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Nation-State and Empire: Digital Explorations of a Combined Spatial Format in the U.S. West, 1863–1934

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Introduction

SFB 1199’s Project B01, “The Respatialization of the World during the Formation of the Global Condition, 1820–1914: The Americas and the French Empire,” explores the unique spatial format of nation-states with imperial extensions that characterized France and the United States during the long nineteenth century. This paper introduces B01’s subproject on the United States. This project deals chiefly with the U.S. West and the contradictory intersection of national-democratic and imperial spatialization imperatives during the era of post-Civil War reforms. The project draws on digital history approaches to inquire into the legal and social impact of democratic reforms on colonized Indigenous populations and the accessibility of colonization’s opportunities to formerly enslaved African Americans.

The first section of the paper lays out the project’s key terms. It explains what is meant by describing the United States as a nation-state with imperial extensions and what is unique about this combined spatial format. The section shows how this is different from a “nation” or an “empire” or a combination of the two, where the two components remain unaltered. It also discusses how the model enables lines of inquiry that remain underdeveloped in other conceptions. The second section lays out the project’s specific questions and historical contexts. In particular, it looks at how democratic reforms reconfigured the colonization of the U.S. West—and the place of Indigenous peoples and formerly enslaved African Americans in this respatialization. The paper’s third section discusses method—and precisely how an argumentative digital history can produce new insights for the topic at hand and, more generally, within history. After laying out the general style of argument, the section presents concrete examples from the project.
1 The United States as a Nation-State with Imperial Extensions

The term “spatial format,” as defined by Matthias Middell, refers to consolidated spatialization practices. These practices are shared intersubjectively and have assumed a certain degree of historical stability. Spatial formats can be constituted both in a formal-political and intentional way. They can also be solidified and reproduced in an implicit-unplanned way through the actions of private actors. In all cases, they have institutional footing and are ascribed significance in their time, theoretically and through everyday practice. Following Max Weber’s ideal type concept, individual spatial formats must be understood as an abstraction of actual spatialization processes and a genetic concept that clarifies distinctive characteristics of specific historical formations. Conceptions of spatial formats prove themselves in their potential to plausibly explain empirical historical reality. They are not a Procrustean bed into which all empirical cases must fit.

The spatial format of a nation-state with imperial extensions refers to a combination of two different and even opposing spatial formats. Nation-states are defined by a form of government committed to popular sovereignty, which invokes the individual interests of the citizenry and regulates and promotes them through general laws. Historically, citizens have attained steadily increasing political representation. On the other hand, empires subjugate formerly independent societies and their territories to manipulate and transform them according to the dictates and interests of the metropole. Colonized populations are ruled by and for foreigners and enjoy reduced political and economic rights at best. The legitimacy of government derives essentially from its commitment to the metropole, despite paternalistic rhetoric to the contrary. The specific interests of colonizers result in particular practices of colonial regimes. These can range from the enforcement of tribute payments from a still largely autonomous society to the extraction of surplus labor through enslavement to the expulsion and potentially genocidal elimination of Indigenous populations to take possession of agricultural land and natural resources. Nation-states with imperial extensions—such as France, Britain, or the United States in the nineteenth century—were internally organized as nation-states but used imperially dominated territories and populations as resources of state power and social cohesion.

Nation-states with imperial extensions—such as France, Britain, or the United States in the nineteenth century—were internally organized as nation-states but used imperially dominated territories and populations as resources of state power and social cohesion.

What does it mean that the United States was a nation-state with imperial extensions? Today the statement that the nineteenth-century U.S. was both a nation and an empire will cause little controversy. What is more controversial is how this is to be understood theoretically—and how exactly one should view the relationship between national democracy and imperial power projection on the North American continent and beyond.

Why was the U.S. an empire? Already the founding of the country was accompanied by a substantial imperial claim. In addition to their territory on the East Coast (previously seized from Indigenous nations), the thirteen colonies immediately claimed an enormous area in the West, which extended

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at least as far as the Mississippi River. This imperial extension area was inhabited, cultivated, and hunted by Indigenous nations. Nevertheless, the eastern founders and political leaders assumed that the Indigenous peoples would be subordinated to the U.S. by treaty and force and would be eliminated in the long run to make room for an expanded Euro-American society. This extension space with its claim to future incorporation was successively extended in several wars and treaty agreements with competing colonial powers and settler colonies to the present continental territory and Alaska and Hawaii. The U.S. government also conquered territories over which it claimed authority without planning for their future incorporation, although this was a topic of some contention. Cuba, the Philippines, Nicaragua, and other places were subjected to U.S. rule for periods, but political majorities deemed their incorporation unrealistic.

