Limits to American Globalization

Between the American Revolution and the American Civil War, the U.S. significantly expanded its global reach, but this process was not without struggle. The U.S. faced many limits along the way to globalization, some of which include geographical ignorance, resistance from the Native Americans, resistance from foreign powers, resistance from American citizens, and a lack of technological power. In order to expand its global reach, the U.S. took steps to decrease these limits over time, including sending exploration expeditions around the world, stripping Native Americans of their power, increasing its military strength, persuading enough American citizens to support expansion, and developing new technologies.

“Geographical ignorance” limited the global reach of the U.S. Not knowing about the land and people around the world hampered the U.S.’s ability to spread its people and influence. In order to decrease its geographical ignorance, the U.S. sent several expeditions to explore various parts of the world. In 1804-1806, Lewis and Clark explored from St. Louis to the Pacific Northwest, and in 1806-1807, the Pike Expedition explored from St. Louis to the American Southwest. These two expeditions gave the U.S. more information about the land and people to the west, and this information helped the process of westward expansion. The U.S. also sent expeditions to explore the Pacific Ocean in 1838-1842; Chile in 1847-1848; the Arctic in 1850-1851; the Amazon River Valley (now Brazil) in 1851-1852; and Rio de la Plata (now Argentina), the North Pacific, and the Arctic in 1853-1855. These expeditions gave the U.S. more knowledge about these areas and the people who lived there, which enabled it to globalize further. For example, after the expedition to the North Pacific, the U.S. was able to increase its diplomatic missions in that area from zero to one. Exploration expeditions gave the U.S. more
information about the land and people in various parts of the world, which decreased its geographical ignorance and increased its ability to have a global reach more and more over time, as the expeditions progressed.

Resistance from the Native Americans limited the global reach of the U.S. within the land that is now the United States. When Americans tried to take land away from the indigenous peoples who inhabited/owned it, they were understandably unhappy and often fought back. The U.S. tried to overcome this limit by stripping the Native Americans of their land and power more and more over time. Under the Articles of Confederation, the states were allowed to negotiate independently with Native Americans, but the U.S. Constitution did not allow this, so it became more difficult for the Native Americans to negotiate with U.S. powers. The Native Americans were excluded from the 1783 and 1815 peace treaties, “where sovereignty, territory, and boundaries were established.” As a result, the Native Americans were reduced to landholders with no sovereignty. The Native Americans opposed being robbed of their land, because they inherited it from their forefathers, it had sentimental value, the U.S. government had given them the right to the land in several treaties, and they had nowhere else to safely go. But the U.S. wanted to expand, and the Native Americans were in the way, so they pushed them out as much as they could. As the Americans took control over the Native Americans, the limit of their resistance decreased, and the U.S. was able to expand its global reach by physically expanding its borders.

Resistance from foreign powers limited the global reach of the U.S. abroad. Many people and governments around the world were resistant to the spread of the U.S.’s influence, and they tried to fight it. The U.S. decreased this limit over time by strengthening its military forces and asserting military dominance. It accomplished these tasks by establishing new branches of the
military and working to strengthen them, making treaties and agreements with foreign nations, engaging in war with foreign nations, establishing squadrons abroad, and passing acts asserting land rights. The federal government established the U.S. State Department and the U.S. War Department in 1789, the U.S. Navy in 1794, and the U.S. Marines in 1798. To strengthen these institutions, the federal government established the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY in 1802 and the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, MD in 1845. To build relationships with foreign nations, the federal government made treaties and agreements. It made its first international treaty in 1794 (with Britain), its first international treaty with a South American nation (Colombia) in 1824, and its first international treaty with an Asian nation (Siam, now Thailand) in 1833. It made its first international agreement with a Pacific nation (Tahiti) in 1824 and its first international agreement with an African nation (Nigeria) in 1854. To increase its power, the U.S. Navy established squadrons in New Orleans in 1813, Africa in 1820, the Pacific in 1821, West Indies in 1822, Brazil in 1826, and East India in 1835. To assert its right to claim unoccupied land, the U.S. Congress passed the Guano Islands Act in 1856 and used it in 1856 to claim Baker Island and Jarvis Island, in 1858 to claim Howland Island and Navassa Island, in 1859 to claim Johnston Island, and in 1860 to claim Kingman Reef. Taking these steps to strengthen the military gave the U.S. more power to forcefully expand its global reach. For example, after establishing the West Indies Squadron, the U.S. was able to increase the number of diplomatic missions in South America from zero to four. These actions increased the power of the U.S. military, which allowed the U.S. to expand its global reach more and more as it fought the resistance from foreign powers.

