness and durability.<sup>107</sup> This publication is less than ideal for academic purposes, as it was written by the company that produced, and is still producing, defense equipment for the United States

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<sup>106</sup> James A. Wren and Genevieve J. Wren, *Motor Trucks of America* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1979).

<sup>107</sup> "Navistar Defense." Navistar, n.d.  
<https://www.navistardefense.com/navistardefense/ourcompany/history>.

military. They would not publish any information that would appear as a detriment to their record because of the possibility of losing an existing military or civilian contract or not receiving a new contract. For these economic reasons, this source must be taken with a grain of salt. During the Second World War, IH produced M-5-6 and M5H-6 trucks for the United States, many of which were lent to the Soviet Union.<sup>108</sup> These trucks exist as an agent of empire because of the American lend lease program, which shared vital military equipment with America's allies in an effort to defeat the Axis forces in World War II. Rosenberg used the term "agents of empire" in association with people, but objects can also be used in this context because they were doing similar jobs of spreading culture and influence, albeit in a more subtle way, than individuals. From WWII onwards, IH produced vehicles for Australia, Brazil, and Canada, but these are also left out of the historiography.

IH, a vehicle manufacturer, was also tasked with building M1 Garand rifles for the American military during the 1950s. Most of the known information that surrounds these rifles is informal, and has been collected by amateur historians. The National Rifle Association of America has an article on their website dedicated to these rifles and their production, but any history put together by an organization ends there. The story of the production of these rifles is crucial to the historiography of IH because it details the troubles that IH went through in order to produce the rifles they were contracted to make, which foreshadowed the trouble that would lead to the closure of the company. IH struggled during much of the production of these rifles, and eventually sold out their

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<sup>108</sup> David Doyle, "International M-5-6 and M-5H-6 Trucks in WWII." *Military Trader*, March 24, 2021. <https://www.militarytrader.com/military-vehicles/international-m-4-6-and-m-5h-6>.

contract and rifle production facility after producing over 337,000 rifles.<sup>109</sup> There has been no academic writing done on IH's rifle production, besides reports on production in histories of the company based on primary sources from IH or the American government. Rifle production by IH is an unexplored portion of the company's history, and deserves more attention, and would fit into the historiography in the same location as the vehicles made for America's allies in the Second World War.

While IH was busy building products and advertising for outdoor work, they did not forget about the inside of the home. IH also manufactured home equipment, including refrigerators to air conditioners. This part of the company was short lived, and lasted for less than ten years before it was sold to Whirlpool.<sup>110</sup> Unsurprisingly, there is almost nothing about home appliances in the historiography of IH. This different approach to the home would make for an interesting study to see how IH attempted to enter a space which until that point had been completely foreign to them. A gendered approach to this topic is needed for a complete historiography of IH. For example, the advertising strategy used for home appliances could be compared to the way the McCormick Farm Machinery Company advertised for the mechanical reaper to see if IH tried to enter the founding mythos of the United States in the same way, or if advertising tactics had changed.

The history of the McCormick Farm Machinery Company and International Harvester is also something which is discussed extensively and has been recorded by

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<sup>109</sup> National Rifle Association. "The International Harvester M1 Garand: A New Rifle for the Nuclear Age." An Official Journal of the NRA. <https://americanriflesman.org/content/the-international-harvester-m1-garand-a-new-rifle-for-the-nuclear-age/>.

<sup>110</sup> "Library – Archives." FAQ for the McCormick-International Harvester Company Collection of the Wisconsin Historical Society, n.d. <https://web.archive.org/web/20121119044927/https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/libraryarchives/ihc/faq/asp>.

amateur historians and those who are interested in the companies. One example of this is the website [ihgear.com](http://ihgear.com), which sells licensed IH branded merchandise because of their love of the company, and runs a blog on the history of the company.<sup>111</sup> Another example is [TheTruthAboutCars.com](http://TheTruthAboutCars.com), which has an article dedicated to obscure IH pickup trucks.<sup>112</sup> In addition to company histories, the internet is full of different forums, some dedicated to IH, and others based around farming, and other similar topics. Discussions about IH can be found throughout these online forums, regardless of topic. One example is the *Red Power Magazine* forum, named after the iconic colour of all IH produced tractors. Just on the first page of this forum, there topics being discussed which include known serial numbers for as many different tractors as can be sourced, to different wheel types to problems with the fender not being level on certain tractors.<sup>113</sup> Another internet forum, Yesterday's Tractor Co., has a specific section of their forum dedicated to Farmall tractors and other IH products. Much like *Red Power Magazine*, the forum is still active, and is full of people asking for and giving advice about specific problems with tractors.<sup>114</sup> There are even clubs dedicated to the collection of IH products that host annual meetings and conventions where people can gather to talk about the products they are passionate about. This website also has a newsletter which is distributed to all in the club.<sup>115</sup> Even though IH is not a company any more, they are still able to bring people together from around the world on the internet. While the people who use these forums and websites are

