Critical Dialogue

Good-Bye Hegemony! Power and Influence in the Global System. By Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. 208p. $95 cloth, $24.95 paper.
doi:10.1017/S1537592714002291

— Jeanne Morefield, *Whitman College*

This book provides a truly timely and richly documented study of the problems associated with the idea of hegemony in international politics. Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow convincingly interrogate the multiple ways this idea is conceptually impoverished and demonstrate how it skews the lenses through which international relations scholars and political actors view America's role in in the world. At the same time, they maintain, the very assertion of hegemony is descriptively false. America has not actually *been* a hegemon since shortly after World War II and, even then, for only a brief window of time. However, despite its lack of utility and its failure to conform to reality, IR scholars (realists and liberals alike) and the foreign policy establishment cling to the necessity of America's global leadership, resulting in a foreign policy that is largely ineffectual and actively alienates much of the world. Reich and Lebow find this unacceptable and throw down the gauntlet at the feet of academics and policy makers, insisting upon a different kind of foreign policy for an increasingly multipolar international environment.

One of the great strengths of the book is the elegant way it moves back and forth between an empirical and theoretical critique of hegemony, often within the same chapter, even within the same paragraph. In Chapter 2, for instance, the authors first ably demonstrate that neither realists' emphasis on military and economic power alone nor liberals' understanding of hegemony as a "mix of power and norms" accurately describes the status and role of America in the world (p.18). The United States may account for over 40% of the world's military spending and a quarter of its economic activity, but this does not translate into a consistent ability to enforce its will upon the states and peoples it deems out of order. Moreover, to believe (as does G. John Ikenberry) that American hegemony not only exists but that it is necessary and beneficent is, the authors assert, not only woefully out of touch with reality but also grounded in a nostalgic misreading of history that ignores those moments of bullying, assassination, and occupation—in the Axis powers after the war, in Latin America, Asia, and Africa—that have led critics around the world to refer to America as an imperial power. The authors then pivot to a conceptual critique of hegemony that takes this very disconnect—between the IR literature that assumes America is a benevolent hegemon and the fact that it is neither hegemonic nor perceived as benevolent—and uses it to critically disentangle a variety of theoretical distinctions. Because they have a vested interest in this flawed notion of hegemony, Reich and Lebow argue, IR scholars conflate material advantage with power and power with influence. Conflating power with influence leads them to overlook other forms of influence and, in the process, to support a foreign policy that further alienates current and potential allies.

Chapters 3 and 4 shift gears, away from a critique of hegemony as a concept to an investigation of alternative approaches to foreign policy that challenge both hegemony's normative and empirical claims. The authors find these approaches in instances of European agenda setting and contemporary China's role as a global "economic custodian." The investigation of China in Chapter Four is particularly compelling in its refutation of those contemporary American alarmists who issue dire warnings about Chinese regional and global ambitions and who propagate the notion that China is, in Niall Ferguson's typically flip words, "tyrannous and toxic" ("China Marches Again, Tyrannous and Toxic," The Telegraph, Sept. 8, 2007, http://www.niallferguson.com/journalism/politics/china-marches-again-tyrannous-and-toxic, accessed Aug. 21, 2015). Reich and Lebow carefully take on each of these fears and examine the ways in which China has demonstrated its lack of interest in the global overreach of which it stands accused. Rather, the authors argue, China seeks what they refer to as *hegemonia*, a Greek term about which Lebow has previously written in his brilliant and theoretically rich 2003 book *The Tragic Vision of Politics* and elsewhere. Hegemonia requires that other political communities who are ruled understand this rule as justified rather than simply tyrannous. Hegemonia therefore necessitates precisely the kinds of economic custodianship and the infusion of development aid that China has recently been spreading around the world.

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Understanding hegemony simply as brute power (as do most realists), or approaching it with the fixed ideological certainty that everybody loves America because we stand for stability and democracy (as do liberals), blinds scholars and policymakers to what China is actually doing on the ground. Additionally, Reich and Lebow maintain that IR scholars committed to a factually erroneous and theoretically unhelpful notion of hegemony necessarily ignore history and culture in their analysis of China's foreign policy objectives. Hegemony as a description, normative good, and analytical tool compels its adherents to assume what they have not proven—that American power is necessary and good and that the world would fall apart without it. In the face of such conceptual obduracy, all detail—Chinese historical experiences of empire and American power, cultural specificities, and context more broadly—fall away. In this light, the hysteria of American scholars and pundits over China's "tyrannous and toxic" intentions begins to look a lot like what the authors describe elsewhere as Freudian projection: the mechanism by which people deny their own (secretly imperial?) desires and ascribe them to others.