Since its founding, the United States has also been a nation-state. The Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the Constitution in 1789 committed the government to serve the interests of its Euro-American citizens as its primary purpose. In governmental practice, this meant above all that the state sought to secure the liberty and property of its citizens and used its power to promote the conditions of general advancement of private property owners (the “pursuit of happiness”). Only a small property-owning class had political representation at first; in the wake of the Jacksonian Revolution of the 1820s, all white males won suffrage. Women and minorities did not enjoy the right to vote until much later. Beyond the right to vote, African Americans and Indigenous peoples were also denied legal subject status, in whole or in part, until the twentieth century. African Americans were enslaved for the “pursuit of happiness” of enfranchised U.S. citizens who owned them as property and were later exploited as lawless wage slaves. Indigenous people were exterminated, displaced, and confined to reservations for re-education as alleged impediments to progress.

Today, few reputable historians would dispute that the nineteenth-century U.S. was both a nation and an empire. Moreover, it is equally well understood that the two sides mutually shaped each other. The U.S. was an imperial nation—and the way it conducted its imperial expansion was profoundly shaped by the U.S. being a nation with a government responsive to its citizens. In his “frontier thesis,” which long shaped U.S. historiography, Frederick Jackson Turner assumed that the existence of colonizable “free” lands in the West made possible the distinctive American democratic institutions,

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4 Some diplomatic historians still date the emergence of a U.S. empire to the Spanish-American War of 1898, which resulted in Washington becoming the ruler of former Spanish insular colonies and the Kingdom of Hawaii. However, this timing reproduces an imperial myth: the violent conquest, subjugation, and partial destruction of formerly independent Indigenous societies on the North American continent are not recognized as imperial. This dismissal echoes the colonial (originally papal) doctrine of the “Right of Discovery,” according to which European explorers by default had a superior claim to the lands of Indigenous societies, which the U.S. Supreme Court also formally translated into American law in two landmark cases in 1823 and 1831. The Indigenous societies were considered mere “dependent domestic nations”—over which, by definition, there could be no such thing as foreign domination, in contrast to the former Spanish colonies. Although 1898 remains a significant turning point in U.S. foreign relations, modern histories of the U.S. West generally recognize the imperial nature of continental expansion. See Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015), 199–200; Richard H. Immerman, Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 10–11; Frank Schumacher, “Reclaiming Territory: The Spatial Contours of Empire in U.S. History,” in Spatial Formats under the Global Condition (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 107–48, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110643008-005; Michaela Hampf, Empire of Liberty: Die Vereinigten Staaten von der Rekonstruktion zum Spanisch-Amerikanischen Krieg (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenburg, 2019), 21, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110657746.2015

5 Political scientist Paul Frymer argues that demography was an essential factor in whether a conquered territory was seen as a temporary (or permanent) protectorate or an addition to the U.S. itself. Namely, the question was whether it was possible for white U.S. citizens to dominate the Indigenous population by numbers. This was foreseeably the case, for example, with California and Hawaii—but less likely with territories such as southern Mexico, Cuba, the Philippines, and others. See Paul Frymer, Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2017).

6 Before federal laws defined eligibility in a more comprehensive way, voting rights were regulated mainly on the state level and different from place to place. The sweeping characterization here focuses on the larger picture and ignores local differences. See Alexander Keyssar, The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2009) on the history of voting rights.

egalitarian culture, and opportunities for social advancement. The opportunities that grew out of the imperial subjugation of Indigenous nations were seen as central to the fabric of national culture, even as these imperial prerequisites were naturalized. The New Western History, which has dominated the field since the 1990s, focuses explicitly on the imperial dimension and the violence and exclusion that accompanied expansion. Scholars from this tradition portray expansion as a complex and chaotic competition of private interests directed toward personal enrichment and state impulses of power projection. The most recent approaches informed by Critical Whiteness Studies that follow Alexander Saxton’s concept of the USA as “master race democracy,” as well as the global-historical and comparative Settler Colonial Studies also assume a union of imperial and national democratic patterns. However, these new approaches derive the actions of both state and private actors from an amorphous “white privilege” that is mostly understood psychologically and culturally. Strangely, this conception returns to the Turnerian assumption of a general correspondence between national and imperial imperatives, which mutually facilitated each other. Crises and antagonisms are thus largely absent from this relationship.

