

A Revisionist *Pax Americana*

Andrew Bacevich, the author of one of the several books presently circulating that promote the idea that the United States should be a new Roman Empire through global military conquest and occupation, is a self-described “civ-mil paranoid” (an inside-the-Washington Beltway buzzword for civil-military affairs). That self-diagnosis may be one of the few accurate and insightful statements to appear in the entire 302 pages of fractured-fairy-tale American history which this West Point grad, former U.S. Army Colonel, and Boston University professor, dishes out in his call for *American Empire*.

At least Bacevich has the decency to admit, at the beginning of the book, that his entire argument for an American empire is based on the writings of two of America’s most well-known revisionist historians, Charles Beard and William Appleman Williams. Beard, in the era of World War I, and Williams in the Vietnam War period, presented the argument that America was *always* imperial, and that the myth of American reluctance to wield global power was always fake, part of a larger mythology of American exceptionalism and an American republican mission detested by both authors.

Much of Bacevich’s book—once he delivers his endorsement of the Beard/Williams thesis of American greed and lust for global commercial dominance—is devoted to a detailed account of American foreign policy during the 1990’s, spanning the Presidencies of George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and the early months of George W. Bush. Here, Bacevich presents a pure fallacy of composition—noting every (actual) instance of American aggression, while avoiding any and all actions, particularly during the Clinton Presidency, that might have contradicted his thesis.

Ironically, in light of the policy firestorm surrounding the Bush Administration’s recent war against Iraq, Bacevich pays special attention to the 1991 draft Defense Planning Guidance, authored by Paul Wolfowitz, which

called for the United States to openly assert its global power, through a doctrine of preventive war against any nation or combination of nations—formerly friend or foe—which challenged America’s military and/or economic predominance. Bacevich, while embracing the Wolfowitz vision as a true expression of America’s global power play, chastises the current Deputy Defense Secretary for what he dubs the “Wolfowitz Indiscretion.”

Wolfowitz’s mistake, he writes, was to let the public in on America’s dirty little imperial secret, rather than perpetuating the myth of American goodness and pursuit of democracy, prosperity, and human rights for all.

I do not know whether Bacevich is a protégé of the University of Chicago’s professor Leo Strauss, or of one of the many Strauss disciples; I *do* know that his discussion of the “Wolfowitz Indiscretion” draws a conclusion that is pure Strauss: Never tell the truth to the American people, nor to the gullible politicians who are the “useful fools” of the behind-the-scenes imperial string-pullers.

Missing Ingredient

The factor that Bacevich totally excludes from his revisionist imperial pitch, is the very nature of the American Revolution and the revolutionary spirit it transmitted into the U.S. Constitution, particularly through the General Welfare clause of its Preamble. These are the very factors of “American exceptionalism” that Bacevich’s intellectual predecessors Beard and Williams also outright rejected.

Despite the pseudo-Marxist argument that American economic development under what was once known as the American System of Political Economy was merely a commercial form of empire-building, the facts are totally the opposite.

During the first century of the American Republic, the mission of the Founders was to spread republican principles, and the associated principles of



American Empire
by Andrew J. Bacevich
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economic sovereignty and scientific and technological progress, throughout the globe. To be sure, from the outset of the Republic, there were, in the words of Franklin Roosevelt, “American Tories”—proponents of the opposing British imperial system of East India Company “free trade.” But that American Tory faction always represented an alien seed, not the kernel of American republicanism embedded in the General Welfare clause and the Declaration of Independence. The durability of America’s Constitutional institutions is attested to, by the fact that the nation has survived long stretches in which the Presidency itself has been in the hands of the “American Tories.”

All of this is rejected by Bacevich; and, thus, his entire argument for empire is based on a mountain of falsehoods. In fact, Bacevich ends his imperial pitch with a warning that unconsciously betrays the weakness of his entire case.

“The question that urgently demands attention,” he writes in the book’s concluding paragraph, “the question that Americans can no longer afford to dodge—is not whether the United States has become an imperial power. The question is what sort of empire they intend theirs to be. For pol-

icymakers to persist in pretending otherwise—to indulge in myths of American innocence or fantasies about unlocking the secrets of history—is to increase the likelihood that the answers they come up with will be wrong. That way lies not just the demise of the

American empire but great danger for what used to be known as the American republic.”

Bacevich’s book is important for only one reason: As a naked pitch to destroy what remains of the American tradition, it is a useful target of exposure and

strong ridicule. His arguments are shallow, but they cannot be ignored—because they reflect an aggressive campaign by what Lyndon LaRouche has dubbed the “chickenhawks,” to destroy the United States from within.