Perhaps the simultaneously most fascinating and most frustrating chapter in the book is Chapter 5, in which the authors "offer conceptual tools for rethinking the U.S. role in the world" (p. 133). They do this by first introducing the notion of "sponsorship" and contrast it to a foreign policy grounded in the leadership assumed to flow from hegemony and linked to the parochialism of military deterrence and compellence. Such an approach does not require policymakers—who are "oblivious to the limitations of this view despite all evidence to the contrary"—to develop any special knowledge of regional history or of the domestic and international contexts that engender particular conflicts. (p. 139) Rather, all international issues are boiled down to technical problems requiring technical solutions. By way of contrast, Reich and Lebow offer us the "alternative framework" of what they term "sponsorship." In its essence, sponsorship amounts to everything that hegemony is not: Where hegemony ignores context, sponsorship engages it. Where hegemony antagonizes by insisting that the American way is the only way, sponsorship takes the needs and desires of other peoples seriously and works with all stakeholders. Where hegemony assumes moral superiority without consensus, sponsorship understands that a Great Power that truly wants to be effective must be considered legitimate by the nations over whom it hopes to have influence. The authors demonstrate sponsorship in action by first contrasting Barack Obama's approach to Libya with the war in Iraq and then by engaging in a novel, "counterfactual" reading of the U.S.–Mexican relationship since the inception of the drug war.

I am in agreement with much of Reich and Lebow's analysis throughout this book, but found myself troubled by their turn to the counterfactual. To be clear, they use the counterfactual sparingly—it amounts to only a small part of one example in a single chapter—and they obviously do not use it in the same cynical fashion as do neoconservatives, who turn to "what if" scenarios to retroactively justify American military intervention or point to where its absence led to failure (See Ferguson's frequent use of counterfactuals in *Virtual History*, 2000; *Collossus: The Rise and Fall of American Empire*, 2005; and *Civilization: The West and the Rest*, 2011). See also Robert Kagan, "Whether This War Was Worth It," *Washington Post*, June 19, 2005, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/17/AR2005061701217.html, accessed Aug. 21, 2014). Lebow is also a careful and experienced advocate for the use of counterfactuals to explore international politics (see *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations*, 2010), and his desire to expand their utility beyond what E. H. Carr referred to as "parlor-games" is another indication of his open and heterodox approach to IR (Carr, *What Is History*, 1967), p. 127).

Rather, my discomfort with the authors' use of the counterfactual springs from the sympathetic but critical belief that it highlights a potential weakness in their vision of how we—as scholars, concerned citizens, and/or policymakers—ought to respond to the vision of America encapsulated in the idea of hegemony. Specifically, Reich and Lebow label their reimagining of Richard Nixon's response to Mexico and the drug war in terms of sponsorship rather than hegemony a "miracle counterfactual" because it assumes that an administration as committed as Nixon's to a criminal disregard for national and international law would be willing—in an alternative universe—to "work with the Mexican government rather than alienating it through unilateral initiatives" (p. 165). But, other than a miracle, what would it actually take to make American sponsorship a viable alternative to American hegemony?

Reich and Lebow rightly argue throughout the book that IR scholars, policymakers, and Americans more generally must learn to ground their responses to international politics in something other than blind faith in the necessity of American leadership. Such a shift, they argue, "would require reshaping the lessons Americans learned from their history and the deeper-rooted beliefs—exceptionalism, messianism, and indispensability—that we have described" (p. 165). But they do not tell us *how* that miraculous shift is supposed to occur in the context of a political culture so profoundly committed to understanding America as the world's savior. Simply saying to IR scholars, the policy establishment, and the American people alike "this doesn't work, let's try something different" takes an ideologically and historically complex problem and decontextualizes it, something the authors argue vigorously against elsewhere in the book.

Ultimately, I argue, the kind of change Reich and Lebow call for requires a deeper and broad-ranging critique of America's imperial history than they make here. To their great credit, the authors take very seriously the extent to which the United States has historically made foreign policy decisions that violate the principles upon which it was supposedly founded by allying itself with dictators, squashing emerging democracies, and contributing toward an increasingly unstable world economy. But, in the final analysis, Reich and Lebow consider such actions exceptional. Thus, they argue, liberals, realists, and foreign policy analysts ignore the ways America has routinely "violated the responsibilities and roles assigned to a hegemon." By contrast, they insist, "We highlight these departures" (p. 23). The very word "departures" here implies that the authors consider such moments of American overreach to be anomalies rather than the norm, despite their persistence through time. "Postwar American hegemony," they argue, "never took the form of an empire" (p. 135). But is this necessarily true in either a pre- or postwar context?

