Such are the stakes, but some decompression is necessary here, and a more thorough explanation of the directions these arguments will take.

Empire

"The founding tenet of American empire is that it is no empire at all" ("Imperial Ghosting" 826) Anne McClintock has written, echoing a sentiment that goes back at least to the paradigm-shifting revisionism of William Appleman Williams and Wisconsin School historiography in the 1950s. Repeatedly said, but still true enough; even to invoke the word "empire" in relation to the United States is to invite a debate. The spectrum of alternatives—from the self-accrediting "empire for liberty" and "manifest destiny," the policy-ese of "superpower" and "Pax Americana," the critically loaded "hegemony" and "imperialism," and beyond, to, as I will discuss in a moment, "globalization" and even "modernity" itself—testifies to the taxonomical slipperiness it poses. In this sense I follow Paul Kramer, who in an influential synthesis of the field attempted to untangle the series of debates about "whether or not the United States is or has 'an empire'" from the fact that it does indeed require an "imperial historiography" (1350). How we name what the United States *is* or *does* is not the debate here, and this book proceeds under the assumption that the existence of an "American empire" is not in question.[2]

Identifying that empire as one of the central engines in the unfolding, since the late eighteenth century, of an unevenly dispersed global modernity—something instantiated by proxy and networked control as much as through direct colonial power—certainly takes us somewhere beyond the formal acts of colonialism. This book takes "US imperialism" (the activity) and "American empire" (the entity created by the activity) in their broadest terms, a process that is marked by particular episodes of territorial expansion and foreign intervention but that is also in certain respects synonymous with modernity's broader currents of capitalist accumulation, dispossession, and racialization. While something like 1803's Louisiana Purchase cannot be neatly placed into the same conceptual account of imperialism as 2003's bombing of Baghdad, we might see the earlier event as inhabiting at least a similar history of "transnational" or

globalized modernity, and in that sense part of the same continuum. This does not make the United States simply coterminous with western power, but it does see US imperialism as a practice through which capitalist liberal-democratic history has unfolded.

Neil Smith's sense of American empire as a territorializing of US state power that is, especially after 1898, "simultaneously national and global" (Smith xiii) is echoed, for instance, in Fredric Jameson's frequent deployment of "America" as a metonym for a more vaguely drawn "West." In his essay "Globalization and Political Strategy" (2000), especially, Jameson pulls no punches:

> For when we talk about the spreading power and influence of globalization, aren't we really referring to the spreading economic and military might of the US? And in speaking of the weakening of the nation-state, are we not actually describing the subordination of the other nation-states to American power, either through consent and collaboration, or by the use of brute force and economic threat? (50)

"[W]hat is encouraged is the illusion that the West has something no one else possesses—but which they ought to desire for themselves," Jameson says elsewhere. "That mysterious something can then be baptized 'modernity' and described at great length by those who are called upon to sell the product in question" (*Singular Modernity* 8). The point here is that an approach sympathetic to a world-systems view—modernity as an uneven but simultaneous phenomenon, singular in its global systematicity but marked everywhere by the specificity of its social manifestations—helps to shift the critical axis of empire from a spatial/geographical entity to something more temporal/historical. American empire's signature method has been precisely to deny the singularity of modernity and instead to perpetuate its caricatured definition as something that arrives beneficially for some places—first-world western places, and above all American places—whilst others remain locked in premodern or (worse still) antimodern situations. The United States' self-declared imperial role has less often been the seizure of space, and more the benevolent homogenization of the uneven temporalities of the world (including its own unregulated and "empty" western expanses) into a simultaneous present of liberal development. Addressing US imperialism's ideological foundations from these starting points emphasizes how its investment in an incrementally progressive concept of modernity

leads to a temporalized understanding of modernity as having arrived for some but being delayed for others.

"Selling the product," Jameson called it: it could be a euphemism for US imperialism in all its guises, from its earliest moments of continental expansion and clearance of indigenous peoples, through the various (often militarized) efforts to overturn non-compliant regimes or secure new arenas for the extraction of resources, to the panorama of soft powers and cultural imperialisms that corporations such as McDonalds and Facebook have come to (misleadingly) embody. No clear division can be drawn between domestic and foreign in this account of imperialism, because the former, along with its accompanying economies of racialization and structural inequality, emerges as a term "forged in struggles over space, sovereignty, and boundary-making" (Kramer 1357). This book is not a political theory of US imperialism, but a more precise kind of investigation about how an analogy with the ancient world has knitted together the cultural materials of this historically dispersed phenomenon. Seeing empire as a chronic condition of social life and not just as a series of acute geopolitical eruptions acknowledges its different "stages" whilst also finding a conceptual vocabulary elastic enough to speak across its longevity. "Ancient Rome" has allowed for this flexibility, working to underpin as well as trouble an American modernity that from the eighteenth century to the present day has been the assumed pretext for strategies of national self-definition as well as dreams of global ascendancy.

"What does it mean to examine imperialism when the examination itself remains embedded in the continuing history of imperialism?" Russ Castronovo has asked ("On Imperialism" 431), prompting us to think about imperialism not just as an assertion of geographical control but also as a continuum of time in which we must place ourselves. The temporality of US imperialism—its simultaneous and differential investment in the past, present, and future—might also put us in mind of Kramer's appeal for an account of the topic that can "allow fresh approaches to temporality" by cutting across the "conventional chronological divides" and periodizations of a linearly conceived American history (1354), and of Alyosha Goldstein's argument that we need to redraw the temporal parameters of US colonialism: "To forgo a linear and nationally bounded reading of U.S. history from east to west," he suggests, "is to allow the palimpsest of Spanish, British, French, and Dutch colonization, and

the *longue durée* of indigenous peoples, to emerge intermittently from beneath the veneer of naturalized borders and periodizations" (3). The ways in which periods and temporalities have been naturalized at the service of empire, and the imaginative role ancient history has played in this, will be a central line of investigation here.

Why is literature (and culture more generally) important to such questions? We understand well enough by now the formative pressures of imperialism on the cultural sphere; how it cannot be extracted from that sphere as merely a discrete discourse within it, but instead comes to form the conditions in which it speaks. This book therefore follows a group of scholars in American literary studies that have taken up questions of imperial culture, and who themselves have operated largely in the wake of Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's seminal collection (now more than a quarter of a century old) *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Duke, 1993). Suffice to say for now that much of the capacious critical work in this area directly informs what follows. But the material of literary culture should remain a central object of interest in imperial politics for two reasons. Firstly because American literature as a self-conscious body of work has from the start had a close sense of the imperial conditions that bring it into being, and secondly because those imperial conditions have themselves been largely structured by narrative forms. Perry Anderson has insisted on a similar point in his account of American foreign policy's imaginative range: the "American imperial system," he says, "is a theatre of continual drama—coups, crises, insurgencies, wars, emergencies of every kind," and the result is that policy makers and think tanks operate in an "enormous zone of potential action," one where "the advisory imagination can roam—run riot, even" (*American Foreign Policy* 156, 157). In other words, the scope of imperial thinking—its world-defining ambition, untethered from the minutiae of domestic policy—produces "a literature that is less scholarly, but freer and more imaginative" (156). US imperialism as such can be seen as the political enactment of grand narratives; what, after all, is the Monroe Doctrine (for example) other than an emplotment of history that subsequently came to form political reality?[3] Narrative forms *precede* political praxis, becoming not after-effect responses attempting to re-present history, but the junctures and testing grounds in which inchoate worldviews start to organize and become thinkable. The texts explored in this book, through their use of the Roman analogy, either acculturate those logics in ways that