Resistance from American citizens limited the global reach of the U.S. Not all Americans wanted the U.S. to expand or to get involved in global affairs as much as it did. For example, in
his Farewell Address, George Washington warned Americans about the dangers of getting involved in foreign affairs. He wanted the U.S. to trade with all nations, but to avoid making any “permanent alliances.” His view of the U.S.’s global reach was limited to trade, not expansion or “attachments.”39 Later, John Adams was much more imperialistic, although even he believed that the U.S. “ought to keep [it]self distinct and separate” from other nations and avoid forming alliances.40 Washington and Adams were not alone in their limited view of the U.S.’s global reach. A few decades after their speeches, there was great opposition among some American citizens to the annexation of Texas.41 Some Americans “denounce[d] and vilif[ied]” the annexation of Texas and attempted to “thwart and oppose” the efforts to do so. The issue was very controversial, and it “became one of the leading topics of party division, of presidential electioneering.”42 This resistance from American citizens limited the ability of the U.S. to expand its global reach. But people like John O’Sullivan were able to persuade enough Americans to annex Texas, and the U.S. was able to expand southward and overcome this limit through persuasion.

Lack of technological power limited the global reach of the U.S. Not having the technology necessary to travel and communicate with people from other nations made it more difficult for the U.S. to spread its influence. As the U.S. developed technology that enabled it to travel and communicate more efficiently and effectively, this limit decreased. For example, in 1787-1790, the U.S. circumnavigated the globe in a ship for the first time.43 The development of a ship that was capable of sailing around the entire globe increased the Americans’ ability to travel and expand their influence. In 1812-1813, the U.S. sent a warship, the U.S.S. Essex into the Pacific Ocean for the first time,44 and the arrival of this warship led to an additional foreign military action in the Pacific Ocean.45 Building this warship enabled the U.S. to expand its global
reach in the Pacific Ocean. In 1855, the transcontinental railroad across Panama was completed,\textsuperscript{46} which further decreased the limit of lacking transportation technology. In addition to the lack of transportation technology, the lack of communication technology also limited the U.S.’s ability to expand its global reach. Telegraph cables were used during this time period to decrease this limit. In 1858, the transatlantic telegraph cable between Ireland and Newfoundland was completed,\textsuperscript{47} and in 1861, the transcontinental telegraph across the U.S. was completed.\textsuperscript{48} These telegraph cables greatly increased national and international communication, which decreased the limit of lacking technology and increased the U.S.’s ability to expand its global reach.

Between the American Revolution and the Civil War, the U.S. faced many limits to the expansion of its global reach. Geographical ignorance made it difficult for Americans to expand into the world and to influence people around the globe. Resistance from the Native Americans made it difficult for the U.S. to expand westward. Resistance from foreign powers made it difficult for the U.S. to influence people in other countries. Resistance from American citizens made it difficult for the U.S. to physically expand and to influence other nations. Lack of technological power made it difficult for Americans to travel internationally and communicate with people in other countries. During this time period, the U.S. sent exploration expeditions, stripped Native Americans of their power, increased its military strength, convinced enough American citizens to support expansion, and developed new technologies in order to decrease these limits and expand its global reach.

\textsuperscript{1} Lecture notes, February 10, 2016.
\textsuperscript{2} 1804-1806 entry, timeline.
\textsuperscript{3} 1806-1807 entry, timeline.
\textsuperscript{4} 1838-1842 entry, timeline.
\textsuperscript{5} 1847-1848 entry, timeline.
6 1850-1851 entry, timeline.
7 1851-1852 entry, timeline.
8 1853-1855 entry, timeline.
9 1853-1855 entry, timeline.
10 1853-1855 entry, timeline.
11 Diplomatic missions data, 1852-1853, interactive world map.
14 Memorial of the Cherokee Nation, December 1829.
15 Address of the Committee and Council of the Cherokee Nation, 1830.
16 1789 entry, timeline.
17 1794 entry, timeline.
18 1798 entry, timeline.
19 1802 entry, timeline.
20 1845 entry, timeline.
21 1794 entry, timeline.
22 1824 entry, timeline.
23 1833 entry, timeline.
24 1824 entry, timeline.
25 1854 entry, timeline.
26 1813 entry, timeline.
27 1820 entry, timeline.
28 1821 entry, timeline.
29 1822 entry, timeline.
30 1826 entry, timeline.
31 1835 entry, timeline.
32 1856 entry, timeline.
33 1856 entry, timeline.
34 1858 entry, timeline.
35 1858 entry, timeline.
36 1859 entry, timeline.
37 1860 entry, timeline.
38 Diplomatic missions data, 1822-1823, interactive world map.
39 George Washington, Farewell Address, September 19, 1796.
40 John Adams, Message to Congress, May 16, 1797.
43 1787-1790 entry, timeline.
44 1812-1813 entry, timeline.
45 Foreign military actions data, 1785-1813, interactive world map.
46 1855 entry, timeline.
47 1858 entry, timeline.
48 1861 entry, timeline.