The United States was founded upon land already inhabited by autonomous peoples, and its expansion across the continent required an inordinately complicated language of manifest destiny to square forced land dispossession and genocide with America's foundational language of freedom and democracy. The complexity of justification increased in intensity as the United States grew into a world power, annexing portions of Mexico, overthrowing the sovereign monarch of Hawaii, occupying Haiti for more than 15 years, and behaving in ways that, as Reich and Lebow correctly observe, the rest of the world understood to be implicitly imperial. Such misadventures continued after the World War II, and, if anything, the rationalizing language of "exceptionalism, messianism, and indispensability" only hardened in response to the Cold War and following the events of September 11, 2001. In other words, the foreign policy actions that the authors imagine as departures—along with the kinds of ideological justifications and forms of psychological "projection" necessary to sustain them—are actually fused into the very fabric of American self-understanding. This self-understanding is, they note, delusional. But it is also extraordinarily powerful, and unraveling it will take more than identifying it as a fiction.

That being said, the fact that Reich and Lebow *do* identify hegemony as a delusional fiction goes a long way toward beginning the process of reimagining American foreign policy in a multipolar world. I suggest that countering the idea of American exceptionalism ought to proceed on two fronts. The authors successfully articulate one of these fronts for us with their interrogation of hegemony and their clear-eyed call for sponsorship. The other front will entail beginning the difficult process of self-reflection that demands that Americans investigate how their exceptionalism has always been braided with imperial overreach. As Ta-Nehisi Coates notes in a recent article that makes the case for offering reparations to African Americans who have endured 300 years of systematic theft: "An America that looks away is ignoring not just the sins of the past but the sins of the present and the certain sins of the future. More important than any single check cut to any African American, the payment of reparations would represent America's maturation out of the childhood myth of its innocence into a wisdom worthy of its founders" ("The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/05/the-case-for-reparations/361631/, acessed Aug. 21, 2014). Similarly, *Good-Bye Hegemony!* constitutes, to my mind, a crucial initial moment in the maturation process whereby America takes responsibility for its imperial past and present and faces the world with the kind of realistic humility of which Thucydides—one of Lebow's biggest heroes—would be proud.

Response to Jeanne Morefield's review of *Good-Bye Hegemony! Power and Influence in the Global System*

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— Richard Ned Lebow and Simon Reich

Jeanne Morefield's book and ours are complementary in their understanding of U.S. foreign policy and political agenda. We recognize the destructive effects of hubris both at home and abroad: how it is maintained through the repetition of illusions until they become embedded in a political culture and cemented by conceptual sleights of hand. Morefield focuses on the strategy of deflection and we on the defense of hegemony. Both attempt to reduce dissonance between behavior and proclaimed values.

Deflection describes the behavior in question as exceptional and unavoidable. It regards empire as in the interest of colonizer and colonized alike, arguing that valuable ends justify occasionally unpalatable means. Hegemony relies on the same logic. As with a strategy of deflection, both its advocates at home and beneficiaries abroad proclaim that others accept this logic, as they understand empire or hegemony as serving their interests as well. The indispensible hegemon is all that stands between order and chaos in this popular formulation, propagating the mistaken and ultimately often tragic assumption that the United States has the capacity to control the course of events as a product of its vast material power. Material power does not confer influence, and the language of the powerful is only one component in the quest for recognition. Rather, legitimacy is conferred by the governed. It is a product of just rule and entails an acceptance that deferring to others can be a more effective instrument than the assertion of leadership.

Our disagreements are minor but highlight important issues. Morefield believes that the United States is an empire, and we reject this characterization. She thinks that our use of a miracle counterfactual to remake American drug policy toward Mexico is an admission that it would take a miracle to have changed it, and by extension, to reorient contemporary American foreign policy. Yet she criticizes us for not offering a road map showing how the United States could move toward a strategy of what we call sponsorship. Yet that is far from being a "technical fix" or requiring an unattainable reorientation. Indeed, we provide examples—from the global campaigns against human trafficking and piracy to America's role in the campaign against Muammar Gaddafi's forces in Libya—that have proved restorative in terms of America's global reputation. None required a miracle. All simply demonstrated a capacity to discard conventional prejudices and view America's role through a different lens.

