

Out of Stock: The Warehouse in the History of Capitalism. By Dara Orenstein. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019. 352 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Paper, \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-226-66290-9.

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Reviewed by Johnathan K. Williams

Globalization has gained interest among academics and the public alike in recent years. From studies examining shipping containers to those tracing the global travels of commodities, from growing populist political movements and leaders challenging “free trade” to an unprecedented global pandemic and the related disruption of supply chains affecting consumers, the complex—and sometimes *hidden*—network of trade exchanges that encompass the globe are being realized and felt more than ever before. In *Out of Stock: The Warehouse in the History of Capitalism*, American studies scholar Dara Orenstein provides a new understanding of how such a trade system developed.

Orenstein traces the history of warehousing and the emergence of free-trade zones in the United States from the founding of the country to the late 1980s. As she compellingly demonstrates, exceptions to liberal capitalist ideas of “free trade” were essential to the formation of the nation-state. States needed borders and needed to promote *manufacturing*—a term Orenstein deconstructs as a “dog whistle for nationalism” (p. 2). The necessity of a new spatial form to mediate between the state’s “need to impose borders and capitalism’s need to surpass them” resulted in the creation of free-trade zones (p. 2).

Spatial analysis constitutes *Out of Stock*’s greatest interpretive contribution. Chapter 2, on the bonded warehouse, offers the strongest example. The chapter highlights the development of the idea of a bonded warehouse during the mid-eighteenth century as a means to promote international trade by circumventing tariffs. The Crystal Palace was the first to implement this policy, as it allowed merchants to contractually post a bond—typically twice an item’s value—to avoid duties until the item was sold. The bond system gained support from both protectionists and free traders as it promoted importation of foreign goods while creating a legal system to ensure tariff collection. By the end of the century, the system had expanded greatly with the addition of bonded railcars, allowing the same trade advantages for growing western cities as for coastal ones, as the former essentially became inland ports.

Orenstein uses “warehouse” liberally as both a physical and imaginative structure, and while it clearly applies in certain cases throughout the book, in others it is quite problematic. Most importantly, *Out of Stock* tells more the history of free-trade zones than that of warehousing, and even Orenstein admits to “omitting [free-trade zones] from the title of this book” (p. 7). While she makes it clear that buildings within

free-trade zones look like “warehouses,” their purpose—especially today, as Orenstein explains, with “American-made” car manufacturing—makes them a space that is about more than storage and logistical transportation, as warehouses are traditionally perceived. Issues also arise with the book’s introduction and conclusion, which connect free-trade zones to modern distribution centers that power American retail. From their appearance, both certainly can be called “warehouses,” yet their functions within global capitalism and history differ greatly.

In a book primarily about free-trade zones, the author finds creative ways to demystify them and explain how the United States developed the largest zone system in the world. The book draws from numerous sources, including congressional records and government reports, trade articles, and major print-media publications. It also contains numerous images, including photographs and advertisements, with which the author illustrates the physical and imagined aspects of warehouses and free-trade zones. Without access to individual free-trade zone archives, this approach impressively works around the gaps to illuminate the role of the state-sponsored, privately owned zones, especially relating to American automobile production.

While the writing style, lesser-known cultural references, and heavy focus on theory dissuades general appeal, the book offers important value and complements recent studies on the history of capitalism and global trade. Scholars interested in the latter will certainly find the second half of the book on free-trade zones beneficial. The first half, by contrast, presents the most comprehensive study of early warehousing in the United States. Lastly, scholars engaging in spatial analyses will find fascinating examples within Orenstein’s work that add to the growing field of spatial history.

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Corporate Conquests: Business, the State, and the Origins of Ethnic Inequality in Southwest China. *By C. Patterson Giersch.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. 304 pp. Maps, figures, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$95.00. ISBN: 978-150361-164-1.

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Reviewed by Yi Wang

China’s vast and diverse borderlands have long been associated with the image of backwardness, poverty, and isolation, with the ethnic