



The Irony of Manifest Destiny: The Tragedy of America's Foreign Policy

William Pfaff

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"For years there has been little or no critical reexamination of how and why the ultimately successful postwar American policy of 'patient but firm and vigilant containment of Soviet expansionist tendencies...and pressure against the free institutions of the western world' (as George Kennan formulated it at the time) has over six decades turned into a vast project for ending tyranny in the world. We defend this position by making the claim that the United States possesses an exceptional status among nations that confers upon it special international responsibilities, and exceptional privileges in meeting those responsibilities. This is where the problem lies. It has become somewhat of a national heresy to suggest the U.S. does not have a unique moral status and role to play in the history of nations and therefore in the affairs of the contemporary world. In fact it does not."

Cogently, thoughtfully, powerfully, William Pfaff--whose columns and commentary over the past 40-odd years have given him the widest international influence of any American commentator--lays out the historical roots behind the American exceptionalism that has animated our politics and foreign relations for decades, and makes clear why it is flawed and bound to fail. Those roots lie in the secularization of western society brought about by the Enlightenment. "My proposition in this book is that the United States' separation from 1800 to 1941 from the common history of the west has disqualified it from the mandate it has assumed as the society that embodies the future" ...and in many ways is responsible for the impasse in which it finds itself at the end of the disastrous events of the last 8 years. "It has failed to learn from experience because it lacks the indispensable experience Europeans have acquired of modern ideological folly and national tragedy."

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