This project seeks to use the concept of a nation-state with imperial extensions for a more complex critical reconstruction of the relationship between national and imperial spatialization imperatives. In doing so, it assumes that there were connections and overlaps between these spatial formats that explain the particularities of U.S. expansionism. At the same time, however, they are still two different formats of spatialization. The interconnection of these formats developed momentous dynamics. At the same time, the connection was deeply contradictory and prone to crisis.

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12 This is not to say the frameworks do not point to previously understudied dimensions or that they do not raise important questions. Not all histories that have adopted parts of the framework or adapted it fall into the same reductionist trap. But by tendency, many newer works reduce the state to a mere facilitator of white entitlements with no interests distinct from those of its citizenry. See, for example, Lorenzo Veracini, *The World Turned Inside Out: Settler Colonialism as a Political Idea* [London: Verso, 2021].

2 Contradictions of a Combined Spatial Format

The project examines the contradictory entanglement of national and imperial spatializations imperatives using the example of African Americans and Indigenous nations in their relation to land appropriation in the U.S. West from the 1860s to the 1930s. In these years, democratic reforms in the nation-state in contradictory ways spilled over into colonization. However, this is not meant to suggest that these developments were the first to disrupt a previously non-contradictory correspondence of national and imperial imperatives.

In keeping with its self-understanding as a servant to a nation of private owners, the U.S. government organized the incorporation of territory as one extensive offering to the private interests of its citizens. The North West Ordinance, passed in 1787 even before the Constitution, specified that lands and resources in areas newly cleared for colonization were to be surveyed and then transferred to the private ownership of American citizens upon payment of a small purchase price. In advance, the government would have to settle Indigenous claims, officially with treaties, but in practice never without extortion and threats of violence.\textsuperscript{14}

The central place of private interests in projecting imperial power created that interplay and antagonism of private actors and government agencies that gave the continental extension space its reputation of the “Wild West.”\textsuperscript{15} At the levers of political power, many used their knowledge of the subsequent development measures to enrich themselves personally or speculators connected to them by buying up land in time.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, since all resources were to be privatized soon, some U.S. citizens anticipated the government annulment of Indigenous claims that had not yet taken place and settled as “squatters” on Indigenous territory.\textsuperscript{17} Others took the violence against resistant Indigenous people into their own hands—expecting that Congress would pay for this service later. At least since the mid-nineteenth century, however, the U.S. government asserted its sovereign claim to decide about war and peace with the remaining unconquered Indigenous nations more aggressively.\textsuperscript{18} Self-styled western militias had previously unleashed destructive and costly wars that the militias could not win on their own. The scarcely less brutal Plains Wars of the 1860s to 1880s were fought primarily by the U.S. Army, while militia campaigns became a much less common phenomenon. No doubt, the U.S. government remained committed to organizing the incorporation of the West as a big offering to its citizens. The 1862 Homestead Act, which is central to the project, awarded land parcels of 160 acres (64.7 hectares) entirely free of charge to settler households who would occupy and cultivate the land for at least five years.\textsuperscript{19}

By the 1860s, when the project starts, the relationship between national and imperial spatialization imperatives had already been readjusted several times because of apparent dysfunctions in delegating the colonization to unchecked private interests. However, with the end of the Civil War, the conflicts around privatized settler violence against Native people that was condemned on the political level primarily for their ineffectiveness as a strategy of colonization, see Wilm, Settlers as Conquerors, 225–52.

\textsuperscript{14} On the Northwest Ordinance, see Julius Wilm, Settlers as Conquerors: Free Land Policy in Antebellum America, Transatlantische Historische Studien 58 [Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2018], 26–27.

\textsuperscript{15} On the U.S. West’s cultural and social history, see Limerick, The Legacy of Conquest; White, “Its Your Misfortune and None of My Own.”

