

PHS Recommends:

PHS RECOMMENDED BOOKReviews“McGuinness is a superb storyteller.”-Foreign Affairs

“In Path of Empire, Aims McGuinness has crafted a well-conceived and painstakingly executed account of Panama in the face of U.S. imperialism. As far as Americans were concerned, Panama was simply a transit zone, and the efforts of interested parties-Panamanians, travelers, American capitalists-to take advantage of that fact form the meat of this book. By placing this story in his chosen context, McGuinness illustrates the true breadth of his topic.”- Journal of American History

"This fine book tells a multilayered story about intersections among people, capital, and nations in Panama during the gold-rush era. . . . It has many virtues: a self-reflexive style; a rich source base in autobiographies, travel accounts, and records from both the United States and Panama; a focus that both acknowledges states and also presents them as comprised of disaggregated actors; a sense of historical change as contested. . . . In this small and carefully researched book, McGuinness rises above the specificity of time and place to address broad questions about race, gender, class, nation, and empire. He also stresses the often lopsided nature of historical remembrances. Scholars from many different fields will appreciate the book's expansive thematic and interpretive reach."—American Historical Review

"Path of Empire makes an important contribution to the historiography of the California gold rush, Panama, and U.S. expansion and intervention in Latin America. It promises not only to expand scholars' knowledge of their fields but also to challenge them to engage previously overlooked transnational connections."—Western Historical Quarterly

"Path of Empire provides a transnational context for Gold Rush history and draws links between continental expansion and empire-making abroad. Aims McGuinness also shows that colonialist incursions and continental incorporations were closely connected—that the informal empire that was established in Central America was crucial to the formal Americanization of California. This brief book about a small place delivers on its bold ambitions."—Stephen Aron, UCLA, and Executive Director, Institute for the Study of the American West, Autry National Center

“Because it was built in Panama, the first transcontinental railroad—built to connect the eastern U.S. to California—is little known to students of U.S. history. In Path of Empire Aims McGuinness offers a fascinating example of 'connected histories.' His attention to the interplay of U.S. and Latin American nation-building and racial ideology in one small place offers an international history and a tale of historical detective work.”—Donna R. Gabaccia, Director, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota

"You simply must take up Aims McGuinness's offer here, of a lyrical and troubling trip across Panama before there was a canal. What unfolds is better than the transnational history we've all been calling for. His scope takes our breath away, but his real commitment is to the density of daily life, the arc of narrative, and the oracular truths of the archive. The grasping of North America and the birth pangs of 'Latin' America will never read quite the same."—Carl H. Nightingale, University at Buffalo, State University of New York

"Aims McGuinness provides a model of how to do global history from a local perspective. Path of Empire views the global transformations wrought by the California Gold Rush from the vantage points of both poor and elite Panamanians. McGuinness recasts our historical narrative of U.S. imperialism in Central America while he sheds new light on how nineteenth-century intellectuals came to form a common identity as 'Latin American.' This book makes a significant contribution not only to the historiography on Panama but also to that on Colombia and Latin America more generally."—Nancy P. Appelbaum, Binghamton University, State University of New York

"The California Gold Rush and the beginnings of U.S. interest in a Panama Canal are great stories—and here are wonderfully and imaginatively linked by Aims McGuinness's multi-archival research to open fresh, highly important insights into the explosive new characteristics of American imperialism (too many of which sound as familiar in the twenty-first century as they did in the nineteenth), as well as into a growing regional fear of that imperialism, Latin American literature and culture, the hemisphere's slave systems, and the beginnings of Panamanian nationalism."—Walter LaFeber, Andrew Tisch and James Tisch University Professor Emeritus, Cornell University

About the AuthorAims McGuinness is Associate Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee.