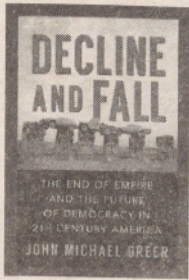


# All fall down: Is the United States the next Third World?

BY MIKE WOLD  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER



**Decline and Fall: The End of Empire and the Future of Democracy in 21st Century America** by John Michael Greer

**A**t last count, the U.S. had more than 500 military bases in other countries. It spends as much on its armed forces as the rest of the world combined.

According to author John Michael Greer, that's because the United States is an empire and its military dominance is in the service of maintaining that empire.

"Decline and Fall" gives a succinct definition of empire as "an arrangement among nations, backed and usually imposed by military force, which extracts wealth from a periphery of subject nations and concentrates it in the imperial core." The U.S. version involves client states and allied governments that maintain the structures to keep the wealth pumping, particularly from the "Third World." Greer points out that empires have a relatively short lifespan on the world stage. For the U.S., he believes, we've about reached the end of our tenure.

Greer ranges across world history to explain his theory of the rise and fall of empires, from ancient Egypt, when the "Sea People" developed a counterweight to superior Egyptian military technology, to the origins of the blitzkrieg concept in Sherman's march through the South in the American Civil War.

He also lays out a theory of the development and decline of our democracy. Quoting the ancient Greek philosopher Polybius, he proposes that democracy goes through cycles, from beginnings with a strong leader who resolves some intractable problem to a final stage where power is so diffused that a new problem cannot be solved without another such leader emerging.

He identifies Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt as the U.S. leaders who played this role and suggests that we've

again reached the gridlock stage.

However, having proposed this model, Greer, who writes the popular blog "The Archdruid Report," is neither incisive nor consistent in applying it. He doesn't make much sense on his own terms.

If we're at the gridlock stage in his cycle, one would expect him to advocate a new leader like Roosevelt or Lincoln taking charge and cutting through that Gordian knot.

Instead, he suggests we'll be saved by small-scale democratic institutions, such as 19th-century school boards and local sewer districts. He idealizes 19th century schooling – which by and large excluded African-Americans and systematically underserved the poor – and makes the questionable claim that people were better educated in the mid-1800s than today, basing this on the contents of 19th-century textbooks and the sophistication of the Lincoln-Douglass debates. As for sewer districts, some people in Seattle may remember when Metro was formed in the 1950s to repair the harm that local sewer districts had done by discharging untreated waste into Lake Washington. What's even more confusing is that Greer appears to be cynical about democracy in any case, considering it to be inevitably corrupt, since voters always seek out their own self-interest.

Greer has little tolerance for other ways of looking at political reality, whether liberal, conservative or radical, dismissing them as misguided "handwaving." He tends to pontificate, argues from anecdotes rather than real evidence and repeats his points over and over. He's not averse to distorting facts to strengthen his case, as when he lumps Keynesian economics with other mainstream economic theories, saying they "ignore the fact that an economy left to its

own devices can dole out decades of misery to everybody" (not leaving the economy to its own devices is a large part of what Keynesianism is about). Similarly, he claims that the weakness of the political left in the United States since the 1960s is due to its commitment to consensus, ignoring that most of the left, including the labor movement, does not use consensus to make decisions.

Greer seems to believe that use of fossil fuels is what made industrialism possible, arguing that as oil and coal get more expensive, industrial society will cease to exist. But the energy and labor efficiencies of using machinery are real, regardless of whether the machines are powered by oil, solar power, humans or animals: The beginnings of industrialization predate the use of coal or oil as power sources.

Greer concludes that people in the U.S. will just have to get used to living without surplus wealth from other countries, as well as from the extra wealth provided by the use of fossil fuels. This certainly makes sense to the degree that people in the U.S. share in the wealth that flows in from the plunder of poorer countries.

However, his characterization of the result being similar to living in a Third World society doesn't. The Third World, after all, is the other end of the "wealth pump" for our empire. Greer has already noted that the impoverishment of the Third World is a direct result of being exploited by various empires.

Does he really mean to imply that the U.S. would just become some other country's imperial colony? He's strangely silent on what might replace U.S. dominance. Wouldn't it be better to rid the world of empires altogether?

*Reprinted from Real Change, Street Roots' sister paper in Seattle, Wash.*

## I AM NOT A POET

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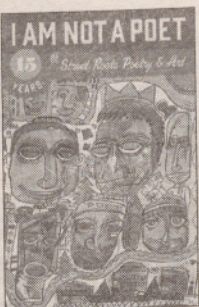
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by Leo Rhodes

In my mind  
Is a door  
I never visit  
The door is locked  
And the key is hidden  
Never to be opened  
Sometimes I hear the creaking sound of the door  
opening  
A sense of panic rushes over me  
I try to stabilize myself  
Mustering all my courage  
I seek the door  
My emotions intensify  
But I don't show it  
Sometimes I'm lucky and find the door  
And lock the door before its to late  
Other times its to late

### untitled 27

by William Holmes

the rustling tide with shallow breaths ebb, replenish, hold  
selfish murmur rolling hollow, determined steady beat  
astigmatic white with verdant shards, ink drops dilate  
aperture distilled, enamored portrait retina etched