\textsuperscript{16} This was true even for some of the most prominent “common man” advocates in land policy, such as long-time Missouri senator Thomas Hart Benton. See Paul W. Gates, “The Frémont-Jones Scramble for California Land Claims,” Southern California Quarterly 56, no. 1 [1974]: 13–44. https://doi.org/10.2307/41170514

\textsuperscript{17} “When white settlers come into a country, the Indians have to move on. The government is going to move these Indians farther west, any time now. That is why we’re here, Laura. White people are going to settle all this country, and we get the best land because we got here first and take our pick,” Laura Ingalls Wilder’s father tells the young girl in Wilder’s famous fictionalized memoir Little House on the Prairie from 1935. In 1869–1871, Wilder’s family had squatted on Osage lands in Kansas. Laura Ingalls Wilder, Little House on the Prairie [New York: Harper, 1971], 236–37; Frances W. Kaye, “Little Squatter on the Osage Diminished Reserve: Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Kansas Indians,” Great Plains Quarterly 20, no. 2 [2000]: 123–40.

\textsuperscript{18} See Richard Edwards, Jacob K. Friefeld, and Rebecca S. Wingo, Homesteading the Plains: Toward a New History [Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017], 1–2.
another modifying aspect emerged. As a result of the defeat of the southern slaveholders’ Confederacy, Congress enacted anti-discriminatory legislation. In principle, this legislation aimed to place African Americans on equal footing with white U.S. nationals. The Homestead Act was amended in 1866 to explicitly allow African Americans to claim land, and in 1868 the Fourteenth Amendment enshrined equality as a constitutional principle. Had these principles been fully implemented, legal obstacles against African American participation in the opportunities of western expansion should have been demolished.

The “Second Founding,” as historian Eric Foner has called the broadening of American democracy after the Civil War, also drew wider circles. Reformers became increasingly influential in discussions of policy toward Indigenous nations. After reformers had demanded this for years as a measure of “Indian emancipation,” Congress enacted the Dawes Act in 1887, which granted Indigenous peoples equal individual property rights and, over time, citizens’ rights. However, prior to this, the former communal property on the reservations was divided into individual lots; the remaining unallotted land was to be sold. The proceeds went to the Indigenous nation that ceded territory.

Democratic reforms in the U.S. nation, therefore, directly impacted colonization in the West. Because the government restrictively established some civil rights for hitherto excluded groups, the terms of imperial territorialization also changed. One spatial format spilled into and reformatted the other. However, there is a good reason not to accept boasts of reformers at their face value. Recently, historians have documented that a section of southern Blacks did use the Homestead Act to build farms in the Great Plains states. The stereotypical image of all homesteaders being white is therefore incorrect. However, critics point out that many, if not most, formerly enslaved Black farmworkers in the South would have struggled to raise the resources for moving west and building a farm from scratch. Therefore, the offer of building a farm in the West would not effectively have been open to most African Americans, even if one leaves aside violent and more subtle discrimination. Because free land is thought to have mainly benefited white people, it is widely believed that the land grant program contributed to the wealth inequality along racial lines that still structures U.S. society.

Most historians consider the effect of the reform measures on Indigenous peoples similarly problematic. The reforms that were supposed to bring equal property and citizenship rights to Indigenous peoples resulted in enormous land losses. Many Indigenous land allottees had to sell their newly won land title right away—often to repay debts. In addition, the “surplus lands” left over after individual

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20 Section 2302 of the Revised Statutes (originally passed June 21, 1866) states: “No distinction shall be made in the construction or execution […] on account of race or color.” See U.S. General Land Office, Circular from the General Land Office Showing the Manner of Proceeding to Obtain Title to Public Lands under the Homestead, Desert Land, and Other Laws [Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1899], 156.
25 Martin Luther King, for example, argued in one of his last speeches: “In 1863, the Negro was told that he was free as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation being signed by Abraham Lincoln. But he was not given any land to make that freedom meaningful. […] And the irony of it all is that at the same time, the nation failed to do anything for the black man, though an act of Congress was giving away millions of acres of land in the West and the Midwest. Which meant that it was willing to uproot its white peasants from Europe with an economic floor!” Martin Luther King Jr., “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” March 31, 1968, in A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., ed. James Melvin Washington (New York: Harper, 1986), 271. For scholarly versions of this argument, see, for example, Thomas M. Shapiro, The Hidden Cost of Being African American: How Wealth Perpetuates Inequality (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 190; Trina Williams Shanks, “The Homestead Act: A Major Asset-Building Policy in American History,” in Inclusion in the American Dream: Assets, Poverty, and Public Policy, ed. Michael Sherraden (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 96.
allotments were opened to white settlers. This resulted in the loss of communal lands on the reservations.\textsuperscript{26}

