The Imperial Question

By

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Four hundred years ago, when the first English colonists braved the dangerous passage across the Atlantic to settle the unknown North American continent, the colonial leader John Winthrop warned his fellow colonists that world will watch every move they make, measure every success against each failure, and judge them for the country that they create. “We shall be made a story and by-word through the world;” Winthrop warned, and looking back at the past several centuries, fewer declarations have been as prophetic. It took 150 years for a several thousand colonists, huddled in only a few isolated settlements on an unexplored continent, thousands of miles from their mother country, to develop into a nation capable fighting for its independence against the greatest power in the world. It took less than a century for that same newly independent nation to become the most dominant power in the world. Today, as we approach the end of the second decade of the 21st century American power and influence traverses every corner of the Earth; it is easy to conclude that the English journalist W. T. Stead was right when he wrote in 1901 that the world was becoming truly Americanized.

When the North's victory in the Civil War unleashed the first era of American internationalism, the effort to enlighten Europe with the principles of republican government ..

However, as we have explored in this book, it was only after World War II that American became a dominant military power—before that it was "Americanization" that generated the foundation of America's international influence was generated by the adoption of its influential, disruptive culture by the nations of the world. This is an important distinction as we have seen how the American Century has been interpreted as a Pax Americana, given the

A Pax Americana?

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For the past century and a half, the United States has been at the center of the world. For much of that time, it has been the most dominant power in the world, while some even say, ever in the history of the world. Indeed, the American age, particularly during the decades following World War II, has been seen as rivaling the famous *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace that lasted for two hundred years, the only time in history that the nations that made up the Mediterranean lived together in peace. It was a period when Rome's legions held at bay all the Empire's enemies, a period when the provinces grew rich, culture flourished, and ideas traveled freely across the width and breadth of the

Mediterranean, one of those ideas being, Christianity. But what of the American era, is it, indeed, a *Pax Americana*?

Scholars have long enjoyed invoking the legend of Rome's legions when analyzing America's sprawling global military presence: its hundreds of bases scattered throughout the world, its fleets of aircraft carriers that dominate the world's oceans, the many divisions that guarded the borders of Western Europe, and air bases in the United States and around the world that have maintained American air dominance since World War II. These were the military forces that helped to protect the democratic world and prevent many states from falling into communism. While it makes for eloquent prose, such comparisons are strained at best.

A crucial difference between the *Pax Romana* and the American era is that the Roman peace was a real peace imposed upon nations that had had fought amongst themselves for centuries; it also protected these same nations from large-scale barbarian invasions from across the Rhine and Danube and attacks from the Parthian Empire east of the Euphrates. It was a time of great stability and prosperity the likes of which the Mediterranean would never see again—hence its legendary status. Of course, there are some important similarities with the American era: America's military presence in Europe helped to end the Franco-German conflict that was at the heart of both World War I and II while also providing the first line of defense against a Soviet invasion of Western Europe. Similarly, American forces in Korea helped to protect South Korean from a Northern invasion. But these examples pale in comparison to the achievement of the Romans for over two centuries.

America's World contends that the American era was in reality a period of great change and upheaval, much of it deliberate as successive United States governments sought to promote the American model to receptive audiences throughout the world, which in turn alienated more nationalist segments of that audience. The result was widespread strife for many nations across the world. Certainly, I am not suggesting the United States is the absolute root cause of these crises, however, as this book has argued, the impact of the rise of American power has been felt throughout every corner of the world, and the reactions to it have played an important role in fueling disorder. The United States was a true revolutionary power, it was a nation created to upset the old aristocratic order that dominated the 18th and 19th century world.

American power was certainly not without its challengers as well.

For nearly one hundred and fifty years—from roughly 1880 until today—America has been at the apex of world power. However, by the begi

two decades into the 21st century As we approach the conclude the first quarter of the 21st century American power had reached nearly unmatched heights. Even the challenge from China. No corner of the globe has escaped its influence; American cultural products had become the world's cultural products, and America's liberal economic model had survived the great challengers of the twentieth century—fascism and communism, and Japan's "illiberal" state-centric economic system. The electronics revolution launched by the "traitorous eight" that gave birth to Silicon Valley had completely transformed the world and the term "innovation" quickly became

synonymous with America. Indeed, since the moment the guns fell silent at Appomattox and the American Civil War came to an end, American internationalists and entrepreneurs launched wave after wave of disruptive revolutions that laid the foundation for the American era, placing the United States fully at the center of global power: financially, economically, politically, militarily, culturally, and technologically. No region of the world escaped its reach—even Stalin's feared Iron Curtain couldn't prevent American radio from being beamed through short wave, or Russian and East European youths from emulating American fashions, and envying the Western lifestyle. Nor could it escape the pull of the American-led international economic system whose success demonstrated the faults of Soviet communism. Eventually, even the Soviet sphere would collapse under the weight of these comparative failures. Nor could Japan's state-centric economic system usurp America's economic dominance despite the countless predictions that it would do just that. The great disruptive force that was America had transformed the world in less than a century.

The sway of America's cultural model had become practically universal; but does the universality of U.S. influence necessarily imply America's domination of the world? Critics of U.S. foreign policy frequently attack American power as merely the latest example of imperial supremacy, i.e., the most recent in an endless line of great powers to have deigned to hold sway over the world. Throughout their history, American's have been extraordinarily averse to adopting the label "empire" largely because the foundation of the American experience has been the creation of a world free of European imperialism. This has resulted in a noteworthy debate around the question; just what is

the nature of American power? How does one compare the vast reach of the American era with past global empires?

The noted British sociologist Michael Mann conceived of three broad categories of empire: direct, indirect, and informal. Direct empires ruled territory contiguous to the home country, thus the Roman, Mongol, Ottoman Empire, and Russian Empire would be considered direct empires. Indirect empires were non-contiguous in nature, concentrating on the accumulation of colonies around the world. Rather than directly ruling a foreign population they normally relied upon local leaders to do their ruling for them. History's most notable example of an indirect empire is of course the British Empire whose primary objective was, ironically, not to rule an empire. Rather as Lord Evelyn Baring British comptroller-general in Egypt pointed out, London's aim was to "govern the governors" of a colony—in his case Egypt. The difference between direct and indirect empires is perhaps best explained by the eminent British historian Geoffrey Hoskings who summed it up thusly: "While Britain *had* and empire, Russia *was* and empire."

Most scholars agree that American power resembles neither direct nor indirect empire; therefore, Mann describes a third category, "informal" empire. By this definition the military, economic, and ideological influence of a state like the United States so permeates the international system that it conveys the power of the other types of empire, but without evincing, either directly or indirectly, control over those regions. Mann as well as the historian Niall Ferguson, dismisses American arguments that the U.S. is not an empire. They believe that regardless of how "liberal" Americans may consider their status as world leaders, U.S. influence has so pervaded the world that the power of the United States ranks with the history's leading empires—a "colossus" to quote from the

title of one of Ferguson's books. As such, America already possesses a global economic dominance as great as 19th century Great Britain, rivaling that of even Rome.

Aspiring to Empire?

Ironically even the "Brotherhood" of men who championed America's independence toyed with the idea that America would become an "empire" whose grace would transform the despotic world of the 18th century into a community of liberal republics. "Oh, my compatriots, you are now citizens of a new Empire," declared Hugh Breckenridge of Pennsylvania, shortly after the signing of the Constitution in 1787, "an empire, not the effect of chance, not hewn out by the sword; but formed by the skill of sages, and the design of wise men. Who is there who does not spring in height, and find himself taller by the circumstance?" Fifty years later the journalist John L. O'Sullivan—whose expression "manifest destiny" would come to define the national mission of 19th century America —believed that America's greatness lay in "the far reaching, the boundless future . . . In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles." Thus, from the earliest days of the republic, it would seem, Americans had sensed it was their destiny to create a new world empire.

But appearances are deceiving. Since these are the same American revolutionaries who struck out against the "tyranny" of King George III, to aspire for an American empire would seem irrational. What then could they have meant when they declared

America's future that of empire? For these leaders, "empire" simply meant space, the vast open wilderness that beckoned the first pioneers, a space that would allow for the creation of a continental-sized nation with the vast resources required to challenge, and eventually overtake, the world's mightiest nations.

Yet, while eschewing the moniker of imperial power, America's Founding Fathers certainly enjoyed employing the symbols of empire, in particular, those of Rome. Born of the 18th century Enlightenment it is no wonder that they would look to Rome for their inspiration; indeed the Enlightenment was itself kindled by Europe's collective yearning to emulate the great classical age of ancient Greece and Rome. And throughout its history many obviously deliberate associations were created between the two historic nations, from the obelisk memorializing George Washington and the beautiful columns and central copula adorning the Jefferson Memorial, to the very naming of Capitol Hill—the seat of the American Congress—after Capitoline Hill, one of Rome's Seven Hills upon which were built several of the most revered temples of the pre-Christian era. Indeed, the eagles that adorned the standards of Rome's once indomitable legions provided the inspiration for the Founding Fathers decision to declare the eagle the symbol of American power. Rome's legacy has been paramount in how Americans have come to define their identity.

But as Rome's greatness was fleeting so too might American power—at least writes Ferguson, who has made a point of comparing the United States to Rome in a series of publications, speeches and interviews, most notably his famous work, *Colossus: the Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (published in 2005), a 2006 *Vanity Fair* article entitled "Empire Falls," and most recently in a 2014 article entitled "Complexity and

Collapse" published by the prestigious journal, *Foreign Affairs.* In each of these publications Ferguson contends that America is beginning to suffer the effects of imperial overstretch that weakened Roman power. Ultimately, Rome would reach a point of no return, and an order that had existed for a thousand years disappeared in only a few decades. Ferguson warns that the Americans, too, may be destined to follow in the Roman's footsteps and that the collapse could come equally rapid. Ferguson thinks the signs are already pointing to that moment as in October of 2014 the IMF reported that the Chinese GDP, adjusted for purchasing power parity, had surpassed the United States GDP. According to this metric, for the first time since 1872 the United States no longer possesses the world's largest economy. The *Economist* promptly concluded, "The American Century is over."

Is America doomed to follow in Rome's footsteps? Will the American era come crashing down as did the *Pax Romana*? To answer that question we must pose an equally important one: is there a true comparison between Rome and the United States? This chapter will explore those questions and determine what connections if any, exist between Roman and American history, in doing so we will see that remarkable comparisons do exist that are currently ignored, and that such mutual comparison allow us to reinterpret both nation's histories and allow us to better understand the nature of American power in today's world. That said, I find the argument that American power may disintegrate as Roman power did more than a bit perplexing. As I discuss below, from AD 400-AD 700 the trans-Mediterranean Roman world underwent seismic changes, from a unitary Roman world order to a period where "Roman" power barely survived in the upper northeast corner of the Mediterranean. In the 400s the western Roman

provinces were lost to the German barbarians, in the 600s the Middle Eastern and North African provinces were lost to the Islamic invasion; this is what we mean by "the Roman collapse." It is difficult to understand how comparisons can be made with potential American collapse. There are no barbarians or jihadists ready to storm across the borders of the United States and carve out kingdoms amongst its former states.

Since the Civil War, the fears that large sections of the United States might separate have been non-existent. Nor are there any concerns—at least rational concerns—that Mexico will re-occupy the American Southwest, or that Canada may decide to seize the American Northwest and the border states along the great lakes, leaving a defeated United States cowering behind the Appalachian Mountains as the last remnant of the Roman Empire huddled behind the Tarsus Mountain range in southern Turkey following the Islamic invasions of the 7th century.

Therefore, American leaders will always have at their disposal the industriousness of 320 million people and the vast resources and energy independence found within its expansive borders. While economic performance rises and falls, even the worst of depressions wouldn't have the impact that the loss of half the United States would have on the strength of the nation. Consequently, we must look elsewhere in order to arrive at a comparison that allows us to judge the nature of American power.

The Evolution of Roman Power

Classifying Rome

Rome is considered the archetypal direct empire. However, at different stages of its history, Roman power also reflected varied types of empire. While the Rome we are most familiar with—that of Augustus Caesar—certainly possessed all the trademarks of a direct empire, earlier in its history it also exhibited the attributes of an indirect empire. Thus for some empires imperial typologies may represent stages of evolution. This is the case for both Rome and America.

Rome's "imperial" expansion began not under the emperors but under the authority of the Senate of the Roman Republic, first through the Punic Wars against Carthage from which it became master of the western Mediterranean, then through the conquest of the Greek dominated eastern Mediterranean the following century. However, by the time Augustus assumed the Imperial Purple the entire Mediterranean—from the Rhine River in France to the Euphrates River in present day Iraq, and the entire North African coastline—was under direct Roman rule. Thus, by the time of Augustus Rome does fit the designation of a direct empire. But was this also the case under the republic?

This raises an important question; can a republic acquire an empire while remaining a republic? Ironically, this was a question that American would later ask of Great Britain. If the answer is yes, then, like Great Britain, the Roman Republic also possessed an indirect empire, one that would eventually evolve into a direct empire. The manner of Rome's rise to dominance does reflect many of the characteristics of an indirect empire: it possessed a distinct Italian core ruled by a Senate and a conquered periphery ruled by client states. Ultimately with the ascension of Augustus the republic would give way to imperial rule, yet for several centuries the republic would play the role of an indirect empire. This demonstrates the limitations of categorizing something as

generic as "empire" or worse "rule"—many historical examples of hierarchy exhibit many of these stages, Rome merely being one of them. Later I will show how American history as well reflects aspects of several imperial categories.

Consequently, Rome's rise to empire—both direct and indirect—was the result of a centuries-long evolutionary process. Under the republic, Rome's conquest of its neighbors—a hallmark of the direct expansion—was haphazard and opportunistic resulting in the creation of unconnected series of provinces throughout the Mediterranean more akin to the future European colonial empires. The Roman republic first unified the Italian peninsula and then captured territories in Spain, followed by the southern coast of Gaul. The Punic Wars gave the republic what is today Tunisia, decades later Roman armies defeated the Macedonians leading to the conquest of both Macedonia and its Greek provinces. The Romans followed their conquest of the Greek peninsula with the seizure of western Anatolia (Turkey), then Syria, the rest of Gaul, Egypt, and North Africa. It would be Augustus who would finally create the contiguous empire that we know of today.

Even the political structure of the empire morphed over time. Under the republic, Rome ruled the provinces through the use of client states governed by trusted local leaders. The most famous example is King Herod the Great of Israel, who ruled Israel for over three decades in the name of his Roman overlords. The use of client kings would come to an end during Augustus' reign and the major provinces would come under the direct rule of the Emperor with a few lesser provinces under the authority of the Senate, a period known as the *Principate*, named such because Augustus was considered "first among equals." Three centuries later, in response to the turmoil of barbarian invasion

and civil war, the emperor Diocletian would create the *Dominate* a massive regimentation of the empire that would reduce the role of the Senate to that of a figurehead.

The Roman Transformation

By the 3rd century AD a strange thing happened to the Roman Empire: by imperial decree it ceased to exist. What do I mean by this? If the distinguishing feature of an empire is the existence of an imperial core and periphery, then with the Edict of Caracalla in 212 AD the Roman Empire could no longer fit that definition. The edict, issued by the Roman Emperor of that name, stipulated that the Empire would extend Roman citizenship to all free peoples throughout the provinces, whereas before Roman citizenship was restricted to those born in Italy or who had completed their service in the army or performed some other duty for the empire. This ruling cemented a process that had been gaining momentum for over a century as power within the empire began to shift from Italy to the provinces. The Spanish-born emperor Trajan who ruled from 98 to 117 AD was the first non-Italian emperor. Economically and culturally the core of the empire would begin its shift towards the more populous and prosperous Greek speaking eastern provinces: Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and what we today call the Balkans. Italy would soon become part of the social and cultural periphery, while Rome would recede into the background as Emperors chose to take residence in cities closer to the empire's frontiers where the greatest military threats existed.

Unlike most empires, the Roman Empire—or better, world state—faced few revolts from the provinces. Aside from the Jewish uprisings in 79 and 135 AD none of the other nationalities raised arms in revolt in over four hundred years of history—indeed

the vast majority of political insurrections throughout Roman history were committed by its own political and military elites. This success came not through the use of military intimidation; the main Roman field armies were positioned closest to the frontiers to defend against enemy attack and were, except for Palestine, seldom used as a force of occupation. In fact, many provinces positioned to the Empire's interior saw few permanent troop deployments throughout most of the empire's history, save for the imperial civil wars among Rome's generals.

One sees this transition most clearly in the Empire's reaction to the Visigoth's capture of Rome in 410 AD. The entry of Alaric, king of the Visigoths, was the first time in nearly 800 years that the leader of a victorious enemy had entered the gates of the Eternal City. Most often, the fall of an imperial capital would be greeted with celebration among the captive provinces, a recognition that liberation was at hand. Such was certainly the case in 612 BC with the fall of Nineveh capital of Assyria, then the mightiest empire in Western history, an empire that had savagely conquered all the great kingdoms of the Middle East for the first time ever; from present day Iran to the entirety of the eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt, Syria, and Turkey. The fall of Nineveh precipitated the empire's complete collapse as its provinces revolted in rapid succession. Literally overnight, one of the most powerful and fearsome empires in history simply vanished.

The contrast to the Roman's reaction to the Visigoth's triumph could not have been more manifest. Shockwaves reverberated across the Mediterranean after word spread of Rome's fall. From one end of the empire to the other, expressions of horror and disbelief escalated, eventually giving way to the unimaginable imminence of the once

immortal empire's destruction: "If Rome can perish, what can be safe" cried St. Jerome, then one of Christianity's leading theologians. The once dominant but now persecuted Pagan community declared the calamity as vengeance from the gods the Romans had only recently spurned, prompting St. Augustine of Hippo to write his epic *City of God*, in which he justified Rome's fall by arguing that only God's work is eternal, while the work of man must surely fail—and so it would be with Rome. But not a single uprising occurred, no movements for Greek, or Egyptian, or Gallic independence. Indeed, when Rome's legions began withdrawing from the British Isles in the late 4th and early 5th centuries leaving them open to attack from barbarians across the seas, the remaining citizens pleaded for their return to no avail. British independence was in reality Roman abandonment.

What made Rome different was the development of a "Roman" nationality across the entirety of the Mediterranean; because of the citizenship bestowed by the Edict or Caracalla, free peoples from Britain to Mesopotamia considered themselves citizens of the empire. If all free peoples are equal citizens, what then can be considered the imperial core and what is the periphery? One of the most amazing factors is that "Romanization" occurred across cultures whose legacies were already legendary: Egyptians, Syrians, the Greeks, just to name a few. The Greek case is particularly interesting as for a 1000 years after Rome's fall they would insist on their Roman identity, even though the empire would be reduced to little more than the Greek speaking provinces of the Balkans and Asia Minor. Were an observer to travel to the Peloponnesus, the very heart of ancient Greece, and were to ask the nationality of its residents, he would be informed that they

were *Romaioi*, or Roman in Medieval Greek. This would be akin to the French insisting they were Americans for a millennium after the destruction of the United States.

Ironically, the legacy of "Romanization" would result in endless quarrels between the descendants of the Germanic tribes that had settled the Roman West and the descendants of the Roman East. The new kingdoms established amidst the ruins of the Western Empire, especially the Franks, Visigoths, and Ostrogoths, considered themselves not the conquerors of Roman civilization, but the heirs to its legacy and quickly adapted to Roman customs and culture. Indeed, the recreation of the Roman Empire became the prized goal of both the Germanic west and the Roman Catholic Church. Beginning with the conquests of Charlemagne that culminated in his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor in the year 800 by Pope Leo III, followed by the permanent establishment of the Holy Roman Empire in 962 by the German King Otto III, a Western Roman Empire of sorts was reestablished. This Western Empire would vie with the imperial court in Constantinople as to which was the rightful claimant of the title "Emperor of the Romans," even though the Emperors of Constantinople were the true linear descendants of Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor who transferred the imperial capital to the ancient city of Byzantium in 330, renaming it Constantinople. As we shall see below, the catastrophic changes that occurred across the Mediterranean during the seventh century provided the opportunity for the Germanic West to challenge the right of Constantine's successors for the mantle of Rome's legacy.

Informal Empire: A Comparison between America and Byzantium

As powerful as the Roman Empire was, its influence did not extend significantly past its borders. This is one of the most problematic aspects of the Rome-America comparison. Rome had created a world empire, ruling all the great civilizations that had existed across the Mediterranean while by contrast America would create an "Americanized world" as no corner of the world would be beyond its influence. Yet, even in bordering regions Roman influence was limited. To the East the Persian Empire resisted Romanization for centuries, building a rival culture that would challenge Roman rule across the Eastern Mediterranean. To the North the Germanic tribes adopted certain aspects of Roman military traditions but resisted most elements of Roman culture until their occupation of the west. When the Empire switched to Christianity, those Germanic tribes that followed chose a version known as Arianism that disavowed the divinity of Christ, the most important tenet of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Of course, the technological limitations of the time played an important role in limiting the spread of Roman culture, as well as the fact that Roman borders quickly expanded to include most areas where Roman cultural influence might have been felt. The result is that the extent of Rome's cultural penetration most nearly coincided with its borders.

However, there was an empire whose influence would penetrate the world far beyond its borders, and whose cultural and philosophical legacy would continue centuries past its demise. That empire is most commonly known as the Byzantine Empire, a name conjured by historians of the Enlightenment to distinguish the surviving Eastern Roman Empire after the fall of Rome.

When the German general Odoacer deposed the last Emperor of the West, the ironically named Romulus Augustus, a combination of Rome's founder with its first

emperor, the Roman Senate decreed that the Eastern and Western Empires should be reunited under Zeno, the existing Emperor in Constantinople and sent him the Western Empire's imperial cloak and insignia. The leaders of the other barbarian kingdoms that had settled on Roman territory pledged their allegiance to rule in the name of the Eastern Empire. Thus, legally speaking the Roman Empire of 476 was, aside from the abandoned British Isles, identical to the empire of 395 when it was divided for the last time.

The reality was quite different, however. At the time of its demise, the actual Western Roman Empire had been reduced to a shadow of its former glory: Italy, the Dalmatian coast and what was once Yugoslavia, and a few small sections of North Africa and Gaul. The Vandals under Gaiseric controlled the majority of the North African coast launching raiding ships that plundered the coastal areas of the Mediterranean, including a second, more destructive sack of Rome in 455 AD. The Visigoths ruled the majority of Spain and Southern France, and the Franks ruled the rest of Northern France. Eventually, the Ostrogoths would conquer Italy and Dalmatia.

