Encountering the world has a deep history, often represented as constantly expanding progress and usually ending with globalization, the representation of a world so interconnected that a push in one part of the world inevitably produces a pull in another. *Globalization*, a relatively recent coinage, builds perhaps upon our ever-increasing awareness of and reliance on networks, electronic and social. However, the efforts that produce globalization came long before we were aware of its production.

That was the premise last fall when an exhibition, a symposium, and the development of a new website plotted the globalization of the United States between 1789 and 1861. The Lilly Library mounted an exhibition of books and maps illustrating Americans’ encounter
The Lilly Library mounted an exhibition of early books and maps related to United States engagement with the world. James Canary, Lilly Library conservator, prepares the exhibit.

with the world before the Civil War. Several academic units sponsored a symposium of “think pieces” in which historians from all over the U.S. explored America’s forays abroad and the research materials that can be mobilized to study them. IU Associate Professor of History Konstantin Dierks curated the exhibition, organized the symposium, and oversaw the design of a website that makes exhibit materials available in their entirety online, along with an innovative world map that allows users to follow America’s outreach over time.

At the symposium, experts found global moments in unexpected places. Consider the revolutionaries of 1776 and what they had to do to supply their armies. Brian DeLay of University of California, Berkeley explained that until the American Revolution, Europe had “thrown up a dam” that kept munitions out of the hands of colonists. Artisans made the vast majority of the Western world’s guns with hard-to-replicate skills in a small number of European cities. Monarchs and powerful merchants controlled markets. Gunpowder required saltpeter. The best source for that was India, and the British controlled that market. Europe had assured the “practical impossibility” for colonists to arm sufficiently to fight a war of independence.

Despite American efforts all over the world, the dam held—until a French foreign minister decided to help the colonists secretly, a move that not only armed the revolutionaries in the British colonies, but also ultimately led to the U.S. arming other insurgents in the hemisphere. The outcome of a war seemingly localized to one part of North America depended on and affected connections and interactions worldwide.

Scholars at the symposium described ways that the U.S. made its early global reach:

• **Sailors.** Brian Rouleau of Texas A&M surveyed journals, memoirs, and government reports to describe the impact of American sailors, numbered in the hundreds of thousands in the period before the Civil War, the largest group of Americans overseas at the time. Sailors were often not well behaved. They provided the world with some of its earliest stereotypes of Americans. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the U.S. government did what it could to dispel that image. Sailors were often the most important source of information about the world for members of their communities back home.
• **Missionaries.** Better behaved than their maritime counterparts, missionaries tried to emulate their British equivalents, said Emily Conroy-Krutz of Michigan State University. The records of the first American foreign missionary society suggest that while missionaries from the U.S. had determined goals for changing the world, they were frustrated in those attempts by a lack of reliable information about the parts of the world they chose to reform.

• **Niche traders.** American sea merchants found corners of lucrative trade, smuggling, supplying opium to China, and other “shadowy” practices. They had to work behind the backs of the great European trade monopolies. Rachel Tamar Van of Cal Poly Pomona, through government reports and maritime records, traced their “pesky” resourcefulness and its ultimate influence on the promotion of free trade around the world.

• **Searchers for “miracle seeds.”** Courtney Fullilove of Wesleyan University traveled to the Ukraine, Crimea, the North and South Caucasus, and further into Central Asia to trace the origin of seeds American scientists gathered in hopes of producing bountiful harvests in the U.S. Seeds for wheat, cotton, sugar, and coffee were brought to the U.S. from all over the world. “We tend to think of the historical record in terms of documents and archives, but plants themselves are historical records, preserving millennia of stewardship and improvement by farmers.” Internationally managed gene banks have become “research libraries,” used originally for developing new varieties, but now revealing a complicated, global history.

• **Supporters of foreign revolutionaries.** Americans, with the model of their own revolution, saw themselves as “international trend setters,” said Caitlin Fitz, of Northwestern University. They responded to controversial foreign revolutions with perspectives distorted by their own beliefs, making increasingly controversial insurrections appear as examples of their own glorious fight for freedom and in the process defining a narcissistic foreign policy.

• **Whalers and consular officers.** Nancy Shoemaker of the University of Connecticut traveled to Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, and French Polynesia in her search for information about Americans, including Native Americans, who emigrated there. She found valuable material in transcripts of disputed land claims as the British colonial government “disallowed”
most of the American land purchases. In her research into Americans abroad in the nineteenth century, including those in the whaling industry and the China trade and increasing numbers of U.S. consular officers, she saw a tendency of U.S. government support for "greed and opportunism" abroad. "It does seem as though from the beginning, the U.S. founding fathers accepted that Americans had a right to pursue life, liberty, and happiness anywhere around the world, and the Constitution was there to protect them, no matter where they might be."