Because of the continued marginalization of people of color and Indigenous nations, most historians do not see the democratic reforms of the 1860s to 1880s as the transformative change they were thought to be. Instead, colonialism and white supremacy are thought to have reigned supreme, as the shift to legal equality simply did not occur in real terms.

Nevertheless, these assessments leave open how national democratic spatialization imperatives reconfigured colonization, even if the effects did not realize reformers’ high-minded rhetoric. In addition, it would have to be determined to what extent the adverse developments that undoubtedly occurred can be explained as the continuation of imperial practices or whether new forms of marginalization operated under the observance of the principle of legal equality. The question of imperial vs. national spatialization imperatives connects to the question of continuity and discontinuity of practices of marginalization and othering in current debates about racism and inequality in the United States. Some discussants emphasize a long continuity of racism and exploitation of African Americans and the dispossession of Indigenous people.\textsuperscript{27} However, others argue that drawing the long lines ignores how and why later social structures encouraged the reproduction of old racisms and the emergence of new ones. They argue that by understanding exclusion and violence as after-effects of a long-gone past, forces operating later, and indeed: in the present, are effectively left off the hook.\textsuperscript{28}

The research is structured around the following questions:

- To what extent did the interplay of national and imperial spatialization imperatives open up agency for the formerly colonized and enslaved—and to what extent did it perpetuate their marginalization and oppression in the new era of limited civil rights?
- Were the imperatives that generated inequality and discrimination still the same under the new conditions of legal advancement as during the era of open colonialism?

\textsuperscript{26} See Carlson, Indians, Bureaucrats, and Land, 136–41; Hampf, Empire of Liberty, 222–23.


Building Arguments in Digital Spatial History

Within the scope of this working paper, only rudimentary research results can be presented. In the following, it discusses the digital models used and lays out their heuristic and analytical potential for dealing with a thin source base. If one seeks to understand how the democratic reforms of the post-Civil War era affected the West’s colonization process, one very soon has a source problem. Indeed, those affected who could best provide information about the process have left little written evidence. Few rural African Americans and Indigenous people could write, and the existing testimonies tend to be anecdotal, while many sources by whites have their own biases.

The project uses an “argumentative digital history” to deal with the overall thinness of sources, which makes it difficult to distinguish the anecdotal from the typical. The term “argumentative digital history” was coined by Stephen Robertson and Lincoln Mullen.\(^{29}\) The term is employed to contrast argumentative contributions to many digital history projects, which tend to explore and visualize sources, but do not aim to make a significant contribution towards answering historical questions.\(^{30}\) In their article, Robertson and Mullen identify digital histories that do argue, and they distinguish several ways in which spatial source analysis specifically can generate new insights and heuristic hints.\(^{31}\)

a) On the one hand, georeferencing makes it possible to recognize patterns in a source series that were not recognizable in the written form. One finds aspects to explore further. \((\text{Discovering patterns in models})\)

b) In addition, qualitative sources can be contextualized in the modeled data. For example, statistics themselves may not provide meaningful information for a historical interpretation, but they can sometimes testify to how typical or atypical an experience was. \((\text{Using models as context for narrative sources})\)

c) Modeled source data can also be re-read in the context of other georeferenced qualitative and quantitative sources. While patterns in models alone may not present insights, putting these into context can create an argument. \((\text{Analyzing models in context})\)

Moreover, based on the current project’s research design, one can add the following to the list:

d) It is also possible to relate complex georeferenced and timed source data to one’s model. Complex research data sets are now available from many completed projects so that with a few mouse-clicks, a context can be added that whole research teams have previously created in long, painstaking work. \((\text{Analyzing models in modeled contexts})\)