By the beginning of the sixth century the illusion of a unified Empire had evaporated and with the ascension of Emperor Justinian I in 527 the East would launch a major effort to recover the western Mediterranean. Led by the great Belisarius, often given the honorific "the last Roman general" by historians, East Roman armies quickly retook North Africa and Sicily, and then battled the Ostrogoths in Italy until they too were vanquished. Belisarius won initial victories against the Visigoths in Spain, recovering a portion of those territories, however, the plague that swept across Asia and into Europe slowed the imperial advance. Nevertheless, the Mediterranean was a once again a Roman lake.

Shortly after Justinian's death warfare erupted with the Persian Empire that would last for most of the next fifty years; the Empire also faced a grave challenge across the Danube River from a fierce barbarian tribe called the Avars who launched invasions deep into the Balkan peninsula. The Avaro-Persian assault reached its crescendo in 626 AD when Persian armies, who already had captured Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, allied with the Avars to lay siege to Constantinople in order to destroy the empire once and for all. The cities impenetrable walls and indomitable spirit prevented its fall, allowing time for the Roman Emperor Heraclius to launch his counterstrike against the Persians. Marching south from present day Armenia, Heraclius armies achieved total victory, by 629 the Persian capital of Ctesiphon had surrendered and the Persians agreed to evacuate all their captured provinces. From Ctesiphon, Heraclius would recapture the True Cross upon which Christians believed Christ was crucified; its loss along with the fall of Jerusalem devastated the Christian world. In 632 AD Heraclius restored the True Cross to Jerusalem in a joyous celebration recreated throughout the empire.

Heraclius's accomplishments should have gone down as among the greatest in Roman history. He had restored an empire without hope of salvation to be the dominant power of both the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Persia, the Empire's main rival for nearly 700 years, had been destroyed. The rulers of barbarian Europe were overawed by his bravery, Western writers quickly renamed him "Hercules." A new age of Roman rule should have been born; Heraclius's name should today be as familiar as Caesar, Augustus, Constantine, and Justinian. But history can be a cruel mistress. By the end of the following decade the entirety of his life's work would lay in ruins. While all

Heraclius exertions were focused on the Persians a new threat was emerging, an Arabia united for the first time by the Prophet Mohammed under the banner of Islam.

Small-scale incursions into the Sinai Peninsula by Islamic raiding parties soon turned into a full-scale invasion of both the Roman East and the Persian Empire. Waging perhaps history's greatest two-front military campaign, Arab forces under the Caliph Abu Bakr and his successor Umar bin al-Khattab launched simultaneously devastating strikes against both empires. Heraclius was slow to recognize the threat, but finally in 636 AD he amassed an army to battle the invasion. Weakened by age and consumed by a debilitating mental illness, Heraclius didn't command this army, whether it would have mattered is uncertain as the Arab forces won a decisive military victory after a weeklong battle at the Yarmuk River Valley in present day Jordan. The result was a total collapse of the East Roman military position, within a year Jerusalem was once again lost: Antioch and with it, Syria, would surrender in 639; Alexandria and the province of Egypt would fall in 642. Thus a mere 10 years after the triumphal restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem, Heraclius's achievements had been wiped from history, all of the Roman East had been lost save for Asia minor which would soon come under unremitting attack. The Persians fared no better as they were completely destroyed within only a few years. By the end of the seventh century Constantinople would face relentless attacks by the Arabs, indeed the emperors would control little beyond the city's walls as even the entire Balkan Peninsula had fallen to Slavic invaders. Under Emperors Leo III and his son Constantine V, two brilliant military leaders, the East would successfully defend Asia Minor, the last remaining province of the once mighty empire, against ruthless Arab attack and eventually stabilize the empire.

Yet, the empire was reduced to a ruined shard of its once all-encompassing majesty. It had suffered repeated devastation; its once bustling cities were destroyed and abandoned by their survivors who now clung to isolated fortifications that eerily continued to bear the names of these once great metropolises. By the end of the seventh century Constantinople, under Justinian a city of over a half million residents, housed perhaps no more than 40,000. By contrast the new Islamic world empire was in the ascendance, stretching from Spain to India and into Central Asia, vastly more powerful and immeasurably richer than its Christian enemies, and formidable enough to challenge dominant Chinese influence all the way to the borders of Tibet. A new era in world history had commenced; the millennium of Greco-Roman and Persian dominance of the Mediterranean and Middle East was over, forever supplanted by the birth of a grand Islamic civilization.

The Byzantine Transformation

Historians give several dates for the emergence of the Byzantine Empire, that is, a distinctly different society and culture from its Roman predecessor. Some argue it was with Constantine's transfer of the capital in 324; others date it to the final division of the empire in 395, or the death of the emperor Maurice in 602, as he was the last ruler of the intact trans-Mediterranean empire. Most scholars, however, point to the end of the seventh century when in response to the Arab assault the empire radically transformed into a military state, provinces were now military districts called "themes" ruled by the army commander. The loss of Egypt, Syria, and North Africa reinforced the empires

Greek identity, and the Christian Orthodox faith became its unifying ideology. Therefore, after this period historians universally refer to this new entity as the Byzantine Empire.

