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Diane Labrosse and Thomas Maddux, H-Diplo/ISSF Editors

George Fujii, H-Diplo/ISSF Web and Production Editor

Commissioned by Thomas Maddux

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Introduction by Howard Jones, University of Alabama

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Anyone bold enough to write a synthesis of such a controversial topic as American empire can expect a range of reactions stretching as far to the left as to the right and including all shades of opinion in between. Richard Immerman has tackled one of the most hotly contested and long-standing issues in American foreign relations – the nature of the new republic that George Washington christened in 1783 as a "rising American empire." Some observers may say that most historians have gotten beyond the debate over whether the new republic became an empire at its inception and, as Immerman argues, evolved from one *of* liberty into one *for* liberty. But the first reviews of this book show that many of the issues remain unresolved. The historians included in this roundtable – Jeffrey A. Engel, Joan Hoff, William Weeks, and Tom Zeiler – criticize this work as much as they praise it, leading one to observe that Immerman has accomplished as much as any writer can hope – to stimulate discussion and suggest more avenues for research.

Immerman does not shy away from the assertion that America is, was, and always has been an empire. Indeed, he declares that our question should not be what type of empire, "but to what end?" The answer seems clear – an empire of ideology stemming from the city upon a hill concept set out by John Winthrop on the *Arbella* before the Puritans settled at Massachusetts Bay. Through six so-called representative Americans – Benjamin Franklin, John Quincy Adams, William H Seward, Henry Cabot Lodge, John Foster Dulles, and Paul Wolfowitz – Immerman traces the transformation of an American empire of liberty from its origin to when it became an American empire for liberty. In this manner, he shows the roots of American exceptionalism as the republic ultimately pursued a dangerous and, more often than not, arrogant policy aimed at developing the world in its own image.

Engel lauds Immerman's work as an "impressive contribution to the field of American engagement with the wider world" – a "thoughtful and insightful new book" that tells the story of America's becoming an empire for liberty both to facilitate its own interests as well as those of the world. Benjamin Franklin thought the key to liberty in America lay in its broad territory and sense of freedom from tyrannical governments. As Engel observes, "The American Revolution was as much a break *from* empire as it was a concerted drive *for* empire" that permitted Americans to live freely. Liberty meant different things to different people, but Immerman declares that Americans agreed on one fundamental premise: "it is good." (6)

The power this new nation possessed did more than provide Americans with the opportunity to expand their own liberties; as Engel notes, they became progenitors of "a state powerful enough to bring American-style liberties to all." But embedded in this new power lay "a dangerous presumptive moral obligation" resting on an imperial base that was not as blatantly militaristic as that of the Old World but nonetheless had an expansionist objective: "to transform the world that spawned America into a world of and for America." Paul Wolfowitz, however, thought it America's moral responsibility to spread liberty throughout the world, by force if necessary. Engel sums up Immerman's central thesis in these words – "Americans have over time transformed their empire from one

devoted to liberty to one destined to expand liberty." The six Americans chosen by Immerman to exemplify this transformation show that Americans have always sought to build an empire, first from within and later from without.

Despite this high praise, Engel criticizes Immerman's decision to leave out the critics of imperialism; this narrow approach causes problems in determining the influence of the six chief characters in the book on the development of the American empire.

As much as Engel praises the book, so does Joan Hoff criticize it. Even though Immerman seems to assume that his six characters in the book were "rational actors," she is skeptical, arguing that once they secured important governmental positions, they rarely learned from history and tried to "manipulate" events to fit their views. Despite their rhetoric of protecting liberty, they often used it to justify the use of military means to impose their imperial objectives. The myth nonetheless remains: The United States is an "exceptionally virtuous empire," yet she insists that its repeated attempts to remake the world have led to deepening global involvements and what historian Charles A. Beard once termed "perpetual war for perpetual peace."

Hoff also argues that none of the six actors highlighted in the book fit the mold of proponents of an empire of liberty. The two chief practitioners of this myth are John Foster Dulles and Paul Wolfowitz. Their deep strains of "religious and personal morality" had no great impact on their "empire for liberty." Rather, their "very arrogance" led them "to subordinate ethical values in U.S. foreign policy to an ideology of national exceptionalism and triumphalism both before and after the fall of Communism." According to Hoff, only John Quincy Adams "demonstrated an intellectual and ethical struggle with the concept of liberty" – as shown by his opposition to the annexation of Texas as leading to the use of force for liberty while facilitating the spread of slavery. As for Dulles, Hoff asserts that his "New Look undermined the nation's core values more than it contributed to creating an ethical empire for liberty." And this was particularly the case for Wolfowitz, who pushed for an invasion of Iraq in 2003 based on false premises that became what Immerman correctly denounces as perhaps "the greatest strategic blunder in U.S. history, a blunder that could prove fatal to the American empire." (225)

William Weeks takes a different approach, insisting that there is no relevance in discussing whether America was or is an empire: The "signs of the decline if not collapse of the American Empire are all around." So bad is the present situation that historians may soon be dealing with the question of "why did the American Empire fall?" It therefore seems unnecessary to debate whether the United States was an empire. Of course it was, Weeks declares. In fact, "the antebellum American Empire was more oppressive towards Native Americans than that of Great Britain and far worse than that of the French and Spanish empires." The continental American empire acquired colonies euphemistically referred to as "states." When one examines American expansion across the continent, "the role of the United States as functioning both in opposition to European imperialism and as the ultimate expression of that tendency becomes clear."

Weeks does not agree on Immerman's six choices of Americans demonstrating empire and liberty but nonetheless praises the book as a thought-provoking study. The only "thread" holding the six chief characters together was "their common belief that political Union was the precondition for both Empire and Liberty." Weeks considers John Quincy Adams the leading proponent of empire, a strong nationalist who found it difficult to reconcile his repugnance for slavery and its threat to the union along with its negative impact on America's international reputation. Weeks initially wondered whether it was wise to include Wolfowitz. "He seems such a lightweight – intellectually, professionally and personally – as compared to the others, little more than an overprivileged, draft-deferring academic-cum-think tanker." Yet Wolfowitz was necessary, Weeks admits, because he was the architect of the disastrous invasion of Iraq. Immerman's work contains "fascinating profiles in American imperial courage" that help to place U.S. history in a global context.

Tom Zeiler is more sympathetic with Immerman's work, although he at first thought it another in a long line of "diatribes against American imperialism and exceptionalism." Yet he found it an "excellent synthesis" that shows the rise of America to power through biographical sketches of six "imperial-minded" figures representing this process. Zeiler calls the work a "stimulating, accurate, and sweeping analysis of American history" that tries to define the term empire.

Zeiler nonetheless has questions about what appears to be an argument for a "predetermined course of empire." Immerman does not make this clear, but many Americans opposed imperialism from the beginning of independence with its focus on continental expansion to the periods afterward and to the present with their emphasis on global involvement. Zeiler also wishes that Immerman had cited more examples of liberty practiced by his six central figures. Especially disturbing, Zeiler notes, is the author's attempt to portray Wolfowitz as an active supporter of liberty in the same way as Franklin. And, as much as Weeks criticizes Seward for his imperial failures, Zeiler considers Immerman's use of Seward as the strongest example of "an indictment of empire." Seward supported Anglo-Saxons as superior, sought commercial rather than territorial expansion, and developed an imperial strategy built on global interests. Even though he talked about liberty, he "behaved like a nineteenth century version of the visionary Wolfowitz." Lodge emerges as "a [George W.] Bush acolyte, a jingo and unilateralist who went in search of monsters, as did Bush." Both men thought America had a mission to spread its values throughout the world, and both of their efforts had similar dire results.

As these reviews make clear, the question of American empire and its relationship to liberty remains unresolved. This is not a bad thing. Indeed, it can lead to heated discussions in classrooms and perhaps on the street. How did the republic evolve from an empire of liberty based on example into an empire for liberty willing to take preemptive military action aimed at destroying its enemies? Such a sweeping question may even lead to what Zeiler initially groaned about when he first picked up Immerman's work – still more books on American empire.

**Participants:**

**Richard Immerman** is Professor and the Edward J. Butkus Distinguished Faculty Fellow in History at Temple University. He is also the Marvin Wachman Director of Temple's Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy. He received his Ph.D. from Boston College in 1979, and prior to his appointment at Temple held positions at Princeton and the University of Hawaii. He has also served as an assistant deputy director of national intelligence. A former president of SHAFR and currently the chair of the Historical Advisory Committee to the State Department's Historical Office, he is writing a book about the Central Intelligence Agency and co-editing with Petra Goedde *The Oxford Handbook on the Cold War*.

**Howard Jones** received his Ph.D. from Indiana University in 1973 and is University Research Professor at the University of Alabama. He is the author of more than a dozen books, including *The Bay of Pigs* (2008) and *Blue and Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (2010), and is presently working on a study tentatively entitled, *Into the Heart of Darkness: My Lai*.

**Jeffrey A. Engel** teaches history and public policy at Texas A&M University, where he is Director of Programming for the Scowcroft Institute for International Affairs, and the Kruse '52 Founder's Professor. A graduate of Cornell University and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he is currently writing *When the World Seemed New: American Foreign Policy in the Age of George H.W. Bush*, to be published by Houghton Harcourt Mifflin, and *Seeking Monsters to Destroy: American Language and War from Jefferson to Obama*, to be published by Oxford University Press.

