

Research Assistantship

Uncle Sam in the Old World:

How did European investors see U.S. expansion and state-building between 1850-1920, and why did they buy into it?

This research assistantship offers a Harvard College student the opportunity to work with a [John F. Kennedy Memorial Fellow](#) on the following research project.

This is an ideal position for a thorough and detail-oriented student of history, economics, or sociology (or similar) who is interested in detecting powerful themes in small texts. This is the kind of research work that reveals the highly prejudiced assumptions, but often also surprisingly sharp analysis of nineteenth-century public commentary – which tend to reflect the manias and maladies of capitalism and state power of our own time.

Project Overview:

This research project aims to shed light on the changing prejudices, stories, and ideas inherent in European financial thought about the United States during the mid-nineteenth to early-twentieth centuries.

One of the best indicators (and, indeed, drivers) of the rapid globalization of the world during this period were networks of capital that transported European money into expanding markets like the United States. But European capital did not inevitably and irreversibly power large parts of the United States' meteoric economic growth. Instead, European financiers and investors consciously chose American opportunities based on scarce information, subjective analysis, and predominant narratives. Alongside stocks and bonds, cultural assumptions and political prognoses travelled across the Atlantic.

This project is interested in the changing perceptions of U.S. financial power, territorial expansion, and colonial rule amongst European financial circles. What did they think about the apparent realities and promised futures of American expansion? What were the prospects of American power -- both on Wall Street and in Washington? How did such views develop over time? This project approaches these and similar questions through multiple lenses, including the coverage in newspapers and financial periodicals in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Paris.

Research Tasks:

- Search and find articles in French and/or Dutch newspapers and specialist financial periodicals.
- Develop and employ keyword searches, discard peripheral material, find good matches.
- Read key articles and summarize, note common themes and similar language.
- Browse adjacent issues for context if necessary.
- Liaise with the principal investigator when needed, as most of the work can be done on a flexible schedule.

Requirements: This position requires mainly qualitative research skills.

Special Skills:

- Specialist language skills (French, Dutch, or both) and an interest in international finance and politics (required).
- Some knowledge of nineteenth-century U.S., French, and/or Dutch history (preferred, but not necessary).
- Experience with digitized newspapers/sources (preferred, but not necessary).

How to apply:

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