There is no denying that the empire of year 800 was vastly different than the empire of Augustus had created—for one thing, it was but a fraction of the size—but these changes did not mean that the empire should be treated as being wholly separated from its Roman origins. First off, since the days of Alexander the Great the eastern Mediterranean had always been Greek dominated with the Greek language and culture holding sway amongst the regions elites. It is hard to believe that over the seven centuries of Roman rule the region would have become even more Greek. Second, Roman culture and society underwent vast transformations as well, from the Senatorial Republic that ruled a mere city-state, to the vast, regimented *Dominate* of Diocletian that ruled the entire Mediterranean. Third, the emperors who reigned in Constantinople were the undisputed heirs to Constantine, how could they no longer be considered "Roman?" Fourth, the people considered themselves Roman, why should contemporary scholarship dispute this? Finally, why do historians have no problem referring the empires of Charlemagne, the leader of the Franks, or of Otto III of Germany as the "Holy Roman Empire" yet insist that the actual descendants of Constantine be considered "Byzantine," a name that had never existed before the 18th century?

Much of the reason stems from an underlying prejudice against the Eastern Empire as its rulers failed to preserve the Roman Empire in the face of the Muslim assault. For eighteenth century scholars like Edward Gibbon or Montesquieu, the history of the Eastern Empire was synonymous with decline; indeed Gibbon considered Eastern Roman history simply a story of steady, unremitting decay from the glory days under

Marcus Aurelius to the final extinguishing of the imperial flame with the Turkish capture of Constantinople in 1453. This is unfortunate as such prejudices prevent us from fully appreciating the important contribution that the East Roman Empire would make over the ensuing centuries, and the development of an influence that would restore its status as a world power and provide lessons for us today.

The Byzantine Commonwealth

The crushing defeats of the seventh century forced the Byzantines to look inward to understand why these calamities befell them. As a highly religious people the truth must lay in God's displeasure, but what had they done? This yearning to understand God's will set off a century-long battle at the heart of which was the question of whether the Orthodox reliance on Icons, beautiful artistic pieces depicting the Virgin Mary, Christ, and Church Saints was in reality of form of idolatry that brought Gods wrath on his people, a period historians call the age of iconoclasm, from which we today draw the word "iconoclast." The ensuring cultural civil war would consume the empire; every defeat or victory in the face of the enemy Arabs was a sign either of support for or rejection of either Iconoclasm or Iconophilism. Finally, by the ninth century, the iconoclastic movement ebbed but not after much destruction and bloodshed. But the result of this struggle was a reaffirmation of the undisputable role of the Church in every aspect of the Empires existence and a sense that Constantinople had become the "new" Jerusalem, and that the Byzantines were the new chosen people of God.

As God's chosen the empire began a major effort to expand its cultural influence on its neighbors, to bring the largely pagan barbarian tribes into the empire's sphere, what

Byzantine historian Dimitri Obolensky calls the Byzantine Commonwealth. At the core of this commonwealth was Eastern Orthodoxy backed up by the growing might of the rapidly recovering empire that seemed to demonstrate God's favor. Over the course of a century the pagan Slavic tribes who today we know as Serbs, Bulgarians, Romanians, and Russians would be converted to Eastern Orthodoxy. But the spread of Byzantine culture did not stop there as its art and literature and philosophy began to influence the Roman Catholic West and the Islamic East. At its peak in 1000 AD the Byzantine Commonwealth included nearly all of present day Eastern Europe and Russia, southern Italy, the Caucuses, and Syria. Even Jerusalem, still under its Islamic rulers, experienced the growing Byzantine presence as countless Christians now made regular pilgrimages to the city while church construction flourished in a manner not seen for centuries past.

By 1000 AD Constantinople had surpassed its former glory under Justinian. Without question, it was again one of the world's greatest cities, with vast wealth garnered from its presence at the crossroads of trade between three continents and a population estimated as high as 800,000—greater than the Muslim city of Cordoba, Spain and nearly as large the Islamic capital of Baghdad and the Chinese city of Kaifeng. But the geographical and artistic beauty of the city was incomparably superior to all its rivals. Situated along the Golden Horn and surrounded by water on three sides, comprised of many of the most beautifully designed buildings in the world, especially the legendary Hagia Sophia, Byzantine Emperors would routinely invite rivals from the Western courts, Russia, and the Middle East fully recognizing the dramatic impact their first visions of the city would have them. Great military victories leading to a doubling of the size of the empire further enhanced Byzantium's prominence. Both western and eastern kings

would pay homage to the Byzantine emperor and avidly seek imperial titles through marriage or imperial acclamation.

The growth of the Byzantine commonwealth did not lead to the outright subjugation of many of these peoples; indeed the Russians would on several occasions seek to capture Constantinople for their own imperial ambitions. But the influence on so large a part of the Middle East and Europe is undeniable providing a sway far beyond the political borders of the empire.

Unfortunately, the rise of the Turks would end the Byzantine resurgence. After the battle of Manzikert in 1071, the Turks would do what the Arabs never could; capture Asia Minor—a region that now bears the name, Turkey. But the Byzantine Commonwealth would survive even the empires catastrophic loss of material power. This influence would continue in sorts even during the Empire's final descent into oblivion with the capture of Constantinople in 1453 by the Turks. Orthodox Christianity and religious art would remain the hallmarks of the Slavic nations of Eastern Europe for centuries after.

Throughout the 19th century, another "commonwealth" emerged, one who would similarly try to influence global events by inspiring other nations to adopt its own model. The United States, a militarily weak and isolated nation bearing certain similarities to Byzantium, would base its national security strategy on exporting American culture, its system of government, its modes of economic production, its mass-oriented literature and music, throughout the world in an effort to transform the world from into a system of like-minded republics. By the late 19th century, American cultural influence would

spread so rapidly the world over that many came to recognize that the 20th century would be the American Century.