Of course, these argumentative steps cannot be employed at will. They presuppose the existence of extensive digitized and georeferenced source corpora relevant to the topic at hand. In contrast to earlier years, today, as the practice of digital spatial history enters its third decade, scholars can increasingly draw on existing datasets from finished projects. However, in the case of the current project, the central building blocks are newly digitized. It uses previously unpublished statistics collected by the U.S. General Land Office’s Accounting Division on homestead filings and finished claims at 235 local offices between 1863 and 1912 that were transcribed at the National Archives in Washington


\(^{30}\) Many digital projects are created for public history audiences. Therefore, the lack of creating new interpretative contributions to the discipline of history is not to be understood as a failure but entirely intended. See Robertson and Mullen, 1005–6.

\(^{31}\) The summaries and designations in italics are my words.
This data makes it possible to show in greater detail than before where and when settlers attempted to obtain land through residency.

Until now, only inconsistent statistics were available, and these were at the state level. The new data is more granular and precisely broken down by specifications. Most published statistics count final homesteads, i.e., land claims that settlers had lived on for five years to convert them into full property titles. This leaves out about half of the original homesteads by settlers who filed for claims but failed to stay for the required five years. It also only counts homesteads at least five years after they were originally settled. The distinction between original and final homesteads, along with other inconsistencies in the published statistics, has led to a great deal of confusion among scholars.

The local land office statistics were georeferenced as point data for the following maps. Together with Robert Nelson and Justin Madron of the Digital Scholarship Lab at the University of Richmond, I have recently released an interactive web map in American Panorama: An Atlas of United States History that uses land district polygons to visualize the same data. In some ways, this allows for an even more detailed view of developments and a more precise combination with other sources than presented in this working paper. However, to explain the mode of argument, the point data is more intuitive.

Fig. 1: Homestead Claims on Public Land, Fiscal Years 1863–1912


The above maps show homestead claims filed at local offices from 1863 to 1912. Already this data alone is quite interesting. There are surprising patterns in this data—for example, how much homesteading went on in the former slave states in the South East. Furthermore, in most available statistics, the data on homesteads on opened reservations is rolled into the totals. Seeing this separate data gives a view of where and when homesteaders were allowed onto Indian reservation lands.36

One could also use the homestead data to contextualize a particular narrative source. Using this model, one could show if land claimants’ move into specific areas in a given period was in line with a larger trend or more exceptional.

However, going back to the project questions, the model becomes more interesting when combined with other data. If one combines the georeferenced homestead statistics with maps of Indian land cessions and Indian reservations that the U.S. Forest Service and historian Claudio Sautn compiled in multi-year projects, it becomes clear just how closely connected the land grant program in the West was with the diminishment of Indigenous lands.37 The below map shows the Indigenous land base in May 1862 (when the Homestead Act was passed) as a backdrop to the location of the homestead claims on public land over the following fifty years.

36 Unfortunately, the paper form of this working paper does allow the inclusion of animated maps that show developments over time. For a selection of animated gif maps illustrating the developments discussed here, see juliuswilm.com/projects.
Fig. 3: Indian Land in May 1862 and the Location of Homesteads, 1863–1912

One can also add another source on top. In the below detail map of Nebraska and Kansas between 1863 and 1869, red stars denote frontier clashes between Indigenous people and the army or U.S. civilians. As one can see on the below map, homesteading and the taking of Indian land overlapped in time quite directly. Frontier wars sometimes continued after the U.S. government had unilaterally declared an area to be cleared of all Indian claims.38

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38 The frontier clashes data have been compiled and mapped by historian Gregory Michno in two volumes. Michno’s books were abstracted in a spreadsheet and georeferenced as coordinate data. The data before 1863 (before the Homestead Act went into operation) and for Texas (where the law did not apply) were left out. See Gregory Michno, Encyclopedia of Indian Wars: Western Battles and Skirmishes 1850-1890 (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2003); Gregory Michno and Susan J. Michno, Forgotten Fights: Little-Known Raids and Skirmishes on the Frontier, 1823 to 1890 (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2008).
During the late 1860s, the Arapaho and Cheyenne nations were still fighting to hold on to the western parts of Kansas and Nebraska, and eastern Colorado. The U.S. government meanwhile encouraged homestead settlers to move into this conflict zone by prematurely declaring all Indigenous claims settled under a fraudulently obtained cession treaty.39

The Indian land cessions data also allows for a precise mapping of homestead claims on opened Indian reservations. This adds context to the history of the openings—which were part of a long trend of diminishing the remaining Indigenous land base. It allows connecting the history of allotment and “surplus lands” sales with specific reservations and the Indigenous nations living on them. Mapping these statistics, therefore, both reconstructs a larger context, and it enables new in-depth investigations.

