



# Work, Class, and Power in the Borderlands of the Early American Pacific: The Labors of Empire

*Evan Lampe*

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This book traces the history of working people who helped established the foundation of the American empire in the Pacific from its origins after the American Revolution to its coming of age in the 1840s and 1850s. Beginning with the expeditions of the *Columbia* and the *Lady Washington*, Lampe argues that the early American Pacific can best be considered through the interaction of four major locations, connected through the networks of trade: the merchant ship, the Northwest Coast, Honolulu, and Canton (Guangzhou). In each of these locations, the labors of a diverse population of working people was harnessed in the critical labors of empire building, including the transportation of goods. The central question that the consideration of working people in the Pacific economy during this period is, Lampe argues, the role of power applied on these laborers by an international capitalist class, emerging alongside the Pacific commercial empires. Lampe also finds that this power was not uncontested and emerged in response to the activities of labor. Working people, on the ship and in the port cities, found ways to secure their piece of the profitable trade, often through illicit means.



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