The Meaning of America's Ascent

Revise the next two pages, point is creating a parallel with the Roman experience

In 1901 the celebrated British journalist W. T. Stead published a work that powerfully stated what many across Europe had long feared. Entitled *The Americanization of the World: or the Trend of the 20th Century*, Stead contended that the rise of American power and the spread of American culture was fundamentally reshaping the world and predicted that the 20th century would be the "American Century"; Great Britain and the rest of the world would have to come to terms with this new power.

Stead was not alone in coming to these conclusions. It was none other than British Prime Minister William Gladstone who as early as 1878 recognized the vast, global transformation that was then occurring. "It is America," Gladstone declared, "who at a given time . . . will probably become what we are now—head servant in the great household of the world, the employer of all employed, because her service will be the most and ablest. We (will) have no more title against her than Venice, or Genoa, or Holland has against us."

Though Britain possessed one of the world's largest and most advanced economies, a colonial empire where—seemingly—the sun would never set, and perhaps the most powerful navy in history, a growing number of British and European observers recognized that the world was witnessing an historic power shift. Gladstone proclaimed that, "While we have been advancing with pretentious rapidity, America is passing us by

as if in a canter. There can hardly be a doubt, as between America and England, of the belief that the daughter at no very distant time will, whether fairer or less fair, be unquestionably yet stronger than the mother."

America's rapid cultural expansion left little doubt that the rising American colossus would soon surpass the great European powers and was destined to reign supreme in the next century. Indeed, by the end of the 19th century, many of Europe's leading intellectuals had resolved that the future belonged to the United States. They believed that America's power would soon eclipse all others and that its civilization would spread throughout the world, radically transforming every nation and culture exposed to it. With the unmistakable rise of the United States, the world's great powers faced a clear dilemma: accept America's emergence and become its partner or resist and remain an adversary. For Gladstone and Stead Britain's answer was plain, since "we (England) could not possibly hold our own against the United States," Great Britain would have to associate itself with the new world power. "The Briton," Stead argued, perhaps a bit sensationally, "instead of chafing against this inevitable supersession should cheerfully acquiesce in the decree of Destiny and stand in betimes with the conquering American." It was now time to resolve the "schism that we owe to the perversity of George the Third" and make a "resolute effort" to re-unify the English-speaking peoples either in an alliance, or even more daringly, a new common state that would include all the English speaking nations, a restoration of what the world would have been had the American revolution not occurred.

In a little over a century, America had risen from a collection of bickering colonies to one of the most powerful nations in history. How then does America's rise to

power compare with our historical examples? To answer this question it is important to recognize that America's rise to power was a two-fold development; first expansion and settlement of the continental United States, then the global spread of America's cultural identity deliberately designed to reshape the prevailing aristocratic cultures of 19th century Europe and Asia.

The American Expansion: Direct Empire

On the surface, it seems hardly likely that America has had any of the characteristics of a direct empire. Americans resist the comparison because of their firm belief that, save for the Native Americans, American pioneers settled a largely empty continent. American expansion was fueled by both diplomacy, exemplified by the Louisiana Purchase that with the stroke of a pen added 800,000 square miles to the United States, doubling its size for a mere $15 million; and military conflict, a victory over Mexico in the 1848 war that earned the United States most of what is now the American Southwest including Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California. In roughly 70 years the United States had expanded from thirteen British colonies huddled along the East Coast to a trans-continental nation that bordered the Pacific Coastline, over 3000 miles distant.

At first glance it would seem that American expansion had many of the hallmarks of direct empire. Huge territories were seized by military force or through diplomatic maneuvering that the United States would organize into territories and eventually states. We have already seen that this expansion had been anticipated by America's Founding

Fathers who had proclaimed it the making of a new empire. And, indeed the United States might have become a new empire had it not been for a certain, largely unnoticed decision made by the founding fathers.

That decision was to admit new states to the Union with the same rights as the original thirteen states that had fought the War of Independence. We never think about this today, however, this represented a major concession from the original thirteen, that future states would have equal rights to those first states. In doing so, the Founding Fathers had prevented the creation of a permanent imperial core—the thirteen colonies—and paved the way for a nation where, eventually, all Americans would live under an equal basis. Ironically, this decision sentenced the smaller East Coast states to the political margins, as they would soon be nationally eclipsed by the rise of the giant states like California and Texas.

Therefore, it is in this sense that America most resembles Roman Empire, the Rome of the third century that is. When Caracalla had granted all free people Roman citizenship, it transformed the empire into a trans-Mediterranean state. The decision by the Founding Fathers to grant all future states equal power under the constitution guaranteed that the United States would avoid the imperial trap and become a true nation without an obvious core.

The American Expansion—Informal Empire

Orthodox Christianity was the core of the Byzantine Empire's informal empire, its philosophical, theological, and artistic traditions that would soon become the predominant cultural motif for most of the eastern Mediterranean and the Slavic world.

The American cultural model would also serve as the core of American internationalism as American concepts, political philosophies, economic theories began to spread throughout the world creating the American Century.

Conventional wisdom holds that the American Century dawned in the wake of World War II. Yet, it was none other Henry Luce, the man who coined the term, who claimed that it emerged so many years before. Writing in 1941 he declared: "American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products are in fact the only things that every community in the world, from Zanzibar to Hamburg, recognizes in common. Blindly, unintentionally, accidentally and really in spite of ourselves, we are already a world power in all the trivial ways—in very human ways." American liberal internationalism, its mass market economy, and artistic and cultural achievements that appealed to the broader masses of society had come to define the source of American influence throughout the world. By 1900 the "Americanization of the world" was a recognized phenomenon. And, like Byzantium, it occurred with U.S. military power at its lowest ebb.