**Joan Hoff** received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. She is Distinguished Research Professor of History at Montana State University, Bozeman. Her latest publication is: *Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush*. Other books include: *Nixon Reconsidered*; *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*; *Ideology and Economics: United States Relations with the Soviet Union, 1918-1933*; *American Business and Foreign Policy, 1920-1933*; *Law, Gender and Injustice: A Legal History of U.S. Women*; and *The Cooper's Wife Is Missing: The Trials of Bridget Cleary*. She is currently working on the foreign policy of Bill Clinton.

**William Earl Weeks** received his Ph.D. at the University of California, San Diego in 1986 and specializes in 19th century U.S. History at the University of San Diego. He is the author of *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), *Building the Continental Empire: American Expansion from the Revolution to Civil War* (1996) and, as a contributing editor, "Expansion into the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific, 1815-1861," in *American Foreign Relations since 1600: Guide to the Literature*, 2nd edition (2003). He is working on a book for the Cambridge University Press entitled *Dimensions of the Early American Empire, 1754-1861*, due out in 2012.

**Tom Zeiler**, a professor of history and international affairs at the University of Colorado at Boulder since 1990, received a Ph.D. at the University of Massachusetts. He has written on

U.S. diplomacy and globalization, including *American Trade and Power* (1992), *Free Trade, Free World: The Advent of GATT* (1999), *Dean Rusk* (2000), *Globalization and the American Century* (2003), and *Unconditional Defeat: Japan, America, and the End of World War II* (2004). He will soon publish a book on the Spalding world baseball tour of 1888-89 and globalization, called *Global Games* and is writing a global history of the Second World War. He is the executive editor of *Diplomatic History*.

Review by Jeffrey A. Engel, Texas A&M University

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America is and always has been an empire, its central authority commanding outer regions and the fates of other peoples for the sake of the metropole's benefit and mission. This is Richard Immerman's first conclusion to *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz*, his impressive contribution to the field of American engagement with the wider world. It is most certainly not his final say on the matter, nor even—as he notes from the book's first pages—a particularly controversial conclusion at the close of the twenty-first century's first decade. Those who fail to see in the contemporary world the broad outlines of an American imperium willfully engage in self-delusion, he argues. The origins of today's *Pax Americana* lie not within the twentieth century that witnessed its imposition and near global acceptance by the Cold War's end, but are found instead in the nation's eighteenth century origins. That America is an empire is quite clear, Immerman tells us; indeed he notes at the outset that we should not quibble over the age old retort, paraphrased here for simplicity's sake: 'yes an empire, but what kind?' Rather, the ideal question is, 'an empire, yes...but to what end?'

A true dean if not deacon of American diplomatic history and foreign relations, Immerman's most significant contribution found within the pages of this thoughtful and insightful new book lies in his focus not on the eye-catching big words of the main title but instead in his detailed attention to the title's smallest word. "Empire" and "Liberty" catch the reader's eye, but the real story lies between. In the time since its national founding, America has become an empire *for* liberty, he tells us, one which finds its principle mission in expanding the sphere *of* liberty for its own benefit and for its perception of the world's benefit. It began with smaller goals. Specifically, American policymakers of Franklin's era—a long era indeed, given this most famous of Philadelphian's influence and longevity, but one we might broadly define as the founding generations—longed for space and freedom to seek liberty at home. They wanted a land capable of liberty, where individuals might flourish free from oppression. The 1770s put that vision of liberty in jeopardy. Far-off despots from King George III to unnamed cabals of power-hungry European elites sought to deprive Americans their God-given right to live as they pleased for the sake of their own aggrandizement and power. To be truly free individuals in the philosophical sense, Immerman argues, Franklin and others knew the sovereign ability to chart their own national course. The American Revolution was as much a break *from* empire as it was a concerted drive *for* empire, but it was most certainly a move made for national self-actualization conducted so that individuals throughout the land might find the space and freedom (in the physical as well as the moral sense) to self-actualize themselves. Put simply, the American empire began in opposition to an imposed order.

The above paragraph is full of slippery and ill-defined terms. It is to Immerman's great credit that he consciously spends little time and energy defining words like "freedom," "liberty," or even "empire" itself. "When it comes to liberty," he quickly notes, "about the only thing Americans agree on is that it is good" [p. 6]. Such terms cohere the national spirit, offering what Abraham Lincoln termed a "mystic chord of memory" capable of

forging a collective identity and will. Such words also activate Americans, catalyzing their actions in pursuit of such widely-held if so infrequently defined national goals. Few politicians wish to oppose “freedom;” fewer still wish to define it. Generations of earlier historians including such luminaries as Charles Beard and William Appleman Williams spent considerable effort attempting to document the full boundaries of America’s imperial trajectory, each forced by the politics of their times to defend the heretical notion of even discussing the term’s applicability to the nation’s past. They assumed in turn the responsibility to define such terms, in order to demonstrate how their nation did or did not fall within the boundaries of their definitions. To know if the United States was an empire, one first had to know what an empire looked like.

Immerman knows an empire when he sees it, and for the full payoff of his argument, implores us to do the same. Reams have been written on the topic since Beard and Williams—and they are by no means the only two one might cite as starting points for this debate. Subsequent scholars have applied post-modernism, orientalism, or like Robinson and Gallagher other theoretical constructs of empire gleaned from Britain’s imperial legacy to the American case. The purpose for each to was to nail down if, and if so what kind, of empire Washington directs. By focusing on what he terms six “exemplary” individuals within the American past who each contributed to the formation of American imperial growth and policy, and by focusing on six individuals who quite frankly spent little time pondering the necessity of American empire rather than its broader utility at home and abroad, Immerman effectively dodges the question that occupied previous scholars. This is a wise choice indeed, made possible by the times. Williams could be called to task for his political views. With no McCarthy-era committee to analyze and critique his conclusions, Immerman is free to explore the broader meaning of the American empire rather than defend himself in a debate over its very existence. We are free, therefore, to debate its merits and flaws, and the implications of each. “The United States fit even the most restricted definition of empire by the outbreak of the Civil War,” he offers, while later noting, “the empire that America constructed in the twentieth century is the most powerful empire in world history” (p. 10 and 12).

What occurred in between 1865 and 1989 is of the greatest importance, as the nature of American empire changed dramatically in the intervening years. I’ve already noted Immerman’s answer: that Americans began their national history bent on establishing a sphere wherein liberty could successfully grow and flourish, while their successors so successfully expanded the sphere per Madison’s suggestion that they found it within their ability to consider the universal implications of their might. Where once this was a land in which liberty might grow if properly tended, it became a state powerful enough to bring American-style liberties to all. And this power carried with it a dangerous presumptive moral obligation to do just that: to transform the world that spawned America into a world of and for America.

This is Immerman’s story, that American policymakers grappled with the growing power of their state and their concordant ability to impose American liberties on the world, and that they assumed the burden. This observation calls to mind, yet turns on its head in an enlightening manner, John Locke’s famous dictum that “In the beginning, all the world was

America.” He meant a natural state in which mankind might exist free of societal bonds. Immerman tells us that for American policymakers at the onset of the twenty-first century, their power had become like that of the cosmic creator, capable of remaking social bonds through the sheer weight of American power and force. Military force held particular appeal for men like Paul Wolfowitz, who found it bothersome if not unpatriotic to question the universality of American values and ideals, and indeed who considered it immoral to delay the bounty of American liberties one day longer from oppressed peoples throughout the world. It was particularly sinful in their view to deny freedom to oppressed peoples, not coincidentally, who happened to reside astride a sea of oil. “To ensure liberty for all,” Immerman concluded of Wolfowitz’s worldview, “America must destroy liberty’s enemies” (p. 224). And like capitalism itself, creativity and prosperity might flourish from an environment purified by the fires of selective creative destruction. Iraqis “view us as their hoped-for liberator,” Wolfowitz noted just prior to the 2003 invasion of their land, because “they know that America will not come as a conqueror” (p. 226). Of greater importance, Wolfowitz argued, Iraqis knew that the path to true peace and prosperity lay in mimicking Americans in their quest for liberty, because the two peoples are alike in being “driven by the dream of a just and democratic society in Iraq” (p. 226).” As Immerman bluntly concludes, “Wolfowitz’s hubris led to what may turn out to be the greatest strategic blunder in U.S. history, a blunder that could prove fatal to the American empire” (p.225).

Immerman’s thesis that Americans have over time transformed their empire from one devoted to liberty to one destined to expand liberty is to my mind not only powerful and instructive but also correct, though it is not, to recall another famous line from the 2003 invasion, a “slam dunk.” The reason is ingrained within the structure of the book itself. By focusing on six “exemplary” individuals cut from the wide cloth of America’s imperial past, exemplary not in their excellence but rather for what Immerman explicitly deems their representative nature, he fully and consciously engages the literature and legacy of Beard and Williams and their disciples, as he both explicitly and implicitly shows that the imperial urge within America’s past was ubiquitous and omnipresent, even as it grew in intensity and purpose. Americans have always been empire-builders, he tells us. At least, a certain class of American policymaker, cut from a particular piece of the national cloth from which power was interwoven with purpose.

