

The united states: an empire in denial

[History](#), [Empires](#)



With the arrival and eventual establishment of a permanent settlement on American soil in the early seventeenth century, the English settlers came upon an expansive territory of land teeming with resources and endless possibilities. Soon, these settlers longed for liberty and thus desired to break free from the imperial clutches of British rule. Standing resolutely against a great and powerful empire, liberty was won in America by the blood of its founding fathers, indelibly written in the Declaration of Independence.

Perhaps in these humble beginnings are the reasons why America today could never officially admit on how she has evolved into the empire she had once detested and fought. The facts, however, speak for themselves. America today is a colossal empire and as such, she has in her power the capacity to shape the future by creating a world environment conducive to profitable economic relations (especially to third-world countries) and international peace, both of which are in short supply, these days.

What the world needs, according to Niall Ferguson in page 301 of his book 'Colossus', is an effective liberal empire and the United States is the best candidate for the job. What restrains America from accepting and performing its role as an imperial power? This paper delves on this question and discusses the following relevant issues: (1) definition of an empire, (2) what America has become, (3) the American might: strongholds around the globe, (4) the American empire: adherence and denial, and (5) America as the engine of global growth.

America is now the only superpower in the world and she is in a position to greatly influence the course of human history. Main Body Definition of an Empire Probing into the topic at hand, it is necessary to elucidate on the true <https://assignbuster.com/the-united-states-an-empire-in-denial/>

meaning of ' empire' as rationalized by Mr. Ferguson: An empire is ' first and foremost, a very great power that has left its mark on the international relations of an era . . . a polity that rules over wide territories and many peoples, since the management of space and multi-ethnicity is one of the great perennial dilemmas of an empire .

. . An empire is by definition . . . not a polity ruled with the explicit consent of its peoples, [But] by a process of assimilation of peoples of democratization of institutions empires can transform themselves into multinational federations or even nation states. (10) Thus defined, an empire does not require the general consensus of the people involved. However, an empire can adapt to whatever is the prevalent social, economic or political environment at hand. What America Has Become

In the course of human history for the past four centuries since the arrival of the English settlers in America, has the United States revealed itself, in whatever degree, as a nation with imperial intents? As Ferguson states: This book argues not merely that the United States is an empire but that it has always been an empire. Unlike most of the previous authors who have remarked on this, I have no objection in principle to an American empire. Indeed, a part of my argument is that many parts of the world would benefit from a period of American rule (Ferguson 2).

The United States is perceived to be the greatest empire to have ever existed in the history the mankind, propelling itself to the top, not only with its involvement and successes at previous wars, but most especially, with its exploitation of constant advances inscience and technologyfor its defensive posture. In this field, America has no equal. As we have seen, by most

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conventional measures of power-economic, military and cultural-there has never been an empire mightier than the United States today (Ferguson289).

The American Might: Strongholds around the Globe

From a military standpoint, America has the greatest influence over many other nations today. Controlling offensive and defensive strategic sites around the globe, its military arm is well-emplaced and is in the best position to act or react should the need arise. . . . the U. S. military has around 752 military installations in more than 130 countries . . . In the first year of President Bush's presidency, around 70, 000 U. S. troops were stationed in Germany, and 40, 000 in Japan . . . Almost as many (36, 500) were in South Korea . . .

Moreover, new wars have meant new bases, like Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo, acquired during the 1999 war against Yugoslavia, or the Bishkek air base in Kyrgyzstan . . . At the time of writing, about 10, 000 American troops are still based in Afghanistan, and it seems certain that a substantial force of 100, 000 will have to remain in Iraq for at least the next few years. (Ferguson 16)

What other nation in the face of the earth - be it in the past or in the present - could ever boast of such a claim? What other nation is more prepared to control vast areas of land, air and water with its military dominance?

On land the United States has 9, 000 M1 Abrams tanks. The rest of the world has nothing that can compete. At sea the United States possesses nine 'supercarrier' battle groups. The rest of the world has none. And in the air the United States has three different kinds of undetectable stealth aircraft. The rest of the world has none. The United States is also far ahead in the production of 'smart' missiles and pilotless high-altitude 'drones' (Ferguson

16). The American Empire: Adherence and Denial The United States today is an empire – but a peculiar kind of empire.

It is vastly wealthy. It is militarily peerless. It has astonishing cultural reach. Yet by comparison with other empires it often struggles to impose its will beyond its shores . . . Only when the United States could cast itself in an anti-imperialist role . . . were the Americans able to perform their own cryptoimperial role with self-confidence (Ferguson 287). This is where the American nation faces its greatest hurdle in reaching its full potential and becoming a great empire for the greater benefit of the world, for it could not bear the concept of an Imperial America.

