

pulled a gun on a “Dago” at a horse track (Murphy had problems with gambling) and told him that killing one more Italian wouldn’t make any difference to him. On a Hollywood movie set, Murphy, who had appeared in a number of films, was annoyed by an actor who flattered himself as a quick draw. Murphy offered to prove his skills using live cartridges. Kirkwood writes that a

fair appraisal of Murphy’s postwar deeds might suggest a physiologically troubled man. To some degree he was. He suffered nightmares and became addicted to sleeping pills, but ever the tenacious warrior, he locked himself in a hotel room and defeated the addiction. He candidly discussed the psychological damage war inflicts on a man, openly trying to help other veterans overcome what was then called battle fatigue and now called post-traumatic stress disorder. War took its toll on Murphy and thousands of other combat veterans.

In his famous essay “The Moral Equivalent of War,” William James wrote that “Militarism is the great preserver of our ideals of hardihood, and human life with no use for hardihood would be contemptible.” James favored sending young men to something akin to a Civilian Conservation Corps to develop the manly virtues, after which “they would tread the earth more proudly, the women would value them more highly, they would be better fathers and teachers of the following generation.” Kirkwood notes that the subjects of *Real Men* were made by the “cultural milieu in which they are raised.” When the President (who preferred political campaigning to fulfilling his obligations to the National Guard) and his hawkish neoconservative Vice President (a serial draft dodger) are happy to send American boys and girls to die for “democracy” in the Middle East, it is safe to say that our culture is no longer hospitable to James’ “ideals of hardihood.”

Instead, our culture is hospitable to metrosexuals, swooning neocons, Xbox geeks, and graying perpetual adolescents. Kirkwood’s book reminds us of real men—and the culture that produced them.

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The Empire Quacks

by Jerry Woodruff

Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors

by Charles S. Maier
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; 373 pp., \$27.95



By comparing America to the empires of the ancient world and Europe, Charles Maier has attempted to answer the question, Is America an empire? While his book reveals an author of immense learning, *Among Empires* is unsatisfying, not only because Maier answers his question in the negative—after presenting a great deal of evidence that seems to suggest otherwise—but because of what he hints at but fails to address.

In scattered moments, Maier seems oddly concerned with the historical role of empire in what he calls “inequality,” a hand-wringing refrain in any liberal’s songbook. In his Prologue, Maier alerts the reader to his moral sentiments. If we have in fact become an empire, “Do we make it more or less likely that the peoples of poorer nations will share in, or be excluded from, economic development and welfare?” That sort of inquiry seems better suited to ideologues than to historians. Maier insists that an empire is not simply a superstate, nor “just a state that subjugates other peoples or states,” but “a system of rule that transforms society at home as it stabilizes inequality transnationally by replicating it geographically, in the core and on the periphery.” He believes that this inequality is an unintentional by-product of empire: “The divisions it intensifies along its frontier or the skewed rewards it distributes among its citizens at home amount to unplanned inequality.” In empires, inequality (by which Maier means material or income inequality) becomes stabilized because empires encompass differentiations that are thereby somehow preserved. In his discussion of how empires organize their economic activity, he concludes that “the structure and inequalities of empire recapitulate themselves at all levels of international, national, and local activity . . .”

The observation seems shallow. Isn’t it true that, in general, the inequalities of life “recapitulate themselves” at all levels of human and even animal activity? Why

the inequalities of empire are particularly noteworthy is startlingly unclear.

Maier begins one chapter by asking if there is a uniquely violent aspect to imperial rule, hoping to determine whether empires might generate a “different pattern or spectrum of violent acts . . . or a cheapening and brutalization of life in general.” Some 20-odd pages later, after breezy descriptions of bloody warfare from the Peloponnesian War to Bosnia to mass exterminations in Rwanda and the Sudan, he simply concludes that “Such a determination remains out of reach.” I cannot help but wonder why he brought up the subject in the first place.

The broad sweep of knowledge Maier brings to his discussion allows him to offer enticing insights—though, unfortunately, he leaves some of the most promising ones unexplored. Maier claims one purpose of his book is to glean lessons from the past for guidance in the present, adding that comparing Rome and the United States is especially useful in discerning “parallels with and lessons for the contemporary United States.” So it is particularly relevant when Maier suggests that it was “the cohesion of their legions,” not technological skill, that constituted the Romans’ decisive military superiority in the ancient world. Here, perhaps, is a lesson for contemporary American military leaders—but such is not forthcoming. Instead, Maier casually notes that Roman military superiority waned in the later days of the empire because its armies “no longer had the ethnic cohesiveness of earlier forces.” He attaches no importance to that observation. As used by Maier, “ethnic cohesiveness” is just another way of saying “loyalty to Rome.” The late Roman Empire had come to depend heavily on soldiers recruited or conscripted from foreign lands, whose allegiance sometimes shifted from Rome to the chiefs of their tribal kin, even while they were under Roman command. What lessons this might portend for multicultural America—which continually embraces a massive influx of foreign populations whose diversity rivals the variegated hordes that populated late imperial Rome—Maier does not say.