But how large that swatch remains, is still an open question in the book.

Immerman provides slam-dunk evidence that empire runs consistently through American veins. But by largely avoiding discussion of imperial critics, those who countered Lodge and Seward and Dulles’ large policies with smaller visions of America’s mission and global role, he unfortunately makes it difficult to discern the true weight and value of the six exemplary gentlemen upon which he focuses. Their collective biographies tell us much, most important of all that their vision was not only influential but ultimately decisive; what it does not reveal, however, is how much of a close-run thing their success was. Each suffered from critics and political quandaries. Seward’s empire was folly; Lodge endured the barbs of anti-imperialists acutely while Dulles endured critiques from the right and left for failing to expand liberty fast enough while simultaneously expanding it too broadly and without restraint. Only Wolfowitz, it would appear with only a few years of hindsight as our guide, lived in an era (and this only after September 2001, and only until 2004) when

the political currents against him were more surface-chop than deep countervailing currents. Greater emphasis on the dissenters to the ideas of the exemplary six might have provided readers with greater ability to perceive the context of their influence; at the same time, such context would have added little to the overall thrust of Immerman's important thesis, one worthy of deep discussion and engagement by historians and students for years to come.

I conclude with a personal note. As Immerman graciously noted in the book's acknowledgements, I was indeed present at or at least near this book's creation, witness to his initial thinking on the project's scope and structure. Like Alfonso the Wise from whom Dean Acheson took the title of his memoirs, I had some critiques, though like most critics these were largely (and prudently) politely refuted by the wiser creator. Along with the editors of H-Net, we determined that I might reasonably contribute to this review forum, so long as I openly acknowledged that personal tie. One quibble remains. Change over time matters to historians, even when addressing their alma maters. The Cornell of Immerman's youth featured a Telluride House whose character proved central to Wolfowitz's intellectual development. It was an intellectual community deemed at the very epicenter of university's academic mission, a center of academic enlightenment and daresay elitism set within the already rarified air of the Ivy League. This was not, however, the Telluride of 1995, where I have no doubt the intellectual ability remained the same as in Wolfowitz's day in 1965, but its elite nature and mission had changed dramatically. Where once intellectual elitism reigned, a generation later it was artistic creativity. Paradoxically, the community that so greatly influenced Wolfowitz took the opposite path of America's empire, turning not outward but inward, producing contributors not to policy debates but to humanistic exploration.

Thus I was truly shocked to learn, as Immerman prepared this book, that Wolfowitz had been at Telluride and that the experience had helped make his career, as I was far more used to its graduates assuming leading roles in artistic or creative communities rather than the Pentagon or national security apparatus. Telluride meant something to Immerman, himself a graduate of Cornell from the 60's; it meant something far different a generation later, a generation one might argue that finds greater interest in its own self than in the community's affairs. This, I note, is my generation, concerned less with building empire than in sustaining it, driven thus less by hope than by fear. In our case, it is the fear of losing the benefits of power we witness around us, the fruits of previous labors, the bounty of empire.

So it is with generations, so too with imperial missions broadly. We are wise then, as we consider Immerman's ultimate thesis, to note his conclusion as well: that while America's imperial mission grew and morphed over time, its mission itself is forever more character and process than destination. "One can only speculate about the lasting effect of such behavior," Immerman notes in the book's conclusion [p. 236]. His context was the degrading and questionable activities undertaken by American soldiers and statesmen bent on protecting the American empire no matter the cost after 9/11. We might well take his conclusion to mind when considering his thesis as well, because like Beard and Williams and all who considered empire, the consideration itself matters to Immerman through the

pages of this book, because it is only by pondering ourselves and our past, as individuals and as a nation, that we might begin to chart a course for liberty anew.

Review by Joan Hoff, Montana State University, Bozeman

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As Richard Immerman notes in his Introduction, “readers will doubtless quarrel with the selection” (14) of the six men he singled out as representatives of America’s empire for liberty. Indeed, it would be an exercise in futility to suggest other men as more or less illustrative. Additionally, in his Acknowledgment Immerman cites Fred Greenstein’s reassurance to him that “individuals do matter” (ix) which in part prompted him to write this book. While denying that his interpretation “plays down” political, economic, or socio-culture influences on U.S. diplomacy, Immerman thinks that when “one sifts through the multiple influences that are the stuff of history one ends up with individuals who choose to do one thing and not another.” (14)

There can be no doubt that “individuals do matter” (ix) to historians and political scientists, but often this approach results in excessive application of the rational actor theory of history, meaning that events do not make the person, but that the person acting rationally influences or even trumps events. Most of us would think that our presidents or other government decision-makers are, indeed, rational actors, in control and acting logically, despite evidence to the contrary. Clearly this assumption is at the heart of Immerman’s characterization of the six men and their respective pursuits of an empire for liberty. Consequently, he does give short shrift to other factors that contribute to American diplomacy because he believes in the salience of certain individuals who made certain choices that determined the course of U.S. diplomacy.

While Immerman deftly indicates what events in their backgrounds may have influenced their views, once they were in positions of influence seldom did these six men learn from events as much as they manipulate them to fit their preconceptions. As William Pfaff has pointed out, since the mid-nineteenth century the United States turned its “conception of American Manifest Destiny . . . [into] universal relevance and validity . . . [using it] to justify the arbitrary use of power to impose national will,” regardless of any lip service paid to liberty, freedom, or various definitions of empire. In this sense the country has not been particularly virtuous, unique, or exceptional. It simply followed “a classical progression . . . in the acquisition of power” with increasing abuses of that power. Yet the myth persists that the United States is an exceptionally virtuous empire with no limits on its ability to act in the world even though “creating a better world [in its own image] is an endless task” that could, as Charles A. Beard said, lead to “perpetual war for perpetual peace.”<sup>1</sup>

This myth of the virtuous empire is particularly true of Immerman’s accounts of John Foster Dulles, about whom Immerman is a long-standing expert, and Paul Wolfowitz. In my opinion both men’s rigidly religious and personal morality had little to do with any belief in

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1. William Pfaff, *The Irony of Manifest Destiny: The Tragedy of America’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Walker & Company, 2010), 184; Claes G. Ryn, *America the Virtuous: The Crisis of Democracy and the Quest for Empire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2003), 8, 15-24, 38 (quotation); and Gore Vidal, *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace: How We Got To Be So Hated* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2002), 3-21 (Beard quotation on 20).

an empire for liberty, regardless of how the term liberty is redefined to apply to them. Their very arrogance has always seemed to me to subordinate ethical values in U.S. foreign policy to an ideology of national exceptionalism and triumphalism both before and after the fall of Communism.

Immerman, however, is not concerned about holding his subjects to a standard of public ethics as represented in enduring national core values. In fact, he really does not mention core values until the six-page Postscript and then only in relation to the Global War on Terror (GWOT) which he thinks has finally awakened Americans to the country's violation of the concept of liberty at home and abroad. Instead, he concentrates on the personal moral views of his subjects as they relate to empire and liberty. The distinction between national ethics and personal morality is important, but usually ignored by those scholars and pundits commenting on foreign relations. Ethics refers to public, rather than private, rules and cultural standards that at the global level consist of both customary and formal international law. Morality is primarily a personal guide for private behavior that often involves self-sacrifice and unselfishness inappropriate when applied to state action because the welfare of millions is at stake, not that of a single individual.<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, the emergence of the national security state has always worked against ethical American core values as defined first by the Founders and later by anti-imperialist, isolationist, and anti-war groups. Such core values initially expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights were not simply abstractions, and first found expression in American diplomacy in the form of political isolationism, neutrality, and freedom of the seas. Later, as the United States became more powerful these were replaced by democracy based self-determination, human rights, free trade as a means for promoting peace, and international cooperation. All were and are more concrete diplomatic goals than the idea of liberty. At least since the Cold War and probably since the late 1890s the pursuit of an empire for liberty has been more rhetorical than real, especially as the country pursued economic, military, and cultural dominance in the course of the twentieth century, without much regard for national ethical standards or core values.<sup>3</sup>

By not dealing with public ethics as reflected in nation's specific core values, as opposed to the abstract concepts of empire and liberty, Immerman can single out Benjamin Franklin as setting in motion an American empire for liberty even though when Franklin spoke of liberty or its absence "he was more concerned with the power and relationships among the powerful." For Franklin "liberty was a means to an end, not an end in itself." (57). In contrast, John Quincy Adams realized that "expansion endangered . . . [American] liberties"

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2. William O. Walker III, *National Security and Core Values in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5-6; Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Necessary Amorality of Foreign Affairs," *Harper's Magazine*, August 1971, 72-77 (quoting Reinhold Neibuhr); and Alan Wolfe, *Moral Freedom: The Impossible idea that Defines the War We Live* (New York: Norton, 2001), 160-6.

