



# Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors

*Charles S. Maier*

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Contemporary America, with its unparalleled armaments and ambition, seems to many commentators a new empire. Others angrily reject the designation. What stakes would being an empire have for our identity at home and our role abroad?

A preeminent American historian addresses these issues in light of the history of empires since antiquity. This elegantly written book examines the structure and impact of these mega-states and asks whether the United States shares their traits and behavior. Eschewing the standard focus on current U.S. foreign policy and the recent spate of pro- and anti-empire polemics, Charles S. Maier uses comparative history to test the relevance of a concept often invoked but not always understood. Marshaling a remarkable array of evidence--from Roman, Ottoman, Moghul, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, and British experience--Maier outlines the essentials of empire throughout history. He then explores the exercise of U.S. power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, carefully analyzing its economic and strategic sources and the nation's relationship to predecessors and rivals.

To inquire about empire is to ask what the United States has become as a result of its wealth, inventiveness, and ambitions. It is to confront lofty national aspirations with the realities of the violence that often attends imperial politics and thus to question both the costs and the opportunities of the current U.S. global ascendancy. With learning, dispassion, and clarity, *Among Empires* offers bold comparisons and an original account of American power. It confirms that the issue of empire must be a concern of every citizen.

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