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<sup>111</sup> "Official Case IH International Harvester Farmall Merchandise." IH Gear, n.d. <https://ihgear.com/>.

<sup>112</sup> Ronnie Schreiber, "A Problematic Pickup: International Harvester Johnnie Reb Edition." [TheTruthAboutCars.com](https://www.thetruthaboutcars.com/2020/08/a-problematic-pickup-international-harvester-johnnie-reb-edition/), August 6, 2020. <https://www.thetruthaboutcars.com/2020/08/a-problematic-pickup-international-harvester-johnnie-reb-edition/>.

<sup>113</sup> "Technical IH Talk." Red Power Magazine Community, n.d. <https://www.redpowermagazine.com/forums/forum/4-technical-ih-talk/>.

<sup>114</sup> "Farmall and International Harvester (IHC) Discussion Forum." Yesterday's Tractors, n.d. <https://forums.yesterdaystractors.com/viewforum.php?f=14>.

<sup>115</sup> National International Harvester Collectors Club, n.d. <https://nationalihcollectors.com/>.

not spreading academic information, they are still agents of empire as they are helping to spread the culture, nostalgia, and memory, whether perceived or real, of IH, and because of what IH represents, they are also helping to spread American culture and ideas.

Additionally, there are several books written by non-academics that further the historiography of International Harvester. One of these books is *International Harvester Tractors 1955-1985* by Kenneth Updike.<sup>116</sup> As the title states, the book examined forty years' worth of International Harvester produced tractors. The reason why this book cannot be used in an academic setting is because it intentionally appeals to the nostalgia of those who used these tractors in the past. Another book was written by Lee Klancher and is titled *The Farmall Dynasty: A History of International Harvester Tractors: Titan, Mogul, Farmall, Letter, Cub, Hundred, and More*.<sup>117</sup> Again, the reason why the book was written can be gleaned from the title, as it followed the development of all of the different models of IH tractors and their evolution, but this work is non-academic because it is the updated version of a picture book dedicated to IH tractors. Finally, *Tractor Wars: John Deere, Henry Ford, International Harvester, and the Birth of Modern Agriculture*, written by Neil Dahlstrom is dedicated to the struggle between several different companies who tried to dominate the farming industry in the early 1900s.<sup>118</sup> This book is not academic, however, and this is mainly due to the sources used. These books, like websites and forums, do offer a lot of good information, but are not a strong enough source to be used on their own, but instead can be a place to start looking for information.

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<sup>116</sup> Kenneth Updike, *International Harvester Tractors 1955-1985* (Osceola, Wisconsin: MBI Publishing, 2000).

<sup>117</sup> Lee Klancher, *The Farmall Dynasty: A History of International Harvester Tractors: Titan, Mogul, Farmall, Letter, Cub, Hundred, and More* (Octane Press, 2008).

<sup>118</sup> Neil Dahlstrom, *Tractor Wars: John Deere, Henry Ford, International Harvester, and the Birth of Modern Agriculture* (Matt Holt Books, 2022).

These books also show that there is a market for IH history on the market, which hints at the companies long standing cultural significance.