In an ideal world, we would like Americans—and especially their leaders—to develop a greater sense of humility and appreciation of the contours and limits of power. It entails American policymakers renouncing their characteristic vision of world leadership and accompanying sense of entitlement, recognizing a plurality of values and interests and with it an acceptance that coordination and behind-the-scenes, patient diplomacy are often more effective than coercion, confrontation, and bribery. We have no magic wand. But we do believe that our book—and hers—have the potential to constitute a small step in this direction by exposing the illusory conceptual architecture of current policy and—in our case—offering an alternative, plausible vision of America's role in the global system in the twenty-first century.

Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection. By Jeanne Morefield. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 300p. $99 cloth, $29.95 paper.
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— Ned Lebow, *King's College London*

In this fascinating and timely study of democracy and empire, Jeanne Morefield offers a comparative study of early twentieth-century Britain and early twenty-first-century United States. She argues persuasively that a strategy of "deflection" was resorted to by elites in both countries to address the contradictions between domestic values and foreign practices. Deflection attempts to draw public attention at home and abroad away from embarrassing and otherwise unacceptable acts by insisting on the "liberal" character and, therefore, benign intentions of the empire. Morefield sees an upsurge in this kind of apologia in Britain in the decade before World War I and during World War I and its aftermath, and in the United States since the end of the Cold War and more dramatically, since 9/11. She interprets this discourse as a response to growing perceptions of imperial decline in both countries.

Morefield documents her thesis with telling statements from many prominent British and American intellectuals and politicians and describes the thought and trajectories of six of them in considerable detail. In Britain, they are Oxford classicist and international relations commentator Alfred Zimmern; members of the Round Table, notably Lionel Curtis and Philip Kerr; and South African general and British war cabinet member Jan Smuts. In the United States, we see empire through the eyes of three neoconservatives: historians Donald Kagan and Niall Ferguson—the latter an Englishmen who works in America—and writer and politician Michael Ignatieff, who is Canadian born, British educated, and former head of the Canadian Liberal Party. It is both an odd and appropriate choice of figures. It is odd because the majority of these figures are immigrants or foreigners, or son of immigrants in the case of Zimmern. It is fitting in that the author's subjects describe "empires" as upholding and spreading universal values and open to people who assimilate them.

Morefield attributes the deflection strategy to liberals, as they suffer most from the dissonance of empire. By emphasizing the liberal character of their state and its world mission, liberal imperialists can "have their cake and eat it too." Their country "is compelled to act imperially to save the world from imperialism, and yet is never responsible for having created the conditions that require it to save the world in the first place because it was always, even when it was not, just being who it was" (p. 3).

Morefield is definitely on to something important here. Her strategy of deflection was resorted to by supporters of British and American imperialism in similar ways, and she marshals evidence that it was generally for similar reasons. In the United States, deflection strategy is not limited to neoconservatives or members and supporters of the second Bush administration. Barack Obama and his coterie of advisors speak in the same voice. They routinely resort to "who we are" language that stresses the benign nature of Americans and their selfless commitment to make the world a better place in order to discourage critical reflection about military intervention, torture of civilians and captured combatants, collateral damage arising from the use of drones, and other policies seemingly at odds with these values.

The author offers a detailed and nuanced reading of the figures to whom she devotes chapters. She attempts to identify their values, the ways they developed or changed in response to events, and, above all, their take on empire. The most interesting of the readings may be of Zimmern, who made Athens his template for empire and imagined the British Empire as its worthy successor. The most tedious—through no fault of the author—is of Donald Kagan, whose views are simple, crude, and certain. The most poignant is of Michael Ignatieff, whose turn to tragedy is ironic, as his own hubris, as it did for Athens, led him farther and farther away from the values in which he claims to be anchored.

This is a fine book and notable contribution to the growing field of intellectual history of empire. For many readers, two concerns will nevertheless spring to mind. The first is Morefield's characterization of the United States as an empire. Second is the extent to which the three defenders of American empire she writes about are representative of American liberals, or even qualify as liberals.