3. Walker, 5-6, 56, 60; Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy: From Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22-24, 68, 111; and Ryn, 2-3.

and so he proposed a constitutional amendment to ensure that people in acquired territory (such as the Louisiana Purchase) ultimately would enjoy “all the rights and liberties that came with incorporation into the United States.” (91) Likewise, Adams opposed the United States going “abroad in search of monsters to destroy” because that would result in substituting force for liberty. (88) He also anguished “over the divergence between Manifest Destiny and the Empire for Liberty” because as he “demanded the abolition of colonization, the more difficult it became to divorce the expansion of U.S. territory from the expansion of slavery.” (91) So he opposed the annexation of Texas. In this sense Adams at least demonstrated an intellectual and ethical struggle with the concept of liberty more than the other five subjects in the book.

William Henry Seward is described as Adams’s “standard bearer” (104) despite the fact that he “did not believe in equality between blacks and whites” (102) because blacks were “incapable of . . . assimilation and absorption” and constituted “inferior masses.” (112) Nonetheless, he did not support slavery. Yet Immerman never quotes him as using the word liberty--only freedom. Seward wanted to extend freedom throughout the world, not through military might, but through commerce and “strategically situated islands,” (123) all the while keeping the nonwhites in peacefully acquired territories to a minimum because they were “inassimilable, inferior, and likely ungovernable.” (122)

Then there was Henry Cabot Lodge, the “point man for American imperialism” for whom “liberty was never more than an abstraction” and who “hardly ever spoke” the terms liberty and empire together. (137, 141) Immerman notes that Lodge’s “facility for intellectual gymnastics” gave him the ability not to admit any contradiction between imposing American freedom, let alone liberty, on the Filipinos who did not want either forced on them by the United States.(152). Lodge’s racism not only allowed him to rationalize the atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers in the Philippines, but also to become “the Senate’s most recognizable voice opposing immigration as well as promoting empire.” (154) The race issue made Lodge begin “to think in terms of an Empire *of*, in contrast to *for*, Liberty” (156) because he came to the conclusion that the country’s national character could not be exported and so “only Americans could be Americans.” (156) This change in attitude put him on a collision course with Woodrow Wilson that carried over into his opposition to the president’s foreign policy both before and after World War I. Unlike Lodge, Wilson actually supported an empire for liberty though the League of Nations in which American norms and principles would dominate. Lodge’s unilateralism determined that he “would entrust the American empire only to American power” (161) and so the personal and political animosity between these two men destroyed each others’ vision of empire.

As I have already indicated, the last two men Immerman discusses, John Foster Dulles and Paul Wolfowitz, are even less representative of advocates for an empire of liberty than the others. Early on in his career, according to Immerman, “the defense or promotion of liberty, whether American or not, was not a high priority for Foster.” (165) In his 1939 book, *War, Peace, and Change*, when he did come up with “an idiosyncratic conception of empires, liberties, and conflict . . . he was not always consistent with this conception,” and he “did not write explicitly about either empire or liberty (save for ‘spiritual liberty’).”

(173) Dulles also “did not concern himself with the liberty of those subject to U.S. rules,” and he “did not apply the vocabulary of empire to the United States.” (172) He also was not a “theorist of empire” (178). Finally, Immerman concludes that as secretary of state the “empire that Dulles was so instrumental in constructing was unequivocally not an empire of liberty.” (195)

Others have described Dulles as “distressingly puritanical” who brought with him a “pharisaic inclination to see in the world struggle a national personification of good versus evil, mistakenly elevating the political ideology of anti-Communism into a superior moral principle.” A British foreign officer once labeled Dulles “the woolliest type of useless pontificating American.” Thus, Dulles created “a rigid and moralistic foreign policy” and converted a conflict between two nuclear powers with rival political systems into “a global ideological struggle of epic dimensions.” In essence, he “connected the national myth of savior nation with his own fixed notion of bipolar world struggle, a reflection of his religious convictions.” This self-righteous ideological vision dominated U.S. diplomacy until the fall of Communism when it was unfortunately transferred to the war on terror.<sup>4</sup>

Although Immerman makes passing reference to the “New Look” of the Eisenhower administration as orchestrated by Dulles, the general reader for which this book was written would never know the far-reaching and hypocritical aspects of this foreign policy. For example, liberating “captive peoples” proved a hoax or “sham slogan.” It aimed more at winning domestic votes from Americans of Eastern European origins than freeing oppressed populations from Soviet domination. Theoretically the New Look relied on nuclear and air power to threaten massive retaliation. This “brinkmanship” approach for achieving “more bang for the buck” initially was adopted to save military costs, but Dulles’s bombastic rhetoric gave the impression that the American position was both inflexible and virtuous because it indicated that the United States would not back down in a crisis “ever if it meant going to the brink of war” and, as he once told a reporter: “The United States is almost the only country strong enough and powerful enough to be moral.” All in all, the New Look undermined the nation’s core values more than it contributed to creating an ethical empire for liberty.<sup>5</sup>

When discussing Wolfowitz, Immerman naturally points out the early influence of Leo Strauss and Albert Wohlstetter on his thinking, and Wolfowitz’s participation in the “Team B” within the President’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) that had formed in the mid-1970s. However, he ignores the influence of the *éminence grise* Fritz Kraemer on members of this obscure, rabidly anticommunist group in part because he expressed

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4. Pfaff, 76, 81-82 (all quotations).

5. Frank J. Merli and Theodore A. Wilson, eds., *Makers of American Diplomacy from Theodore Roosevelt to Henry Kissinger* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), 285-313, 302 (more bang quotation); Thomas G. Paterson, et al., *American Foreign Relations: A History Since 1895*, Vol 2 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 6th ed., 2005), 279-80, 286 (all other quotations); and Walker, 139-40.

himself more clearly and simply, often in military terms, than Strauss and Wohlstetter and others on the right did. Beginning in late 1940s Kraemer became a civilian adviser in the Pentagon to such defense and state secretaries and top military commanders as Henry Kissinger (until they parted ways during the Nixon administration), James Schlesinger, Donald Rumsfeld, General Creighton Abrams, General Alexander Haig, Jr., General Vernon A. Walters, Lt. General Edward Rowny, and Major General Edward G. Lansdale.<sup>6</sup>

Kraemer's main and long-lasting claim to fame in the formation of the neoconservatives stemmed from his insistence that the United States should never demonstrate "provocative weakness." By this he meant that the perception of weakness would "provoke" the country's enemies to take aggressive action. So Kraemer successfully proselytized a "militaristic approach to foreign policy. . . rejection of diplomacy. . . [and] emphasis on morality as a guide" for U.S. diplomacy influencing not only those previously mentioned but also Paul Nitze, Richard Cheney, Richard Perle, Elliot Abrams, Douglas Feith, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, William J. Bennett, Richard Armitage, Zalmay Khalilzad, John Bolton, and, of course, Wolfowitz. Kraemer's influence continued after he retired in 1978 through his son, Sven, who served on the National Security Council from 1961 to 1976 and again from 1981 to 1987 when he became policy adviser to Feith, Undersecretary of State during George H.W. Bush's administration. In addition to Kraemer, there was Andrew W. Marshall, whom Nixon appointed in 1973 as director of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment and who, since the 1950s, had advocated a first strike computerized defense based, if necessary, on low-yield nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup> As of 2006 Marshall still held that post and when Kraemer died in 2003 he was praised by all those he had tutored including Kissinger, Haig, Rumsfeld and, especially, Wolfowitz who gave the following remarks at a book party for a hagiographical biography about Kraemer:

There are people who worship death frankly, and not life. People who worship the devil, I believe, and not God. They are an evil that has to be confronted . . . . Fortunately, we do have a president that [sic] is prepared to see it the way I think Fritz Kraemer would have seen it, and is prepared to confront it. I believe his spirit still lives.<sup>8</sup>

By ignoring both Kraemer and Marshall, Immerman presents a curiously one-dimensional portrayal of the reasons for Wolfowitz's ability to bring together Rumsfeld and those "Cheney-type 'apostles of brute force'" (219) with his own more optimistic view of

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6. Len Colodny and Tom Shachtman, *The Forty Years War: The Rise and Fall of the Neocons from Nixon to Obama* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 4, 22, 27-28, 30-31, 33-35, 72-73, 146-47, 152-53, 193-95, 244, 258, 273-75, 401, 405.

7. Anne Hessing Cahn, "Team B: The Trillion-Dollar Experiment," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 49, no. 3 (April 1993): 22, 24-27; Colodny and Shachtman, 3-4 (quotations), 97, 142-43, 195, 239, 362-65, 422-23; and Walker, 140, 192-93.