- **Philosophers of social order.** Rosemarie Zagarri of George Mason University recounted the life and philosophy of Thomas Law. Law was born in England, began his career in India as an East India Company clerk, and ended up in Washington, D.C., becoming involved in building a canal, a theatre, and a learned society. Based on his knowledge of societies around the world, Law wrote prolifically about what he saw as "universal laws about human nature and human institutions" and their ability to solve the young country's problems. For example, he saw the success of the India Company in the "primacy of private property," and proposed making Native Americans individual landholders.

These presentations highlighted the breadth of international engagement by the United States during a period that has traditionally been imagined as one preoccupied with internal politics. Dierks explained the importance of recognizing the early global impact. "If we take globalization to mean imagining a world that is larger than yourself, then you can identify a history of globalization in phases," he said, "and that helps throw modern forms of globalization in relief."

Top left: Students used the exhibition for their research.

Top right: Frontispiece of United States Exploring Expeditions, by John S. Jenkins (1852). Jenkins recounted scientific expeditions that the U.S. government had dispatched to almost every corner of the globe.

Above: "Capture of the Author & ten of his Crew, by a tribe of wandering Arabs, near Cape Barbas [Western Sahara]," from An Authentic Narrative of the Loss of the American Brig Commerce, by James Riley (1817). Riley was a commercial trader in the Atlantic region, including the perilous west coast of Africa.
In particular, Dierks sees a “dissonance” in the globalization of the United States before the Civil War. “There was an increasing sense that Americans could reach anywhere in the world, but as they encountered more and more cultures, they wanted to differentiate themselves from those people.” U.S. globalization differed from its nearest model in Britain. “Americans wanted to interact with the world, but they were not as impact-oriented. They didn’t expect to change the world as much as the British expected to change it. They went to trade rather than to colonize.”

Efforts to write the history of the early globalization of the United States require attention to historical sources that might not appear to address the global at all. “Look in any index of the past for the word global and it doesn’t exist,” Dierks said. “You have to look at more obscure places in the archive to see where global manifests itself. Even something so apparently unrelated as a cookbook. In it, you find a recipe for Brazilian rice; no foreign ingredients, no explanation for the name, but that’s part of how Americans engaged the world.”

One message Dierks hopes the symposium and exhibition will convey is that globalization “is not a natural condition that’s magically easy. To this day it requires serious investment, experimentation, hard work, successes, and failures. We have no word that captures the incompleteness before globalization might be achieved or even recognized as a goal. Even though the word seems to rush too fast to its endpoint, globalization is the only word we have to represent the process of reaching toward an unknown that might, or might not, become global.”

The recognition of the early global effort affects our sense of American history. “It fights the urge to create narratives where everything was easy in American history—‘We’re all freedom fighters; we wanted freedom and therefore we fought for it and therefore we won.’ Such an approach declaws our history; it takes away all the blood, sweat, and tears of the American Revolution, of the Civil War, and of everything in between.”

Konstantin Dierks, associate professor of history, and curator of the exhibition, *Globalization of the United States, 1789-1861.*

The symposium was supported partially by Indiana University’s New Frontiers in the Arts & Humanities Program and partially by the Indiana University College of Arts and Sciences Ostrom Grants Program.
Part of Their World History

The exhibition figured prominently in Professor Dierks’s American History I class. International students Crystal Lu from Shanghai, China, and Khawaja Imran from Lahore, Pakistan, encountered in this introduction a global dimension of American history that would have found little place in American textbooks a generation ago. Coming from a much more ancient culture, Lu was impressed with the American attitude toward change. “China is old, and the first thing we think about is keeping the tradition. Americans had a spirit of trying things.

Everything they did was like an experiment, and they were not afraid of failing.” Imran, from another ancient culture, had similar reactions. “When Americans focused on putting the USA on the map, they worked on it, and they actually achieved it. In just a few decades, they were ranked among the world’s powers.” This was the message of the course, Imran explains, “Setting a goal and working for it. That’s what I will carry back home.”

Responding to what he perceived as the U.S.’s “elevated rank in the family of Nations,” Jonathan Elliot in his American Diplomatic Code designed a more systematic approach to preserving its scattered diplomatic records.

From Isthmus of Panama: History of the Panama Railroad: and of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company by Fessenden N. Otis (1867). Otis promoted the U.S. company that built a transcontinental railroad on foreign soil in the 1850s, in order to capitalize on the California gold rush.