Morefield defines an empire as "a state that engages in direct or indirect rule over dependent or colonial territories" (p. 4). Drawing on Michael Doyle, she characterizes imperialism as the "process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire" (p. 4).[1] Imperialism and empire promote hierarchy, discipline, dispossession, extraction, and exploitation (p. 4). To be sure, Britain was an unabashed empire for centuries, and politicians and intellectuals across the spectrum used the term to describe those territories that flew the Union Jack and were painted pink on maps and globes. The United States acquired colonial holdings in the late nineteenth century, but politicians and intellectuals were never comfortable in calling themselves an empire and more so after World War II when the Philippines was recognized as independent in 1946. Efforts by neoconservatives like Kagan, Ferguson and Ignatieff to use the term after the end of the Cold War to describe America's role in the world met considerable resistance and showed little traction. This opposition, I believe, was primarily due to the odium that now surrounds empire. It is an enterprise associated by most Americans with racism, exploitation, and violent imposition of rule over those who want to be self-governing.

One can argue, as do neoconservatives and left-wing critics of U.S. foreign policy, that America has an informal empire, notably in Latin America. But why call it an empire? The Left does this to expose the nature of American political and commercial relationships with allegedly independent countries and emphasize the contradiction this poses between practices and professed values. For neocons, I believe, the appeal is just the reverse. By acknowledging America as an empire, they hope to justify and gain support for policies at odds with liberalism, like domestic surveillance, the indiscriminate use of force, indefinite imprisonment of politically undesirables without trial, and reliance on torture to extract what might be useful information. The three neocons featured in the book are thus different beasts from their three English imperial predecessors. Zimmern, Smuts, and many members of the Round Table were to varying degrees liberal. They recognized and were concerned with the contradictions between values and practices and sought to overcome this dissonance by deflection, but also imperial reform. There were differences among them, to be sure. Zimmern was the most concerned with violations of liberal norms because he was a true liberal who believed that the British Empire should reflect these values. The Round Table members and Smuts had more instrumental concerns. They wanted Britain to remain strong in a competitive world, and this, they believed, required meaningful self-governance for white settler colonies and camouflage to mask self-interested rule elsewhere.

The three defenders of American "empire" that Morefield features are hardly representatives of American liberal opinion. The author (pp. 4–5) is clear that she uses "liberal" only in the context of empire, and that all of the figures she studies believe that the British and American empires are based on the liberal principles of freedom, individualism, and universal equality. Kagan is a conservative ideologue and moved to the right in response to the social and political upheaval of the 1960s. He is not associated with any values or causes that could be called liberal in the twentieth-century understanding of the term. Ferguson is described by Morefield as a die-hard Thatcherite, that is, an opponent of state intervention in the economy and other kinds of collectivism. This makes him a nineteenth-century liberal at best. But it is not evident that Ferguson has any values beyond self-aggrandizement. Ignatieff was once a true liberal and disciple of Isaiah Berlin. He underwent a conversion for which the catalysts appear to have been in roughly equal measure the course of post–Cold War events and his career as a public intellectual and politician. While British defenders of empire were embarrassed by deviations, their neoconservative American (and Canadian) counterparts revel in it. Nor at the height of their influence did they regard America as a declining empire, but one that still had the potential, and now the opportunity, to remake the world.

I think it fair to say that there is a continuum in American opinion that is anchored on the left end by true liberals. Here, we find those few politicians and journalists, and many international relations scholars, who had the courage to speak out against intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, and subsequently, with much broader support, against Guantanamo, rendition, waterboarding, drones, and illegal or improper foreign and domestic surveillance. At the other end of the spectrum are the neocons, including the three described in this book, many politicians like John McCain, and journalists associated with conservative or right-wing publications and think tanks. There is nothing liberal about this crowd, with the possible exception of opposition to racism in the United States. In between are arrayed the vast majority of Americans, and arguably somewhere in the center most members of the Obama administration. This is, of course, a simplistic portrayal because there are libertarians like Rand Paul who oppose military intervention, and conservatives who worry about overextension and the use of the U.S. military for purposes for which it was not designed. They support cautious foreign policies for different reasons than do liberals.

Those in the center and close to it on either side are most likely to be liberals and also supporters of a would-be hegemonic, or at least activist, role in the world for the United States. They are the group, not the neocons, who most need some strategy for overcoming dissonance. Many engage in deflection, which as Morefield so nicely describes, has several interlocking features. The one that Simon Reich and I focus on in *Good-Bye Hegemony!* is the belief in America as "the essential nation," in the words of former Secretary of State Madeline Albright. This flattering self-characterization is encouraged by American leaders and taken to heart by so much of the population.[2] Many other Americans with at least some liberal values prefer to engage in denial. They do their best to insulate themselves from reports of American atrocities and violations of human rights. Some distance themselves further by not voting.