8. Colodny, 3-4; Hubertus Hoffman, *Fritz Kraemer on Excellence* (New York: World Security Network Foundation, 2004); and Hoff, 127-28 (quotation).

remaking the world through proselytizing liberty by either co-opting “potential opposition” (217) or using legitimate preemptive attacks to rid the “world of all those tyrants who held in contempt the values and liberties that the United States stood for.” (216) Both camps wanted to ensure that the United States retained its “status as the unrivaled unipolar power.” Thus Wolfowitz created an unethical alliance of neoconservatives who wanted “to proceed unilaterally and exterminate the evil doers” (220) with what came to be known as the “Wolfowitz Doctrine.” The doctrine was first formulated in the 1992 Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) document and, despite its many redactions to make it more palatable to Bush, Sr., the American public, and traditional allies, it has been compared to the NSC 68 in terms of its impact on American diplomacy. The DPG called for increased American defense spending; pre-emptive action whenever the United States perceived a threat from both enemies and friends; unilateral action whenever possible; and the prevention of any nation from developing weapons of mass destruction and/or threatening U.S. access to vital natural resources. Thus, the Wolfowitz Doctrine presaged the better known formation in 1997 of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) whose subsequent extreme policy recommendations built on those in the DPG and found acceptance in the George W. Bush administration.<sup>9</sup> Immerman’s account of the Wolfowitz Doctrine underplays its negative long-term impact, stressing instead, how watered-down the final version was because of its many redactions.

Immerman condemns Wolfowitz’s egocentric and irrational push for the Iraqi war, without occupation or exit plan, because it resulted in the “greatest strategic blunder in U.S. history, a blunder that could fatal to the American empire.” (225) Yet the only time he mentions ethics in connection with Wolfowitz is when, as head of the World Bank, he violated that organization’s ethical and governance guidelines because of a private moral failing.

The personal biographical sketches Immerman includes about the private lives and public policies cannot be factually faulted. In the policies of all six men, with the exception of Adams, Immerman indicates that, at the very least, that they usually compromised the idea of liberty in pursuing their respective versions of an American empire. It was not that liberty and empire were on a collision course, as he seems to imply. In fact, they seldom could be found in alliance in the diplomacy of most of his subjects. Immerman does not usually hold these architects of empire accountable for any mistakes made or ethics and core values violated in their pursuit of an empire for liberty. Unless American decision makers of the past and present are held to some standard or sense of ethics, there can be no re-evaluation or reformation of U.S. foreign policy to begin to bring it in line with national core values.

In his six-page Postscript Immerman does indicate that although Americans’ belief in the exceptional nature of their country did not lead them to question the various definitions of liberty propagated by their leaders in the name of empire, they did begin to see a disconnect with the onset of the GWOT. I think that Americans began to recognize challenges to the nation’s core values, including liberty, as far back as Vietnam. Immerman

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9. Walker, 262 (quotation); and Hoff, 192.

concludes by saying it is up to Americans “to rethink who they are to revisit their history, and to revise their beliefs about American’s global mission” (234) in order for U.S. foreign policy to change. It probably would be more effective if diplomatic decisions makers did this and finally took responsibility for errors in judgement or manipulation of data in their pursuit of an impossible utopian dream of an exceptional, virtuous empire for liberty. This is not likely because, according to Pfaff, “increasing abuses of power . . . characterized the Cold War, the Vietnam war, and the eight years of the Bush administration . . . [resulting] in a colossally militarized but morally nugatory global mission *supported by apparent majorities of the political, intellectual, and academic elites of the nation.*”<sup>10</sup>

George Bush’s recent memoir reflects this chronic problem of political leaders never admitting diplomatic mistakes and the devastating economic and political blowback that often results.<sup>11</sup> This lack of accountability is being perpetuated by the Obama administration’s refusal to prosecute or, at the very least, investigate dubious decisions by Bush officials that curtailed civil liberties at home and human rights abroad.<sup>12</sup> Such inaction only perpetuates the practice that American politicians, with few exceptions, are above the law and do not have to fear being held liable for ethical or other violations of the country’s core values. It is as though they never have to say they are sorry or be subject to the possibility of indictment as long as they maintain they acted morally and in good conscience to ensure the security of the nation. But then again, I am still waiting for an apology for the Vietnam War.

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10. Pfaff, 184, 190 (quotations, emphasis added); and Ryn, 1-3, 10-11.

11. Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Cost and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 3-33, 193-215, *passim*.

12. Garry Wills, *Bomb Power: The Modern Presidency and the National Security State* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2010), 238-39.

Review by William Weeks, University of San Diego

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As I write these words, signs of the decline if not collapse of the American Empire are all around. In early October, an imperial turning point may have been reached when China once again rebuffed U.S. efforts to get it to trim its massive trade surplus by devaluing its currency. The U.S. appears helpless to stop the continued drain of hundreds of millions of dollars a day to China, either by leveling the currency playing field or by restraining its own appetite for cheap foreign goods. Equally ominous, recent reports of China's development of a "carrier-killer" ballistic missile capability are perhaps the first indication of the end of the Pacific Ocean as an American imperial lake. In Afghanistan, "graveyard of empires," American troops are bogged down in an imperial fiasco that is diminishing both the Empire's coffers and its prestige. Internally the Empire is undergoing serious cultural and economic strains. The "bonds of sympathy and affection" that James Monroe and others saw as necessary in order to make the citizens of the nation "one people," are fraying by the day. David Waldstreicher has shown how in the early years an American national identity (like the Union itself) was constructed by a society "in the midst of perpetual fetes."<sup>1</sup> Today that identity is in the process of being de-constructed, in both the theoretical and practical uses of the term, by a culture in the midst of perpetual fits of one sort or another. Depending on one's perspective, America is at once too racist, too sexist, too greedy, too godless, too socialist, etc., and in dire need of reform if not revolution. The Tea Party and the academic left are in agreement that contemporary America is corrupt and wrong, albeit for very different reasons. Some Texans, including Governor Rick Perry, appear to be actively contemplating secession. Financially, recent reports of massive foreclosure fraud by the banking industry are just the latest in a long string of embarrassments (Enron, Worldcom, etc.) pointing to the collapse of sound business practices in the United States. The most optimistic analysis regarding the future is the hope that the Empire will slowly lose its position in the world hierarchy; more pessimistic commentators such as Niall Ferguson warn that a major shift in global power relations might happen much more suddenly. It seems likely that before too long, the question of "why did the American Empire fall?" may be as hotly debated as the similar question long posed about Rome.

Against this backdrop, after a half century of debating the question, it seems odd that Richard Immerman's valuable new contribution to the study of the American Empire should still find it necessary to rebut those who deny its very existence. Continuing this discussion against a backdrop of the contemporary imperial swoon does not make a case for the relevance of our field to the larger public. Fine distinctions between "hegemons" and "empires," or "imperialists and imperial" begins to resemble a sort of 21<sup>st</sup> century scholasticism in cyberspace-- hardly what is required from a putative intellectual elite at this critical moment in world history. Yet the author apparently feels compelled to confront this issue and this fact at times makes him tentative in his arguments. If on page 4

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<sup>1</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In The Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997).

he “seeks to persuade the reader that America is and always has been an empire,” by page 10 he is clearly backpeddling: “The United States fit even the most restrictive definition of Empire by the outbreak of the Civil War. It exercised sovereignty over a large expanse of territory that enveloped previously autonomous units and included peoples of disparate races and national origins whose residence within that Empire was not voluntary. Further, at least its continental expansion was the product of violence. Antebellum Americans used the word *empire* to describe the U.S. as a sovereign state. But that sovereign state grew by wresting away the sovereignty of non-American, indigenous populations, just as had the more traditional ‘Old World’ empires of the day.” (10-11) But the effort to measure the American Empire by the “most restrictive definition” of “old world empires” overlooks the fact that the antebellum American Empire was more oppressive towards Native Americans than that of Great Britain and far worse than that of the French and Spanish empires. Alan Taylor, Timothy Dowd, Colin Calloway, among others, have demonstrated beyond rational argument that the true losers of the War of Independence and the War of 1812 were the Indians of the Trans-Appalachian west, who were deprived of the “middle ground” that they had navigated amongst the European empires for centuries and who now had to submit to the Americans or face extermination.<sup>2</sup> That the American Empire begins in the trans-Appalachian west is not a new idea. As Immerman notes, no less an historian than Henry Cabot Lodge understood that the road to the conquest of the Philippines began in the Ohio River Valley. (153) Even then, the two situations were not wholly comparable in that the Philippines from the start of its time as a U.S. colony could look forward to its independence, but the natives of Ohio have no immediate prospect of recovering their autonomy. Their conquest was total and permanent in a way that those of the European empires were not. Immerman hints at this when he writes “yet it was precisely during the earlier years—the century preceding America’s annexation of Hawaii and the conquest of the Philippines, that the United States was the most ruthless in creating the empire and least respectful of non-Americans’ . . . liberty.” (6) Historians have long understood that American imperial history is at least as old as American national history but they have been slow to appreciate the implications of that fact. The assumption of the fundamentally non-colonial nature of U.S. North American expansionism is the first step in becoming an empire-denier. Once one fully grasps the fact that the continental American empire did acquire colonies, except that it called them “states,” the idea of an American Empire becomes much less controversial. In other words, the conquest of Ohio is no different than the conquest of Hawaii, in that both were acquired without the uncoerced consent of the local populations. (Congress may come to regret its public apology to Native Hawaiians on this point).