Maier is far more thorough in his discussion of whether the United States shares enough of the attributes of historical examples of empire to qualify as one. The United States, Maier concludes, is not (yet) an empire “at home” and has no territorial empire that it administers abroad. Unfortunately, he does not ex-

plain why these two criteria are more important than other possible ones. True enough, the United States has no emperor or dynastic succession, and her formal rulers are elected freely (or, perhaps more accurately, they freely arrange to get themselves elected). And, indeed, the United States does not directly administer any vast contiguous territorial provincial system that constitutes a frontier defining who is inside, and who is outside, the empire. But are these qualifications really necessary to constitute an empire in the modern world?

Maier acknowledges that the notion of empire is not a scientific concept and that empire itself “is not a single or coherent phenomenon,” and he suggests that America may preside over a “post-territorial” empire in which frontiers and control of land space are unnecessary in a world where financial institutions, media conglomerates, and miscellaneous corporations hold sway, protected by the world’s most powerful military. He questions, though (and with some justification), whether private money-making organizations are properly considered part of America’s national power. Maier does not consider, however, whether modern communications, transportation, and technologically advanced military organization have altered the meaning of *frontier*. In reality, the American frontier—that is, the locations where those without the empire can enter it—might well be defined as wherever there is an airport and a State Department embassy to issue travel visas. Penetrating this virtual border is simply a matter of acquiring a few pieces of paper—a passport, a plane ticket. In this sense, America’s frontier lies as much in Jakarta and Calcutta and Moscow as it does along the Rio Grande.

In the premodern era, empires needed to control the land across which they marched their armies. Without control of territory (or of sea lanes), armies could not march or sail to enforce the empire’s will. No longer: Force projection today, at least for technologically advanced America, rests primarily on strategically located refueling depots for planes and ships. That is why President Franklin Roosevelt demanded—and got—leasing rights for military bases across the globe in exchange for warships sent to Winston Churchill in 1940, long before the United States entered World War II.

The “territory” of a modern empire may be described as whatever the homeland will defend. In this respect, the

territorial system of America’s empire has an extensive frontier. Under Article V of the treaty that created NATO, the United States must regard an attack on any member as an attack on herself. Those member states that we will defend to the death include Canada, Iceland, Britain, France, Holland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Germany, Turkey, Greece, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. And the NATO territories are not the only portions of the globe that the United States regards as extensions of herself: More than 30,000 U.S. troops still protect South Korea, while, according to the Treaty of Rio, we are pledged to defend nearly any country in the Western Hemisphere, excepting Cuba. No power in all of human history—“empire” or not—has ever been militarily committed to protecting such a massive portion of the earth.

Maier affirms that “Imperial power is power that can be brought to bear far away with no loss of energy because of the distance.” There can be little doubt that America exercises such power. In his discussion of Roman military proficiency, Maier explains that what was crucial to Rome’s long-term imperial success was “the ability to project power far from the capital. This involved the capacity to keep or to raise military forces . . . along long and far flung frontiers.” For this reason, the efficient movement of troops was the real impetus for the construction of Rome’s famed road system; trade and commerce were secondary. Historian Chalmers Johnson writes that, in 2001, the United States maintained no fewer than 725 far-flung overseas bases. Only imperial force projection and the desire to defend the vast NATO configuration, as well as regions in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America, can explain why U.S. forces are stationed in such places as Keflavik, Iceland, 50 years after World War II and more than a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A modern imperial power need not have entire jurisdiction in a country in which its base is located. The mere presence of that base is enough, especially when added to sufficient influence on the local government, to allow access to jurisdiction through friendly persuasion, bribery, blackmail, or coercion. Americans have been especially good at obtaining access to bases, as Maier helpfully explains:

Empire is a form of political orga-

nization in which the social elements that rule in the dominant state—the “mother country” or the “metropole”—create a network of allied elites in regions abroad who accept subordination in international affairs in return for the security of their position in their own administrative unit . . .

Substitute “country” for “administrative unit,” and the way in which American foreign policy operates in such places as the Middle East becomes quite clear.

Maier believes that “an empire will punish defectors from its control,” while a nonimperial hegemonic power such as the United States “will do no more than rely on common interests and moral suasion.” He reminds us that, when confronted with rebellion by the city-state of Mytilene, the Athenians slaughtered all its men and sold its women into slavery. He offers other examples from ancient to modern times that, in his opinion, exempt the United States from being classified as an empire because she abstains from engaging in that level of brutality.

This argument is not persuasive. Maier himself points out that the British, who did indeed create an empire, “in most cases shrank from such measures” against colonial peoples. And he neglects to mention the heavy punishment accorded by Britain and the United States to Japan and Germany, who posed a threat to imperial Britain’s domination and America’s own global aspirations. It is significant that the bombings of Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki were directed at civilians, mostly women and children, not uniformed combatants. These bombings had no military purpose but a political and propagandistic one. The message delivered was the same as that sent by the slaughter of the Mytilenians: Don’t challenge our dominance.