While these websites, forums and books hold an extensive amount of knowledge and personal experience, the main problem with this type of history is that it is not academic, and is often without citations or any reference to the source material. One exception from this rule is TractorData.com, which references the manuals for the tractors it exhibits, and appears to be put together by one person with a wealth of knowledge of tractors.<sup>119</sup> Most of the websites and forums are not academic or as well researched, however, and many posters are anonymous. It is not difficult to create lies on the internet, so without citations, many of these sites, with their wealth of first-hand accounts, cannot be used as references in an academic paper because they could be fabrications or half-truths. These websites are an excellent place to find information in order to form an understanding of IH, especially because of the non-academic language used as the websites are average people discussing a topic they are interested in. Sometimes primary sources are listed when questions are asked on forums, so despite the fact that they are not academic sources, they still have an impressive amount of information that can be used in academic works, or can point someone in the right direction to find the information they are looking for. Additionally, the books do offer a good amount of information, especially in the form of pictures, which can be used to show changes in different models of products and how they evolved throughout the years, and, like forums, can list important information if a list of citations is included. These

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<sup>119</sup> Peter Easterlund, "International Harvester Farm Tractors by Model." TractorData.com – information on all makes and models of tractors, n.d. <https://www.tractordata.com/farm-tractors/tractor-brands/ih/oh-tractors.html>.

sources also reveal the continuous cultural relevance of IH within communities, how brand loyalty has kept IH alive for many people, and how commodities and consumerism are still changing the cultural landscape of countries.

Ultimately, IH could not survive its own internal struggles when they crossed paths with external ones. After a long United Auto Workers strike, the company had to close its doors due to the thin profit margins which were the result of a general recession in heavy equipment.<sup>120</sup> The strike resulted from an attempt by IH to decrease production costs within their factories, mostly because of the lack of sales caused by the recession in the early 1980s.<sup>121</sup> IH's labour issues is something which has been studied by Raymond Friedman in "Interaction Norms as Carriers of Organizational Culture: A Study of Labor Negotiations at International Harvester." Because many blame the fall of IH on the UAW strike and the aftermath, to have a study on what happened and why the deal was so destructive to IH is an essential piece of the historiography of the fall of the company. This paper is also relevant because it combines the human element of the UAW and the economic woes of IH and compares the two. Friedman argued that the UAW was simply trying to get what they thought they deserved for their work, and that IH had overestimated their ability to survive a strike. The economic approach used by Friedman is also relevant because IH had to close its doors due to financial reasons.

A book titled *A Corporate Tragedy: The Agony of International Harvester Company* by Barbara Marsh was published in 1985, the year after the fall of IH. Marsh

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<sup>120</sup> Raymond Friedman, "Interaction Norms as Carriers of Organizational Culture: A Study of Labor Negotiations at International Harvester." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18, no. 1 (April 1, 1989): 3-29. 6-7.

<sup>121</sup> Friedman, "Interaction Norms," 8.

followed the downward trajectory of IH for many years, and was able to get close to many executives, office workers, and the average factory workers in order to put this book together.<sup>122</sup> This book is vital to the historiography of IH because many of those Marsh was able to interview have since passed away, taking their testimonies with them. This collection of primary source accounts is an integral part to the historiography of the fall of IH for many reasons, partially because it sheds light onto what was going on at the upper levels of IH as the walls came crumbling down. It is imperative to know what was going on at all levels of the company during its downfall because the ideas and actions at different levels of a company can show where mistakes were made, and what could have been done better in order to keep IH afloat.<sup>123</sup> Additionally, since this book came out directly after the fall of IH, it was able to capture the feelings of those involved with the company during its downfall, instead of many years later through rose-tinted glasses. This is not without problems, however, as collective or social memory can make individuals remember things differently. Another major issue that IH faced that Marsh explored was that the company did not listen to the suggestions of the dealers of their equipment.<sup>124</sup> While listening to the dealers would not have solved every problem IH had, taking what they said into account would likely have helped, and might have kept the company alive for longer. Ignoring them was akin to ignoring their customer base, as farmers purchased their equipment from dealers, not straight from the company. Marsh added to the historiography by examining how IH executives were not paying attention to the problems within the company, which attributed to the downfall of IH.

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<sup>122</sup> Marsh, *A Corporate Tragedy*, vii.

<sup>123</sup> Marsh, *A Corporate Tragedy*, 227.

<sup>124</sup> Marsh, *A Corporate Tragedy*, 226-227.