That the question of an American Empire is rooted in an extensive background political debate rather than a dispassionate assessment of the evidence at hand is implicit in Immerman’s statement: “I appreciate the arguments that America has been a force for good

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Taylor, *The Divided Ground: Indians, Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (New York, 2006); Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country* (New York, 1995); Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore, 1992).

in the world, that its ideals and values, especially those concerned with liberty, do have universal applicability, that its missionary zeal to modernize less developed areas can be beneficial, and that pursuit of foreign policies and strategies designed to promote the security of domestic and international constituents is legitimate and necessary for any state. That said, my judgment is that by building an empire through either direct conquest or informal control the United States has frequently done evil in the name of good.” (6) Yet isn’t the assumption that the U.S. has been “a force for good” hopelessly subjective, rooted only in the interests and perspectives of the speaker? And how can “liberty” have “universal applicability” when the author acknowledges that “. . .for Americans, liberty is even more difficult to define than empire.” (5) Liberty, like Empire, is a contested term whose meaning evolves over time, making them both moving targets for historians.

Going forward, maybe it would be best for historians (this one included) to resist the evaluative tendency altogether. Was the American Empire a good idea? In answering the question, perhaps we should take our cue from Mao Tse-Tung’s reputed reply to a similar query on the French Revolution: “it is too soon to tell.” Some scholarly distance is needed, the first step to which may involve a reworking of the “mental maps” that historians bring to these questions. When the U.S. conquest of North America is situated in the larger context of the Euro-American conquest of the world, 1492-1914, the role of the United States as functioning both in opposition to European imperialism and as the ultimate expression of that tendency becomes clear. Positing the U.S. as an empire from the start helps explain how its ascent to global imperial power was aided by the relative decline of the European imperial footprint, first in North America, then in the Western Hemisphere, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, globally. The focus needs to be on describing/defining/contextualizing the American Empire, and leaving the value judgments to future historians (if we have a future) who are not so close to the events being discussed. Placing the American Empire in a world historical context may actually rehabilitate the United States’s historic reputation. Certainly it is more than a coincidence that the take-off in the Industrial Revolution (and in the Western World’s separation from the rest of the planet), roughly 1800-2000, maps perfectly onto the birth, growth, apex, and beginnings of decline, of the American Empire. My sense is that there is a strong argument to be made that the United States is the key transformative civilization in human history, whose technological, architectural, political, economic, and cultural accomplishments, like Rome’s, will persist long after its decline in relative importance. As Victoria de Grazia observes in *Irresistible Empire*, her stellar book on the U.S. market empire of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “Less than a century has passed, but American hegemony has left traces as distinctive if not as permanent as the Roman Empire left over a span of four centuries.”<sup>3</sup> It’s not all war, slavery, and genocide, as some books would seem to have it.

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<sup>3</sup> Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America’s Advance Through Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005), 480. It is a source of wonder to me that what is in my opinion one of the best books ever written on the American Empire was produced by a scholar whose primary specialty is European history.

*Empire for Liberty* in essence is a series of character sketches of major American empire builders, and in that respect a better title might have been *Six for Empire*, a nice counterpoint to Robert Beisner's classic study of the anti-imperialists *Twelve Against Empire*. He starts, appropriately, with Benjamin Franklin, who propagated an expansionist, imperialist vision of a rapidly expanding (white) population secured by a durable union of Britain's North American colonies. In the original scheme a United Colonies of America would be the engine of continental expansionism, providing a key market for British manufactures as well as a source of raw materials. British fears and colonial obtuseness prevented this vision from becoming a reality, forcing Franklin into supporting an independent American Union, best understood as a key fork in the road of the American Empire, not its beginning.

The presence of John Quincy Adams in the narrative is also highly appropriate. To my mind, Adams remains the most important ideologist/theoretician/builder of the antebellum empire and an individual in whom the contradictions of American Unionism is perhaps most clearly seen. Adams linked a staunch Unionism to an expansionist vision undergirded by a messianic conception of American nationalism. Yet staunch nationalist that he was, as early as 1820, Adams could barely contain his objections to the slave institution his nationalism forced him to both tolerate and defend. Adams' internal struggle over slavery reveals the fragile nature of the Unionist consensus in the minds of even the most zealous nationalists. The fiction of national unity could be maintained only by tacit agreement not to talk about the major differences that threatened to tear it apart. Adams as much as anyone embodied the contradiction of a zealous nationalism that ultimately could not be reconciled to the existence of slavery, if only for the embarrassment it caused the country on the international stage.

Adams' acolyte William Henry Seward is the next figure examined by Immerman. Seward is rightly known as a champion of "the Seward Doctrine," a sea-based American Empire, but he was not the originator of it. An American Empire of the Seas can be understood as a second aspect of the American Empire, a place where U.S. norms were enforced by naval power. While he undoubtedly was one of the great ideologues of American Empire, Seward's record as Secretary of State continues to leave me, and Immerman, unimpressed: "Seward's record between 1865 and 1868. . . was dismal." And like many historians, Immerman mocks Seward's April 1861 proposal to Lincoln that the U.S. provoke a confrontation with France or Britain as a way of heading off Civil War. Yet in my view his gambit to start a war in order to avoid disunion is not as wacky as it is often treated. Contra Waldstreicher, the primary builder of nationalist sentiment is not "perpetual fetes" but rather war, which gives the citizenry something tangible to perpetually fete about. Going abroad in search of monsters to destroy may seem a desperate measure to maintain unity but at least Seward was not passive in the approach to civil war. It seems fair to say that had the Lincoln administration known the bloodbath that was coming they would have "considered" more extreme measures than they did to prevent it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a more favorable take on Seward's efforts to avert war, see Lawrence M. Denton, *William Henry Seward and the Secession Crisis: The Effort to Prevent Civil War*, (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2009).

Immerman takes Seward, staunch abolitionist in his early political career, gently to task for backing away somewhat from his principled stands on race as his foreign policy ambitions increased. (113) Indeed, an entire school of thought seems to have emerged of late that is highly critical of eighteenth and nineteenth century American political leaders for being insufficiently concerned with equality. This to me seems wrongheaded. Seward, like Washington, Lincoln, and Adams (to name three) understood that the most important thing was not how egalitarian, but rather how united, the U.S. was. However repugnant Seward found slavery, however much it rendered the American example absurd in the eyes of many, it did not mean that he was ready to embrace the concept of black equality. Union instead was his touchstone, and all his political stands were subordinate to it. This points to a thread that ties all of the figures in the text together: their common belief that political Union was the precondition for both Empire and Liberty. This tendency is most evident in Franklin, Adams, Seward, and Lodge, but it is implicit in John Foster Dulles and Paul Wolfowitz.

Immerman's chapter on John Foster Dulles reveals him to be a transitional figure, on the one hand sympathetic to anti-colonial struggles in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the other hand zealously committed to maintaining the status quo when the U.S. achieved global dominance after World War II. Certainly his relationship to United Fruit Company and its role in the 1954 coup in Guatemala is a prime example of an American informal Empire built on financial control.

At first I had my doubts about including Wolfowitz in the collection. He seems such a lightweight-- intellectually, professionally and personally-- as compared to the others, little more than an overprivileged, draft-deferring academic-cum-think tanker. My initial thought was that Henry Kissinger would have been a more appropriate figure for the post 60s era. But Wolfowitz's role as chief architect of the Iraq War, what Immerman deems "the greatest strategic blunder in U.S. history, a blunder that could prove fatal to the American Empire" (225) makes him indispensable. Under the tutelage of Leo Strauss, and Albert Wohlstetter at the University of Chicago, Wolfowitz learned about the necessity of American power, the efficacy of American power, but it seems all too little about the limits of American power. His refusal to join the anti-Vietnam war movement while at Cornell in the 1960s proved good for his career as a neo-conservative but it may have prevented him from absorbing the one foreign policy lesson this intellectual prodigy needed to learn the most. Nonetheless, his quick mind and neo-conservative orientation hastened his rise in the foreign policy bureaucracy.

Immerman's sketches of Dulles and Wolfowitz reveal the U.S. as a mature empire, less concerned with expanding the realm (except perhaps into space) and more with defending it from its would-be challengers. In the post-war era, the determination to avoid "another Munich" or "another Holocaust" has paralyzed the capacity for nuanced analysis. Wolfowitz, an ivory-tower ideologue "notorious for his disorganization and administrative ineptness," who even as he approached sixty sported "the air of a promising brainy student being groomed for great things," (223) perhaps represents microcosm of the limitations of contemporary American foreign policy elites. That Wolfowitz's post-Bush administration

career as President of the World Bank (unlike that of Robert McNamara) ended amidst charges of bad judgment, greed and influence peddling merely confirms his status as a lightweight. Having played a historic role in the fall of the American Empire, Wolfowitz now occupies a comfortable position as a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, proving once again that, in modern American life, after having reached a certain level of status/achievement there is no such thing as failure.

Richard Immerman has produced six fascinating profiles in American imperial courage. His book deserves to be read and debated, especially in the seminar room. It is a valuable contribution to what I hope is the birth of a distinct subfield of American Empire studies, much like historians of the British Empire have long had. Such an approach has much to recommend it: it would better integrate the study of U.S. national history in a global and world historical context. It would more clearly limit the internal and external dynamics of the American Empire, problematizing the concept of a wholly legitimate “national space.” And, practically speaking, it might just boost undergraduate enrollments in diplomatic history classes. For if it is true that “power is the ultimate aphrodisiac,” as Henry Kissinger famously asserted, than it is also true that American imperial power, unprecedented in its scale and scope, is the ultimate ultimate aphrodisiac. Cognizance of that fact alone should stimulate fresh interest in the field.