In Maier’s world, though America may look like an empire and act like an empire, she is really only a global “hegemon”—a distinction without a practical difference. In the real world of history and politics, behavior—not abstract categories, definitions, and lists of attributes—is decisive. In the real world, if it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, odds are you have a duck on your hands, no matter what you call it.

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A Threat to Our Very Way of Life

Here's a heresy for you. A grave danger is lurking among us, caused by certain people who are spreading lies—and in the name of Christianity! So grave is this danger that it threatens our very way of life. And, as one of our great leaders once said, “The American way of life is not negotiable.”

We are, of course, talking about the threat of babies, and the strain that having them puts on us as Americans, particularly white people. Thanks to the Industrial Revolution, the Managerial Revolution, and the World Wide Webolution, the world has changed, and we just cannot have unrestrained marital sex and produce large, unruly families like we did in days of yore, back when land was cheap, a man could earn a living for his wife and children, and those children (because of the slave labor they endured) were considered an economic asset. Today, we live by a higher standard: Chattel-children are a thing of the past, and plasma televisions are considered economic assets. Women are no longer bound by the constraints of having multiple children; no career in business, House speakering, or freedom-spreading; and nothing to do but keep a house and clothe and feed children and husband. In today's nonnegotiable America, a woman can create a company called Baby Einstein, which produces educational enrichment (babysitting) DVDs for children ages six months to three years old; sell the company to Disney for a secret all-cash amount (reportedly \$25 million); then be recognized in the gallery during the President's State of the Union Address as a “talented business entrepreneur.” You've come a long way . . . Lady!

Now, there are the naysayers out there who point out that, yes, according to estimates just released by the CIA's World Factbook, women in the United States are actually reproducing slightly below replacement level (2.1). These nabobs are just ignorant of the facts and lack the optimism that makes America great. After all, thanks to the influx of Mexican immigrants (they are the most fertile, followed by non-Hispanic black African-Americans, followed by Asian-Americans), we have gained one one-hundredth of a baby per woman (2.09, up from 2.08 in

2005), and we are closing in on communist North Korea, where Comrade Kim has sat right on the replacement level for two years in a row. Watch out, Argentina (2.16) and South Africa (2.2)!

Then again, the ninnies point out that this downward trend in having babies is affecting our churches as well. They point to a 2005 study by three researchers (Michael Hout of the University of California-Berkeley, Andrew Greeley of the University of Arizona, and Melissa Wilde of Indiana University) that indicates that the massive decline in every Protestant denomination in the United States can be explained by declining fertility rates. According to their study, the fact that fertility rates among more conservative denominations are now the same as among the Mainline liberals explains why conservatives can no longer claim that they are growing (while the Mainlines are shrinking) because of their conservative stance on abortion, homosexuality, *etc.*

Nonetheless, we cannot let these startling statistics cause us to lose sight of reality: The threat of babies is as real today as it was 85 years ago, when Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, wrote *The Pivot of Civilization*, in which she clarified that,

As a social programme, Birth Control is not merely concerned with population questions. . . . It looks for the liberation of the spirit of woman and through woman of the child. To-day motherhood is wasted, penalized, tortured. Children brought into the world by unwilling mothers suffer an initial handicap that cannot be measured by cold statistics. Their lives are blighted from the start.

In his Introduction to Sanger's *Pivot*, Mr. H.G. Wells declares that the threat of babies is at the heart of a clash of civilizations: the Traditional or Authoritative Civilization *versus* the Creative and Progressive one. The former

rests upon the thing that is, and upon the thing that has been. It insists upon respect for custom and



usage; it discourages criticism and enquiry. It is very ancient and conservative, or, going beyond conservatism, it is reactionary. . . .

Said the Ancient Civilization—and it says it still through a multitude of vigorous voices and harsh repressive acts: “Let man learn his duty and obey.” Says the New Civilization, with ever-increasing confidence: “Let man know, and trust him.”

Certain men, however, cannot be trusted, particularly a group of “Christians” who deny the menacing threat of babies, and who claim that they are doing God's will by having children. They belong to something called the Quiver-Full Movement, which takes its name from Psalm 127:

Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them . . .

In their primitive understanding, they read this to mean that a “man” will be “happy” if he has many “children”—and that this “reward” comes from “the LORD.”

But they don't stop there: They also insist that birth control is a sin—a ridiculous notion easily dispelled by the theologians of all major Protestant denominations decades ago. Of course, the nagging nincompoops are right about one thing: During the oppressive days of the Authoritative Civilization, every theologian, from Augustine to Aquinas, Luther to Calvin, Wesley to Spurgeon, condemned contraception as a sin against natural law—a rejection of the obvious purpose (though not the only benefit) of postmarital sex.