—Jeffrey Steinberg

Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, the Inspiration for Fidelio Magazine

The first issue of this magazine, *Fidelio*, was published in 1991. I had just been released from Federal prison in October to a half-way house. I, along with Lyndon LaRouche and a number of his associates, although innocent, had been persecuted for our political convictions and had been imprisoned as political prisoners in the United States of America beginning Jan. 27, 1989. Lyndon LaRouche was still in prison at the time.

Fidelio magazine received its name from Beethoven’s only opera, and in my view, the greatest opera written by any composer thus far. When I named the magazine, I had in mind Lyndon LaRouche as Florestan, and his brave wife Helga Zepp LaRouche, who fought internationally for his freedom, as Leonora. As an associate of LaRouche, I also had in mind my own brave wife, Marianna, who had fought so valiantly both for Lyndon LaRouche’s freedom and for mine. In fact, while I was in prison, my wife and I exchanged over 90 letters under the pseudonyms Florestan and Leonora.

Beethoven’s opera is based on *Leonore*, a French opera by Pierre Gaveaux with libretto by Jean-Nicolas Bouilly, a French political figure who governed a prison at Touraine during the French Revolution. In his memoirs, Bouilly claimed that the events of his *Leonore* libretto were based on “a sublime act of heroism and devotion by one of the ladies of Touraine” as the Terror raged in France.

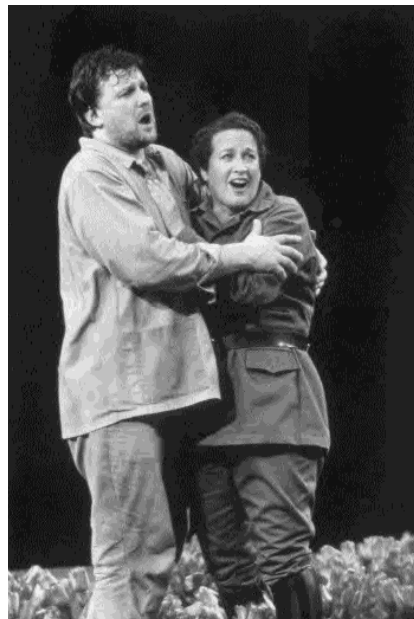
Donald Phau, another associate of Lyndon LaRouche who was a political prisoner, has pointed to the fact that the more likely inspiration for Bouilly, although it may have been politically difficult for him to say so at the time, was

the case of the Marquis de Lafayette, the famous French military leader who contributed to the success of the American Revolution and then returned to France to spread that revolution to Europe. Lafayette was forced to flee France with the advent of the British-orchestrated Jacobin terror and was imprisoned in Austria on orders of British Prime Minister William Pitt (the opera’s

Pizarro). His wife Adrienne worked tirelessly to free her husband, and even joined him in prison for two years. The couple was finally freed in 1797, the result of international pressure. Bouilly’s libretto was published in February 1798.

When this magazine was named *Fidelio*, it was thus an expression of our commitment to fight for the freedom of Lyndon LaRouche and his remaining associates still wrongfully imprisoned; it was an expression of our commitment to freedom and justice for all humanity; it was a celebration of what Lyndon LaRouche once referred to as the “Florestan principle,” Florestan’s commitment to the truth, regardless of personal consequences; and it was a celebration of the sublime beauty of a woman who, like Joan of Arc, acts heroically out of true married love, and more than that, out of love for all humanity.

In the opera, for those not familiar with the libretto, Florestan is impris-



Carol Pratt for The Washington Opera

Susan B. Anthony (right) as Leonora/*Fidelio* and Christopher Ventris (left) as Florestan, in *The Washington Opera production of Beethoven’s Fidelio*.

oned for telling the truth about his enemy, the tyrant Pizarro. His wife, Leonora, disguises herself as a young man named Fidelio, in order to gain access to the prison, where her husband is being

held. When Pizarro learns that the Governor is planning to inspect the prison and will uncover that Florestan, whom he believes to be dead, is being held there as a political prisoner, he decides to kill Florestan. Leonora, disguised as Fidelio, accompanies the jailer Rocco into the dungeon, where they dig her husband’s grave. When Pizarro enters the dungeon to kill Florestan, Fidelio/Leonora reveals that she is his wife (“Ich bin sein Weib”), as she fends off Pizarro at gunpoint. Pizarro flees and, with the arrival of the Governor, is taken into custody, and all the political prisoners, including Florestan, are freed.

The Washington Opera Performance

The Washington Opera performance of *Fidelio*, which I saw on May 19, was the first live performance I have witnessed. Since the Kennedy Center is being renovated, the performance took place at D.A.R. Constitution Hall,