For Samuel Flagg Bemis, the American Empire was an “aberration”; for William Appleman Williams, it was a “tragedy”; for others, it is the national equivalent of a blood libel. Let’s forget about all of those categories, assume it is a fact of history neither to be lamented nor celebrated, and take a dispassionate and analytical approach to its study.

Review by Tom Zeiler, University of Colorado

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As the administration of George W. Bush recedes into history, its impact is still fresh for historians of U.S. foreign relations. The reaction goes beyond scholarly assessments; it is oftentimes a visceral response of disgust and bewilderment. With Bush in mind, some of our best scholars – Walter Hixson, Michael Hunt, and George Herring – have recently turned out provocative books that survey the history of America’s involvement overseas. Now another major figure in the field, Richard Immerman, has entered the arena with this excellent synthesis that, like the others, has a strong argument in which one discerns the influence of Bush II. Immerman’s treatment of the Bush team, and namely Paul Wolfowitz, is fair – and searing – toward the administration’s galling unilateralism and betrayal of American principles. Thus, this is a study that keeps up with the times and scholarly trends.

*Empire for Liberty* also caused me to groan as I read its intent to understand the course of empire as a foundation of American foreign relations. I’m suffering from imperial fatigue, though not from the news of the American empire but rather from the study of it. Immerman has written nothing less than an excellent book, but he also concedes the plethora of books on the topic that were spurred by the global war on terrorism and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. He has something new to add to the (mostly) diatribes against American imperialism and exceptionalism. He presents a nuanced interpretation of the grand sweep of America’s rise to power and its hegemony by cleverly tracing the history through the biographies of six representative figures. His conclusions are convincing about these imperial-minded men. Portraying William Seward as *the* greatest imperial visionary, for instance, or John Foster Dulles as a tough guy in public but a true philosopher in private circles, are just two examples of Immerman’s logical conclusions. Henry Cabot Lodge would have fit perfectly into Rumsfeld’s Pentagon as a super-nationalist. Thus, Immerman has seized on the idea of empire and applied it across time to show its variations. Regardless of my reaction against our obsession with empire, the result is a stimulating and well-written book.

Yet although we now accept that premise of America as an empire (even Bush backers concede this point), *Empire for Liberty* left me with questions. First off, according to Immerman, imperialism appears to be a normal course for nations. Paraguay, Canada, and Albania did not achieve empires, but likely not because their leaders eschewed expansion, power, and profits. So, America was not so unique as an imperial aspirant; as Immerman notes, America was “the new empire on the global block” (p. 60). But his presentation seems to support a predetermined course of empire, as if the United States won its independence, and thus – voila! – became an imperialist. I’m not so sure. America oftentimes seemed to be a pawn or a reluctant imperial power later on. There were also many voices which opposed imperialism from the outset and through the years. Immerman goes as far as to imply that Woodrow Wilson thought of the League of Nations – a multilateral and ultimately weak institution – as an “empire” (p. 158). The League of Nations?!

While delineating what is a formal or informal empire has also been a focus of scholars (and Immerman is simply superb on these terms), the lockhold of the empire concept on the public and scholarly imagination is more my concern. At what point does imperial-mindedness set in? According to Immerman, the United States was an empire from the very outset of independence, even though it was both weak and eyed only continental expansion. Many leaders railed against it, as the author well knows. Perhaps Immerman has tried too hard, in his wholly justified pique toward the Bush administration, to come up with an overarching framework and synthesis with which to view American history.

Immerman's treatment of liberty also raises some issues. He readily acknowledges that 'liberty' is difficult to define, but it would have helped if his biographies had provided more examples of liberty in action. This book is much intellectual history and part diplomatic history, so Immerman does not want to get bogged down in policy studies. Yet he does give a lot of historical detail without, surprisingly, backing up one of his key concepts with substantial evidence on the ground. Americans sought their freedom from their beginning; the Franklin chapter is solid on the liberty concept. Immerman also deals appropriately with slavery. Both the Revolution and bondage are obvious examples of liberty-seeking, however. It is harder to determine what Adams, Seward, and Wolfowitz viewed as exemplars of liberty. Regarding the latter, Immerman does a good job in laying out the objectives. Wolfowitz perceived elections in Iraq as evidence that liberty had taken hold, though it was a vague concept when applied there. I found it surprising that earlier in the book there was not at least a paragraph on America's key symbol, the Statue of Liberty, and its meaning for immigrants and ties to foreign policy. And what did Dulles see as America's real contributions to liberty – rollback? Trade liberalism? If so, Immerman needed to give concrete examples.

Then, there is the empire-liberty paradox itself: could the United States have achieved liberty at the same time it succeeded in expanding its power? Immerman questions whether there can be democracy, civil rights, and the like alongside hegemony. We would like to think so, but the record shows, for instance, that the United States allied with dictators who deprived their people of liberty to boost American power. Woodrow Wilson went on a quest for liberty, but he also invaded Mexico. And he sounds awfully similar to Paul Wolfowitz, who also pursued liberty. At least, Immerman wisely notes, Wolfowitz had the hindsight of the Holocaust, atomic bombings, and other horrors behind his rash, liberty-seeking policies. Yet it is troubling that we might judge Wolfowitz as a true seeker of liberty in the same sense we would assess Ben Franklin or Woodrow Wilson.

And so, we return to the Bush shadow that is cast over the entire history. Franklin postulated the notion of American exceptionalism, and sounds like President Bush himself. But the Seward chapter may be the strongest and most convincing one as an indictment of empire and the Bush way. Unlike Franklin, Adams, and Dulles, whose imperial push was a defensive response, Seward acted by *choice* (like Wolfowitz and Bush) rather than from necessity. He allied with Anglo-Saxons, privileged commerce over territorial expansion (though he had his moments of weakness), and articulated a strategy of empire building. He also talked a lot about liberty, though it sounded a bit phony. He proclaimed and behaved like a nineteenth century version of the visionary Wolfowitz, although he was not

as enamored with the use of force. Lodge was the next closest thing to a Bush acolyte, a jingo and unilateralist who went in search of monsters, as did Bush. He believed that America had a mission in the world and had not reached its vaunted stature by chance. But by this time, America was no innocent – it was a determined expansionist, moralist, and participant in the game of realpolitik. I took away from Immerman’s book that Bush was simply the culmination of decades of such thinking and actions, because Wolfowitz expressed no more hubris than Lodge or Dulles - or Seward, for that matter.

Immerman might have built his case even more powerfully if, for instance, he focused more attention on corporate America, the growth of multinationals, and international organizations like GATT, the WTO, and the IMF/World Bank. They are the usual suspects for imperial-minded scholars. He gives them just passing notice – the latter near the end of the book – but they would appear to be the building blocks of the American empire abroad. He makes his case well nonetheless, and with some excellent quotes. His insights are even better, such as the notion that the U.S. expanded its empire at the expense of its allies, and not its enemies, during the 1950s (p. 183). I am unconvinced that it’s “game over”, as Andrew Bacevich blurbed on the back of the book when it comes to the genre of empire writing, because the topic will continue to draw in our field. Yet I am certainly glad that Richard Immerman wrote this stimulating, accurate, and sweeping analysis of American history in an attempt to clarify the term.

Author's Response by Richard H. Immerman, Temple University

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I must begin by thanking Tom Maddox for organizing this roundtable and Howard Jones for agreeing to write the introduction. I also thank Jeff Engel, William Weeks, Joan Hoff, and Tom Zeiler for their careful reading of my book and thought-provoking as well as thoughtful reviews. Such expressions of gratitude are of course obligatory for such roundtables. That they are, I hope, will not make mine seem any less genuine. I sincerely appreciate that such uniformly distinguished scholars took the time to pay my book such close attention and provide such valuable insight.

It goes without saying that I'm pleased that the overall tenor of the reviews is quite positive. Each of the authors does, nevertheless, proffer some well-founded criticisms. I will address them below, albeit somewhat selectively. I do so because my purpose is not to rebut them or otherwise defend my book. Rather, I seek to embed the criticisms and my responses in a broader discussion of my aim for this book, and the challenges that I assess as inherent in achieving that aim.

As I wrote in my acknowledgements to *Empire for Liberty*, in "fundamental ways" I began writing this book as an undergraduate spell-bound by the lectures delivered by Walter LaFeber in an intellectual environment all but defined by the War in Vietnam. It was Walt who introduced me to the notion of an American Empire in a manner that helped me make sense out of the Vietnam experience. Also while I was at Cornell I became aware that whereas in 1780 an anxious Thomas Jefferson used the phrase "Empire of Liberty" when writing to George Rogers Clark about a vulnerable United States, in the aftermath of his triumphant Louisiana Purchase a more self-confident Jefferson transformed the preposition "of" to "for." Referring to the opportunities for further expansion, specifically Canada, Jefferson advised his protégé and successor James Madison in 1809, "[W]e should have such an empire for liberty as she has never surveyed since the creation." I interpreted the change in prepositions as signaling Jefferson's transition to a more aggressive, pro-active exporter of liberty—and as a consequence, an empire-builder.