The largest single problem that IH had was that their profit margin was roughly half of what their competitors were.<sup>125</sup> The combination of labour problems and a slim profit margin was too significant to be ignored, and were nails in IH's coffin. For these reasons, among others, the UAW went on strike. IH was never able to recover from this, which led to IH selling off various parts of the massive company to competitors and other business, with the farming branch having been sold to Tenneco. This portion of IH was renamed Case IH in 1985. Additionally, the commercial truck division of IH became Navistar.<sup>126</sup> This is all discussed in great detail in Paul Wallem's publication "Why Did International Harvester Break Up?" in *Farm Equipment Magazine*. Wallem was an executive at IH, and was a dealer of IH goods. This work is relevant to the historiography of IH because it was published in 2019, far removed from the fall of the company, and therefore has allowed for time to show what became of IH. Throughout this publication, Wallem discussed the problems of IH, their inability to adapt to the changing times, and what happened to all of the different branches of IH after the company fell apart. To have an insider's knowledge of the fall gives a different view than most publications, as Wallem was involved with IH when the decisions were made to end the company, particularly those made by McCardell and those directly underneath him. It is also relevant to the historiography because it addresses the aftermath and how the surviving parts of IH adapted under their new parent companies. Additionally, *Construction Equipment Magazine* gives a brief outline of the construction branch of IH, and a brief explanation of the aftermath of the downfall of the company. Most products from the

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<sup>125</sup> Paul Wallem, "Why Did International Harvester Break Up?" *Farm Equipment Magazine*, May 17, 2023. <https://www.farm-equipment.com/articles/17349-why-did-international-harvester-break-up>.

<sup>126</sup> Wallem, "Why Did International Harvester Break Up?"

construction line were sold to Dresser, who then formed a venture with Komatsu, who eventually bought out Dresser in 1994. These construction products would undergo several more name changes, and at the time of writing were called Komatsu America International Co. and Dressta, under the LiuGong brand.<sup>127</sup> While not being a long article, it still gives additional context to the heavy equipment that IH produced over many decades.

One final aspect of the historiography has not been touched on yet. One of the main reasons why Cyrus McCormick created his mechanical reaper was in order to better utilize enslaved labour on plantations within the Southern United States.<sup>128</sup> “The United States and Global Capitalism” by Dael Norwood brought this issue to light. This is a necessary portion of the historiography because it shows the problematic history of the McCormick Farm Machinery Company, something which is missing from other works on the history of the company. This is due to the extremely effective marketing campaign which was run by McCormick’s company and IH in order to create a founding myth which revolved around progress, industrial achievements and a civilizing mission to improve the world, which is discussed in Ott’s work mentioned above instead of the legitimate and dark reasons the company was originally founded for. This way, the negative aspects of history have been able to slip through the cracks of many works on IH, something which needs to be explored in more detail than Norwood was able to in the paper.

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<sup>127</sup> Walt Moore, “The Rise and Fall of International Harvester.” *Construction Equipment* June, 2018. <https://ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/rise-fall-international-harvester-docview/2062656097/se-2>.

<sup>128</sup> Norwood, “The United States and Global Capitalism,” 276.

## AFTERMATH

Despite the fact that IH no longer exists as a company, they have survived in Americana and pop culture. This is something that has been overlooked within the historiography of IH. One example of IH impacting American culture is the song “International Harvester” by Craig Morgan. The song opens with the line “I’m the son of a 3<sup>rd</sup> generation farmer,” and because the song is titled International Harvester, it can be assumed that this particular family has been using IH equipment for generations, which shows brand loyalty to IH despite the fact that the song was released more than thirty years after IH closed. The lyrics then describe the life of an American farmer during the harvesting season, saying: “I make a lotta hay for a little pay/ But I’m proud to say/ I’m a God fearin’ hard workin’ combine driver/ Hoggin’ up the road on my p-p-p-plower/ Chug a lug a lugin’ 5 miles an hour/ On my International Harvester.”<sup>129</sup> This song reinforced the traditionally rural ideals that are often associated with IH, something that has had a strong resurgence in the southern United States. There is no mention of this song, or IH in popular culture, in any academic writing on IH. Despite this lack of academic attention, the popularity of this song can be tracked through the Billboard charts, and through other sources such as YouTube or Spotify to see how many people listen to this song, keeping IH in the minds of many as they listen to the lyrics.