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How do these visualizations help in pursuing the research project?

1. The data throws an interesting light on the history of allotments and openings of reservations to homestead settlers. On the one hand, the visualized statistics make it possible to see them independently for the first time—because the previously published settlement statistics did not show claims on Indigenous reservations separately. It was, of course, well known that there were claims on reservations, but the information of where, when, and how many was not accessible. Based on the claims data and the reservations identified, the more extensive history of homesteading on Indian reservation lands can be located and quantified for the first time. In this respect, patterns in the data themselves offer exciting insights.

In combination with other narrative sources and complex data, first interpretative conclusions also emerge. For example, there is a relatively seamless continuity of land-taking, which opened the remaining reservations shortly after the United States took over the last “unceded” Indigenous territory. Despite idealistic rhetoric, the seriality of the land openings suggests a continuity of colonization rather than a genuine, if flawed, consideration of Indigenous interests.

Above all, however, the model and contextualization reveal where to search: as a next step, developments in selected reservations will be investigated more closely. Without the overview created by this model, these deep drillings would not be possible—and it would not be possible to place the smaller histories in a larger context.

2. Regarding the accessibility of homesteading to African Americans, the model does not reveal much about the prospects in the main homesteading areas in the Great Plains. However, a surprising observation in the data is that there were many claims in the Deep South. Between 1867 and 1912, 334,369 households filed homestead claims in the former slave states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. 159,130 of these claimants stayed on their claim for

Karen V. Hansen’s study of homesteaders on the Spirit Lake (Devils Lake) Dakota Reservation in North Dakota in the early 1900s is so far one of the few works on the subject. A more extensive overview work that compares developments across space and time does not exist. See Karen V. Hansen, *Encounter on the Great Plains: Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
the prescribed five years to become full owners of their farmsteads. Based on limited statistical data that suggested catastrophic failure rates for claims in the Deep South, historians have not seen much use in exploring homesteading under Jim Crow beyond the first very unsuccessful years.\textsuperscript{41} The data, however, shows that people quite consistently and successfully claimed land in the former slave states. It is possible that formerly enslaved people of color did participate in this, which some anecdotal sources suggest.\textsuperscript{42} This could help to explain how a sizable share of Black Southerners became property owners under Jim Crow—a surprising development during these years of the most severe repression.\textsuperscript{43}

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\textsuperscript{43} In 1870, only 10,926 African American farm households (or two percent of the total) in the Deep South owned land. By 1910, this number had risen to 131,859 or nineteen percent of all Black farm households. See Loren Schweninger, \textit{Black Property Owners in the South 1790–1915} (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 164.
Conclusion

In keeping with the character of a working paper, it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions here. Instead, the paper sought to present questions and new ways of pursuing them. The concept of a nation-state with imperial extensions seeks to generate a new approach to the intertwining of imperial politics and democratic reforms in the American post-Civil War era. The concept promises flexible and critical access to the contradictory re-spatialization of the U.S. West, in which equal rights were supposed to apply, even if the results modernized existing marginalizations rather than dissolving them. In the context of this paper, it was mainly the implications for U.S. history that were raised. As the concept follows a global-historical approach, it is natural that comparisons should be made.

The methodology of argumentative digital history, particularly the combination of sources by georeferencing, yields first interesting results. The modeled land data offers a new heuristic approach and allows first conclusions to be further substantiated in source and literature studies. The initial results suggest mixed effects of the national democratic reforms on the imperial spatialization of the West. In severely limited and constricted ways, the federal policy may have become more responsive towards African American interests—but the implementation of Indian reforms does not look like they had Indigenous “emancipation” in mind. These results are more hints for research than definitive answers. The model helped find these research avenues, and it will help contextualize specific qualitative sources once these have been located in the respective archives.