So a project that examined the concept of America's Empire for Liberty really originated while I was an undergraduate. But the impetus for undertaking it didn't come until decades later, during the interregnum between the end of the Cold War and George W. Bush's declaration of a War on Global Terrorism. Like many historians of U.S. foreign relations, I had conventionally taught a two-semester survey. I believe that the only distinction between my chronological parameters and those of Walt's when I was his student was that his first semester ended at 1914, whereas I brought the initial "half" of my sequence up to 1920. Hence both my students and I experienced the frustration of my second semester culminating in 1969, or if I was ambitious and extremely self-disciplined, 1975. Hence sometime around 1999 I proposed to revise the undergraduate curriculum at Temple University (I had already fiddled with Waldo Heinrich's sequence, which began in the 1890s) to accommodate three courses on U.S. foreign relations—one that covered the colonial period to 1941, another that began with the Second World War and extended to

the present, and a third that surveyed the entire sweep. I titled the latter course, “The American Empire.”

The process of first imagining and then designing this course served as the catalyst for resurrecting my interrogation, and I use that word purposefully, of America’s Empire for Liberty. The Bush foreign policies, especially the invasion of Iraq, added momentum and urgency to undertaking the project, but they were not the foundation for it. I emphasize this point, and I provide the context for it, because all of the reviewers proceed from the premise that I wrote this book as a reaction to 21<sup>st</sup> century developments. I did not. And that I did not has a bearing on the comments—perfectly legitimately comments—made by William Weeks and Tom Zeiler. Weeks thinks it is “odd” that my “new contribution to the study of the American Empire should still find it necessary to rebut those who deny its very existence.” In his view, the case has been closed, and long ago. Hence he chides me for being too “tentative” in my arguments and even for “backpeddling.” Zeiler doesn’t necessarily think the case is closed, and regardless, feels my book has “something new to add.” Still, he wonders if I did not try “too hard” to identify an overarching framework. And in a most collegial and congenial way, he concedes that reading the introduction caused him “to groan.” In light of the “the plethora of books on the topic that were spurred by the global war on terrorism and the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan,” he is “suffering from imperial fatigue, though not from the news of the American empire but rather from the study of it.”

To an extent I feel Zeiler’s pain. In the book I underscore the massive number of books and articles about the American empire that have been published since 2003. Perhaps their very volume supports Weeks’s claim that it is odd that I feel the need not only to rebut the empire deniers but also to confront the issue of an American empire in the first place. I don’t think it odd at all, however. It is possible, although I doubt it, that among those of us whose life’s work it is to study U.S. foreign relations, or for that matter who subscribe to H-Diplo, accepting America as an empire, and an empire that has caused other peoples and nations grief, is “beyond rational argument.” But I am confident that this is not universally the case. In fact, on almost every occasion in which I have spoken about the book since its publication, someone in the audience (or one of the commentators) has challenged my use of “empire.” Moreover, in some instances even those who appeared to sympathize with my application of the word to the United States have argued that I should not have done so in order to avoid generating controversy that detracts from the book’s fundamental story.

With this last point I disagree strenuously. I can’t bring myself to agree completely with Jeffrey Engel’s judgment that I “dodged” the question of defining an empire, or at least it was not my intention to dodge it. I tried to come up with what one might call a working definition (cf. pp. 6-13). But because empire is a concept and not a “thing,” and a dynamic concept at that, I simply couldn’t define with the precision that I initially sought, nor could I identify others who could. Hence while “dodge” may be a bit strong (or unsettling) for my taste, I will agree that I somewhat finessed the issue by identifying central components, common denominators of empires and referring to a literature that may lead the reader to more success in formulating a rigorous yet comprehensive definition than I had.

That said, accepting the notion of an American empire is central to my argument, and moreover, generating controversy is central to my aim. Zeiler concludes his very complimentary review by challenging the claim that with the publication of *Empire for Liberty* the game is over in terms of debating the American empire, as Andrew Bacevich's most generously blurbed. I call Zeiler and raise him. I respect Bacevich tremendously, and I am flattered by his praise. Still, I had no intention of "winning." To the contrary, my goal was to promote the game, and to the best of my ability, to extend it. For this purpose I sought to produce a book that my peers and colleagues would find original and valuable, and students and the general public would find stimulating, accessible, and manageable. To put it another way, my conceit was that I wanted my book to influence my readers in the way that Walt LaFeber's lectures influenced me. I wanted them to consider and to perceive America as an empire and to think about the implications—for Americans as well as non-Americans—in new or different ways. This required my writing a somewhat messier book than I first planned because the American empire was non-linear; it changed over time. Rather than fit a single pattern, it evolved like a patchwork quilt—messy from the perspective of history.

The thrust of the reviewers' evaluations suggest I at least partially achieved this goal. But their criticisms make clear that what success I had came at a cost. Engel in particular but Zeiler as well take me to task for insufficiently bringing critics and dissenters into play. They are right to do so, which stings that much more because addressing such dissent was part of my initial conceptualization. But owing to the structure as well as the length of the book, I struggled. My decision to focus on individual empire-builders made it difficult to identify a counterpart and discuss him (yes him) adequately in such a brief book. It was one thing to juxtapose Benjamin Franklin with, for example, his son William, or Joseph Galloway, or even Thomas Hutchinson. But what about, say, John Foster Dulles? He was a Republican who to varying degrees and at various times served Democrats Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Harry Truman. With regard to what I call Dulles's advocacy of an "Empire for Security," an "empire to confront an Empire against Liberty" (p.175), was his adversary Robert Taft? William Knowland? James Burnham? Stuart Symington? In my mind the list of possibilities was endless, and I couldn't formulate a strategy for dealing with any without disrupting the arc of my story even as I exceeded my page limits. So I punted. Joan Hoff faults me for paying short shrift to the New Look, maintaining that the "distressingly puritanical" Dulles "orchestrated" it and my reader will "never know" its "far reaching and hypocritical aspects." Putting to the side my differing interpretation of Dulles, I agree with some parts of Hoff's take on the New Look and disagree with others. But the irony of her criticizing me for making only "passing reference" to it signals my dilemma. I've spent decades grappling with questions that inhere in the New Look, and I simply could not figure out how to explore fully its myriad dimensions, at least in this book.

Hoff's criticisms extend well beyond my underplaying the New Look. More fundamentally, she contends, my empire and liberty framework, or empire versus liberty framework, was counterproductively narrow. Instead of writing about the tension between empire and liberty, I would have done better, much better, to have written about the violation to the spectrum of America's core values produced by its pursuit of empire. "Immerman does not usually hold these architects of empire accountable for any mistakes made or ethics and

core values violated in their pursuit of an empire for liberty,” she writes. “Unless American decision makers of the past and present are held to some standard or sense of ethics, there can be no re-evaluation or reformation of U.S. foreign policy to begin to bring it in line with national core values.”

I won’t argue with Hoff. Rather, I’ll suggest that she would have preferred that I write a different book. Indeed, Bill Walker has for all intents and purposes written that book, and it is excellent. But while our audiences overlap, they are distinct. What is more, for my purposes “liberty,” with its ambiguous meaning for Americans, represents America’s core values because, as I make explicit, it is the first and most cherished of them. Further, I repeatedly argue that American notions of exceptionalism were rooted in the premise that liberty is *the* American core value. If I insufficiently tease out the ethical consequences of the conflict between empire and liberty (and Weeks seems to agree with Hoff that I pull my punches), the problem therefore is a function more of my exposition than my design. For the record, as I tried to convey in both my prose and the chapter title “John Quincy Adams and America’s Tortured Empire,” I concur with Hoff that Adams engaged in an “intellectual and ethical struggle with the concept of liberty” more than the others I cover.

As for Hoff’s cognate criticism—that I failed to identify Fritz Kraemer and Andrew Marshall as influences on Paul Wolfowitz’s ability to create an “unethical alliance of neoconservatives”—that, in contrast, was by design. I do not consider their influence on Wolfowitz remotely approximate to that of Leo Strauss, Albert Wohlstetter, Paul Nitze, or even a number of writers on the Holocaust and Indonesia’s Abdurrahman Wahid, and my scheme for the book allowed only for identifying the most direct and salient influences. I regret that the result was not as multi-dimensional as Hoff would want. Yet addressing her criticisms would have required me to write a book other than the one I wrote, and I wanted to write the one that I did.

I’ll end by again expressing my gratitude to all of the roundtable’s participants. I very much appreciate all the comments, which collectively will provide much grist for my future mills. I intend my responses to the criticisms as neither excuses nor objections. They are explanations, explanations driven by my effort to write a book that would contribute to an ongoing conversation about America, Americans, and their empire by framing the debate differently and bringing into it new participants. If this conversation contributes to an emerging subfield of American Empire studies, as William Weeks recommends, I’m fine with that. Still, my goal was more limited—to write an accessible, controversial, and somewhat idiosyncratic history of the broad contours of U.S. foreign relations. The reviewers have expertly pointed out the costs of such an undertaking, and I wish there were an easy fix. But I fear there isn’t.

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