IH has also found its way into video games, such as American Truck Simulator and Farming Simulator. These two video games are semi-realistic games that intend to show the day-to-day life of both truck drivers and farmers. These games have tens of

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<sup>129</sup> Craig Morgan. *International Harvester*, Broken Bow Records, October 31, 2006.

thousands of positive reviews on the Steam storefront (the main digital video game distributor for PC gaming), and awards from numerous game reviewers and distributors.<sup>130</sup> On a Monday afternoon in October, these games had an average player base, only on PC, not on console versions of the game, of over 6000 for American Truck Simulator,<sup>131</sup> and almost 40000 for Farming Simulator 22, the newest version in a series of games.<sup>132</sup> American Truck Simulator was released in 2016, and Farming Simulator 22 was released in 2021. Both games have a strong and loyal fanbase. Similar to how the song “International Harvester” is representative of the strong rural identity resurgence within the United States, these games also display the appeal of a rural focused lifestyle to those with access to computers and gaming consoles. Unfortunately, Steam does not record the data of the individuals who use the website, so information on those who play these games is not something which can be found easily or examined. However, the reviews of these games hold some of this data, with many fans of both games stating the attention to detail the game developers put into the game, noting that the trucks, tractors, locations, and more were accurate to real life, hinting that at least some of the players were truckers, farmers, or were raised in close proximity to these occupations. Nothing has been written on the connection between these video games and American cultural identity, or how International Harvester has found its way into this setting. Academic and non-academic information on this is non-existent, and all of the information listed above is found on Steam and other video game related outlets. Steam, while not an academic

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<sup>130</sup> “Steam Store.” Welcome to Steam, n.d. <https://store.steampowered.com/>.

<sup>131</sup> “American Truck Simulator on Steam.” Save 75% on American Truck Simulator on Steam, February 2, 2016. [https://store.steampowered.com/app/270880/American\\_Truck\\_Simulator/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/270880/American_Truck_Simulator/).

<sup>132</sup> “Farming Simulator 22 on Steam.” Farming Simulator 22 on Steam, November 22, 2021. [https://store.steampowered.com/app/1248130/Farming\\_Simulator\\_22/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/1248130/Farming_Simulator_22/).

source, is a useful primary source for this kind of information, as it regularly tracks and keeps records of the average player counts for each respective game, as well as all of the reviews to understand how people who played these games reacted to the content. This is something missing from the official historiography, and is another case of IH spreading Americana internationally, as these games are available worldwide.

Even though IH does not exist as a company any more, it is still relevant for them to remain in American popular culture, and to stay relevant within the farming community worldwide. This is because after IH ceased to exist, IH and its subsidiaries split into new companies or were sold to other corporations. By keeping their reputation up, these new entities and parts of other businesses can continue to use the International Harvester name and history to sell more equipment. This is also why it is useful to remain relevant in video games and music, as it is an easy inroad to younger generations who were not around when IH existed as a company. While younger generations cannot purchase a new Farmall tractor in person, they can purchase one in a video game. This is important because it shows the integration of American agricultural companies into the idea of “rural America,” a subset of American culture. These companies are able to influence people and help to spread Americana worldwide through the popular culture which is associated with their equipment, even if it is digital and no longer physical, which represents a change in the way that the spreading of culture is experiencing in the digital age. This also hints at the importance of imperial nostalgia and what it means to empires. Because of these products and what they stand for, or at least what it is perceived that they stand for, empires and imperialism can continue to exist for as long as individuals connect commodities with empires.

The historiography of International Harvester is incomplete. As was stated above, most of the equipment produced by IH has not been studied nearly as much as the origin and downfall of IH. In fact, most items that IH has produced have not been studied at an academic level, and therefore the connection IH has with the American Empire cannot be fully appreciated. The saga of IH is also something that can be looked at through different disciplines. A bottom up, Marxist view of IH would show how the products IH produced changed people's lives and how countries and culture changed with these farming innovations. It would also show the economic factor, which is why IH made many of its decisions as the company was focused on making money for shareholders. Another interesting aspect that could be studied would be with the Annales school of thought to see exactly how humanity has changed since McCormick's inventions began to spread across the United States and the role that International Harvester played in these changes over many decades instead of looking at little instances of cultural changes. Another good addition to the historiography would be to further what Domosh has started with explaining the connection between International Harvester and the American Empire, how both benefited from their relationship, and the ways the rest of the world interacted with this duo. Finally, a connection between IH and modern pop culture is something that is missing from the official historiography. A connection could be made between how IH appears in media and compare it to how they have been represented in the past by their own advertisements. This would also show how public opinion on IH has evolved over the many years of operation and sales, and how different cultural aspects can still be spread by a company which is no longer in business.