It is important, and Morefield concurs, to examine these discourses in a broader historical context. Empires proclaiming liberal values, and even some, like Portugal and Spain, that did not, have always confronted cognitive dissonance arising from the contradictions between their proclaimed values and repressive practices. Thucydides has Pericles attempt to square this circle in his funeral oration, where he justifies empire on the basis of what Athens does for its "allies"[3] The Anglo-Normans did the same in the aftermath of their conquest of Ireland.[4] They portrayed the Irish as barbarians in need of a strong hand to civilize them. The clash between the Christian values of colonizers and their non-Christian treatment of subjects prompted the use of perceptual sleights of hand and the stereotypes they supported to dehumanize the colonized so that these values no long applied. Alternatively, the colonized were described as children who required tutelage and oversight until they reached maturity. The Portuguese, Spanish, British, French, and American empires made use of one or both strategies, as did Americans in their treatment at home of African Americans. This is the principal reason why the stereotype of diverse colonial peoples is so strikingly similar.[5]

What is new—to the extent that anything is new—is the even more pronounced contradictions between liberal democracy and empire and the inability to hide or ignore them in a world of television, Internet, and social media. We can reduce dissonance of this kind by ignoring, redefining, or changing behavior or by changing our beliefs. The last choice is the most dangerous in its consequences as it threatens to undermine democratic values and practices. This is why neoconservatism and its plea to reframe America as an empire and to relish in its imperial role constitutes the kind of threat that Zimmern, Smuts, and the Round Table did not.

Notes

1 Doyle 1986, 45.
2 Reich and Lebow 2014.
3 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.34.8–2.46.
4 Lebow 1976.
5 Ibid.

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Response to Ned Lebow's review of *Empires Without Imperialism: Anglo-American Decline and the Politics of Deflection*

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— Jeanne Morefield

I would first like to thank Ned Lebow for his generous review and insightful critique of my work. Our projects, as anyone who reads this exchange will no doubt recognize, are similar: Lebow, Simon Reich, and I are interested in challenging the notion of America as "the essential nation." We do this from complementary perspectives, and our differences reflect, perhaps, our subdisciplinary inclinations regarding the relationship between language and power.

In his review, Lebow asks why it is important for my analysis to call the United States an empire, particularly in light of the neocons' push to embrace the term. Accepting the neocon framing, he argues, would entail "changing our beliefs" about America's democratic values and practices. However, as I argue in my book, American and British character narratives about both nations' "democratic values and practices" were/are predicated on, and discursively bound to, practices of imperialism. In America, this has been true since before the founding of the Republic, and imperial practices have existed right alongside a collective denial of imperialism ever since. Citizens, scholars, and policymakers in both countries have long tried to square the circle between liberal democratic values and empire through elaborate strategies of deflection that entail historical retelling, careful forgetting, and disavowal. Given this deflective tradition, I maintain that the best way to oppose the neocons is not to fall back on narratives that insist that "we are not an empire and therefore refuse to let the neocons change our values." Rather, challenging deflective American narratives about our exceptionalism might very well demand that we "change our beliefs" about who we think we are—and have been—in the context of empire.

In this sense, it is also important, I argue, to demonstrate the ways liberalism has been complicit with imperial politics, and this requires demonstrating how capacious liberalism is as an ideology. Lebow is not entirely correct when he maintains that the contemporary authors I scrutinize are not liberals. Michael Ignatieff, in his domestic policy in particular, is a tried and true liberal in a way that Lebow would recognize—supportive of welfare state policies, civil liberties, and so on. Donald Kagan calls many aspects of his politics "liberal," and Niall Ferguson makes ample use of his support for civil liberties, freedom of speech, and human rights when he contrasts "the West" with "the Rest." Likewise, while Alfred Zimmern might have been moderately agonized by the disconnect between British imperialism and liberalism, the Round Tablers and Jan Smuts certainly were not. If anything, Smuts was even more cynical in his crafty expansion of Anglo-imperialism (in the name of internationalism) than any contemporary neocon. In other words, the differences and similarities among these authors point not to the necessity of saving liberalism from the contemporary neocons but, again, to the need to call liberalism's expansive and historic attachment to empire into question.

To clarify, I do not mean to imply here that challenging the myth of American exceptionalism means jettisoning the liberal democratic baby with the imperial bathwater. But it does require active reflection on those moments when American empire and American liberalism were/are not merely in tension but constitutive of each. From a scholarly perspective, critical exchanges like this—between sympathetic authors with different approaches to American hegemony—might just be the best way to begin that conversation.