Yet there are crucial differences. While American military power was similarly constrained it was by choice. Bequeathed with two vast oceans separating it from its greatest potential enemies, America had the unmistakable advantage of distance allowing it justification for a reduced military footprint. This distance also provided it with time to mobilize its vast economic resources as the North had during the American Civil War. There was also a philosophical reason: fear of the impact of a large military on the republican form of government. Americans looked to the history of two other attempts at republican rule, the Roman and French Republics. Both republics were overthrown by

their greatest military leaders: Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte. Given its proximity in time, the French example especially alarmed American leaders. Surrounded by aristocratic enemies, France immediately suffered from continuous warfare; the ensuing chaos eventually led to the rise of Bonaparte, a young general who would assume command of France's armies and in 1804 would be crowned Emperor of France. The overthrow of the French Republic haunted American politicians and fear of "Bonapartism,"—as it came to be called—within American military led to a wholesale effort to enforce a strict civilian control to prevent such an occurrence in the US.

America: the post-Imperial Power

While I have used the phrase "informal empire" to describe American and Byzantine policies is that a truly accurate term? What about an informal empire makes it an empire? As discussed before, empire is about rule, in particular, rule of the periphery by a core state. But the informal empire system isn't about rule, but influence. Byzantium did not rule the Russians, but its cultural expansion into Russian territories shaped how Russia developed as a nation. So too with the United States; the American Century as defined by the willful acceptance of American culture, American political ideals, American methods of economic production, by many throughout the world. There were those who opposed the spread of American influence and that struggle would define much of the 20th century, nevertheless, the struggle between the United States and the world was not an effort to limit American rule, but to define the American model's acceptable limits of influence over these societies. This is much more akin to "benign

hegemony", a nation that both leads—and works with—the secondary powers of the world community to forge a mutually beneficial international system.

Hegemony itself is a term fraught with misunderstandings. For sociologists and historians it means "domination", for political scientists it denotes "leadership." But there is a term that better encapsulates the concept of benign hegemony, "commonwealth." Byzantine historian Dimitri Obolensky arrived at that term to describe the empire's growing cultural influence, and I contend that it best serves to describe the type of world that has emerged under American influence. A Commonwealth is a collection of individual states tied together by specific sets of ideas, religion with Byzantium, the American cultural model for the United States. The goal of American internationalism was never the building of an empire but of a world of liberal republics interacting with each other peacefully, with the United States providing leadership as needed. The goal of the Commonwealth was not the creation of Empire but the breakdown of the European empire system and transformation of these nations into enlightened republics. It was the creation of a political system that would ensure individual liberty and intellectual freedom, that would support—or at least not penalize—those who sought to create something different for themselves, something better, be the settlers who spearheaded the conquest of the continental United States or the religious and secular missionaries who spread both the word of God and worth of American capitalism around the world. The objective of the Commonwealth was the creation of a global system based on fundamental principals, what we today refer to as liberal internationalism, where the individual could make a difference, not merely the state.

The United States was largely successful in creating the American Commonwealth, what we most commonly call the American Century. For the past century many nations within the international community have actively emulated elements of the American model in developing their nations economies and society. This would occur often under both American insistence as well as assistance; the Marshall Plan being a prime example. Yet the irony is that despite over a century of effort, today few of these nations have truly succeeded in mastering, let alone surpassing, the elements that have given America a special position within the world. Therefore, before we look at the rise of the United States and the creation of the American Commonwealth, we should first examine what is it about the United States that has enabled it to create and maintain its global position. The answer is its ability to launch revolutionary innovations. While there is so much press about how the world has caught up to the United States in terms of patents and discoveries, the key revolutions of the past two decades, namely the technological revolutions spawned by the widespread adoption of personal computers and social media, are American inventions. How is it that over the past few decades it was primarily American entrepreneurs—like Bill Gates, or Steve Jobs, Michael Dell, could radically transform the global technology market by putting an easy to use personal computer in every home. Why were their no foreign Mark Zuckerbergs or Marc Pincus' whose creations, Facebook and Zynga would revolutionize how we communicate over the internet? The following chapter will explore one possible answer, which is itself emblematic of long-time American cultural traditions.

As we have already seen in an earlier chapter, that answer is Silicon Valley, which has emerged as the incubator for innovation for the U.S. and the world. Its unique

characteristics are almost impossible to emulate elsewhere in the world. But from where did those characteristics emerge, what was it in the evolution of the American cultural model that laid the foundation for one of the most innovative nations in history. The previous chapters have told the story of the rise of American culture and how it captured the world.

Will America Decline?

- Start with Paul Kennedy discussing economic and military aspects of great power rise and fall, argue that what he calls the modern era (post renaissance) has given way to a new era –advance?—that is reflective of massive technological advance where more happens in a decade than happened over the course of a century.
- American power is also different from other nations in that its spread was bottom up not top down like all other great powers, that means the cost of influencing the world is vastly different than the era Kennedy discusses.
- America is not a dominating power but a power with great influence whose cultural attractions allow it to shape the international system but not dictate to it.
- The problem with relative decline, we trace relative decline historically over a period of decades or even centuries then try to apply that model to a handful of years. Habsburgs decline occurred over 150 years, in a radically different time without the benefit of scientific discoveries

The Rise and Fall of Great powers

Discuss Kennedy's argument and how it is used to apply to the US

The problem of relative decline

1) **Its is best used to discuss historical shifts, of little value with contemporary times given lack of perspective.**
2) **What measure of power are we talking about, always changes**
3) **Argue that relative decline works less for the US given US habit of demobilizing after conflicts, and that the intrinsic nature of the American system the types of power that are so important to the US go well beyond the traditional hard military and economic measures, cultural model and attractiveness are very important to the US—distinct from other nations.**
4) **This leads to second half of chapter, just what type of power is the US, how does it compare with Rome, how is it different.**

Discuss how the framework of past histories is misused to compare with the US and China

Define the difference between the US and other great powers.

America: The Unique Nation