## CONCLUSION

Case IH, one of the many portions of IH to be sold off in the 1980s, is still in business today, and recently unveiled the Farmall Electric Tractor, or the Farmall 75C Electric.<sup>133</sup> The Farmall 75C is a major step up from the first and only other electric tractor IH produced in the mid-1950s, the Electrall.<sup>134</sup> The new electric tractor should begin to be available to order in limited quantities by 2024.<sup>135</sup> This tractor can also follow a famer in a field using AI technology, and farm without a driver.<sup>136</sup> While not on the same level as the farming equipment in the movie *Interstellar*, this is a major step in the evolution of farming equipment. This development shows the innovational techniques that IH had early on, but lacked in the 1970s and 1980s that led to the company going out of business. This is also a continuation of the history of International Harvester, and is something that must be added to the historiography of the company started by Cyrus McCormick in the early 1800s. From mechanical reapers to electric tractors, McCormick's legacy has stretched from the fields of Virginia to every continent except Antarctica. IH was a titan of industry during their time producing farming equipment, holding 85% of the agricultural production market in the early 1910s, and the descendants of the company he created have all split off into their own sectors of the market. McCormick, International Harvester, and the many companies IH split into, have

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<sup>133</sup> "Farmall Electric Tractor: Case IH." Case IH, n.d. <https://www.caseih.com/en-us/unitedstates/products/tractors/farmall-series/farmall-electric-tractor>.

<sup>134</sup> Jim Allen. "The Brief Life of the Electrall." Octane Press, July 25, 2023. <https://octanepress.com/content/brief-life-international-harvester-farmall-tractor-electrall>.

<sup>135</sup> Alex Gray, "Case IH's New All-Electric Farmall Tractor." Successful Farming, September 11, 2023. <https://www.agriculture.com/case-ih-s-new-all-electric-farmall-tractor-7968311>.

<sup>136</sup> "Case IH Electric Tractor Ready for Release." The Western Producer, n.d. <https://www.producer.com/crops/case-ih-electric-tractor-ready-for-release/>.

changed the way that humans farm, how food arrives at the table, and helped the spread of American culture throughout the world.

Who benefited the most from IH's spreading of American goods, culture, and ideas? It was, of course, International Harvester and the shareholders. The more educated the average farmer was, the more likely it was that the farmer would work with different crops, and therefore need more equipment to tend to these crops.<sup>137</sup> The hope of IH in this situation would be that the farmer would purchase new equipment from IH, either because they were an existing customer, or because they were appreciative of the advice and knowledge given to them by the company. If this happened, it meant that IH could continue to grow as a company, and continue to extend their reach across the globe as they got more and more money, until every farmer had what they needed as IH expanded through different commercial markets. This was a cost-effective measure for IH because they continued to publish informative pamphlets and similar writings for several years. The other major beneficiary of IH's imperialism was the American government. Because IH was an American company that had a positive reputation as a reputable producer of agricultural goods, it meant American culture and ideology, at least when it came to farming, was seen in a good light throughout the world. The United States was able to enjoy their role as distributors of some of the best farming equipment and knowledge for many years, thanks in part to International Harvester.

The history of International Harvester is full of twists and turns, and the historiography that has been written reflects this. IH plays an important part in the

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<sup>137</sup> Domosh, "International Harvester," ScienceDirect.com.



historiography of the United States imperial history, both domestically and internationally. One problem with IH's historiography is that the vast amount of information on the subject has been written by the company. This is not ideal for an official historiography, as IH can omit any wrongdoings from their past, which is why it is important for historians to develop a historiography independent of the company. Any focus on IH is also a focus on the American Empire, both formal and informal. It is a way to study inter-imperial relationships, and the importance of individuals in national histories. IH played a large part in the history of the United States by helping the American farmer with equipment or knowledge of farming, and in the history of the world as their farming equipment has helped to put food on an innumerable number of tables and plates during the decades when IH was a company, and their equipment is still functioning today on fields throughout the world. This spreading of food coincided with the expansion of the American Empire with IH as a conduit through company programs, advertisements, and products.

## APPENDICES



While this International Harvester pickup has seen better days, it is still a functional vehicle. Originally purchased for the Churchill Northern Research Centre in Churchill, Manitoba, this truck is still in working condition and belongs to a private individual who resides in Churchill. These pictures were taken by the author on September 10, 2023.

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