It took a succession of humanitarian disasters abroad in the 1990s and terrorist attacks at home in 2001 to rekindle public enthusiasm for a more assertive American foreign policy, though even this had to be cloaked in euphemism, its imperial character repeatedly denied (Ferguson 287). But this denial is not a sentiment shared by all Americans. As events unfold and the need for change arises, more and more adherents to an imperial America surface, publicly giving voice to an advocacy silently embraced by a few.

Richard Haas, who went on to serve in the Bush administration as director of policy planning in the State Department, argued that Americans needed to ‘re-conceive their global role from one of traditional nation-state to an imperial power’, calling openly for an ‘informal’ American empire . . . As Thomas Donnelly, deputy executive director of the Project for the New American Century, told the Washington Post in August 2001, “There’s not all that many people who will talk about it [empire] openly. It’s discomfoting to a lot of Americans.

So they use code phrases like ' America is the sole superpower' "(Ferguson 4). There is little doubt that the declaration of an imperial America would profoundly provoke global agitation. However, one must bear in mind that this is not a new concept and that for decades, this abstraction has always been in the backdrop, even more so in every anti-American cause one would care to listen to. Few people outside the United States today doubt the existence of an American empire; that America is imperialistic is a truism in the eyes of most educated Europeans.

But the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr noted as long ago as 1960, Americans persist in ' frantically avoiding recognition of the imperialism[they] in fact exercise (Ferguson 294). All evidence suggests that America is an empire. The denial of the American populace and most especially that of the United States government to this fact is not an altogether innocuous act or claim, as in the present case of Iraq and Afghanistan. Does imperial denial matter? The answer is that it does . . .

The trouble with an empire in denial is that it tends to make two mistakes when it chooses to intervene in the affairs of lesser states. The first may be to allocate insufficient resources to the nonmilitary aspects of the project. The second, and the more serious, is to attempt economic and political transformation in an unrealistically short time frame. (Ferguson 294) America as the Engine of Global Growth To this day, America remains to be the behemoth that it is with the American dollar taking its rightful place as the international currency in the global market.

Twentieth-century history handed the United States a privileged position in the world economy; its currency became and has remained the world's
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favorite. Since 1945 it has been used more than any other for denominating international transactions, and that has made it the preferred currency for central bank reserves (Ferguson 283). America, it appears, has everything that is needed to perform its imperial role. It is even likely that, in these times of widespread poverty, many countries would rally behind this cause for simple economic motives.

The reason that so much overseas capital flows into the United States, so it is said, is that the American economy is the engine of global growth and foreign investors simply want a 'piece of the action' (Ferguson 281). At the end of the day, the alleviation of poverty through the creation of a dynamic and vigorous economy is the backbone of a peaceful nation. Here is where one sees the role that America should play. The Role that America Should Play What the world needs today is not just any kind of empire.

What is required is a liberal empire- that is to say, one that not only underwrites the free international exchange of commodities, labor and capital but also creates and upholds the conditions without which markets cannot function- peace and order, the rule of law, non-corrupt administration, stable fiscal and monetary policies- as well as provide public goods, such as transport infrastructure, hospitals and schools, which would not otherwise exist. (Ferguson 2) The question that must now be answered is: 'Can the United States achieve the role of being an effective liberal empire?

' There is no doubt that the America of today has a foothold on almost all of the essential attributes required to perform this role. Although the United States seems in many ways ideally endowed -economically, militarily and

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politically - to run such an ' empire of liberty' (in Thomas Jefferson's phrase), in practice it has been a surprisingly inept empire builder (Ferguson 2). Because of the democracy with which America was founded upon, we have seen time and again how the American populace, in general, refuses to accept the concept of an empire.

As such, it could not move on to greater heights of historical attainment. Others would claim that many millions of people around the world have benefited in some way or another from the existence of America's empire - not least the West Europeans, Japanese, and South Koreans who were able to prosper during the cold war under the protection of the American nuclear ' umbrella' - and that the economic losers of the post-cold war era, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, are victims not of American power but of its absence (Ferguson 13).

In the words of retired General Anthony Zinni: ' What is our obligation to the world? ' We preach about values, democracy, human rights, but we haven't convinced the American people to pony up . . . There's no leadership that steps up and says, ' This is the right thing to do' . . . That's the basic problem . . . There has to be the political will and support for these things. We should believe that a stable world is a better place for us . . . the U. S.

would make a much greater difference to the world. (Ferguson 293)

Conclusion Through the acceptance and support for an American empire by the American people themselves - which in itself is a huge undertaking - the United States could significantly alter the course of human history for the better. This conclusion could better be proven by questioning any of the

multitudinous impoverished citizens from a third-world country if such a nation would be better off under the auspices of the American dollar.

The United States has always been an empire in denial. A truly unfortunate fact for humankind would have a much better place to live in if only the world, most especially the American populace, would accept, recognize and support this undeniable reality of an imperial America. Works Cited Fletcher, Richard. *Colossus*. U. K. : Penguin, 2004.