

The New Criterion

Books

November 2006

The new appeasement

by [Victor Davis Hanson](#)

A review of "America Alone" by Mark Steyn.

Mark Steyn

America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It.
Regnery, 256 pages, \$27.95

reviewed by Victor Davis Hanson

The wider English-reading public discovered the genius of Mark Steyn after September 11, and for two reasons other than the fact that his amazing prolificacy did not come at the expense of quality.

First, he is funny in an understated way; indeed, he may be the most interesting satirist now writing in English. Consider a few quips from his latest volume about Westerners' neurotic propensity to worry that we aren't accommodating enough when we are already way beyond 1930s appeasement.^[1] "The corpulent snorer in the La-z-Boy recliner may have a beautifully waxed Ferrari in the garage, but he hates having to take it out on the potholed roads. Still, it looks mighty nice in the driveway when he washes it;" "The U.S. military hands each jihadist his complimentary copy of the Koran as delicately as white-gloved butlers bringing His Lordship the *Times* of London."

Second, in this time of crisis in the Western world, Steyn is singularly unwavering and unaffected both by criticism and the blandishments of triangulation. Read Steyn each week of this long war, and there is no chance whatsoever that one will be surprised by a syrupy retraction, disguised as a "change of heart" or a "crisis of confidence"—those well-known embarrassing moments when a pundit suddenly learns he's off the Washington A-list gravy train, and desperately wishes to write anything to get back on it.

We live in an era when many of the neoconservatives—some who called for the removal of Saddam Hussein well before September 11—have by now either recanted their support for the President, or concluded that the effort in Iraq was not very good because it has proven less than perfect.

Rarely mentioned, much less appreciated, is the low probability that another American president would have removed Saddam, or stayed around to secure Iraq, in the face of such criticism. In addition, many traditional conservatives supported the war, but, like liberal hawks, now have gravitated to the "It was my perfect three-year war, and your lousy three-year occupation" school of opportunistic hindsight.

Not Steyn. Like a handful of others—Christopher Hitchens, Charles Krauthammer, and the late Oriana Fallaci—he has never indulged in the usual litany of postbellum faultfinding: "Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld must resign"; "we must go into Iran or Syria or else I give up on the President";

“you put too few troops in Iraq to have allowed my brilliant ideas of reconstruction to work.”

Instead, day in and day out, on the op-ed pages of the British, Australian, Canadian, and American daily papers, Steyn has brought home the simple fact of this war: whatever mistakes we have made are not fatal if we keep our heads. As he puts it near the end of the book, the problem is not merely that we are only employing a fraction of our physical power: “This book isn’t an argument for more war, more bombing, or more killing, but for more will.”

In his multifaceted homage to American exceptionalism, Steyn focuses on three themes to underscore the critical, but lonely role of the United States: the demographic catastrophe in Europe, the ill-preparedness of liberal socialism to resist the horrific nature of our primordial enemies, and the dangerous wages of Western complacency and self-loathing.

For Steyn, Europe is already doomed—“too enfeebled to resist its remorseless transformation into Eurabia.” European women are having 1.4 children on average; Muslim immigrants 3.5—and more still in their home countries of the Middle East. Not only will Europe increasingly mortgage its democracies to the popular will of unassimilated Islamic immigrants, but the European Union will find itself shrinking in comparison to the growing populations in Turkey, the Middle East, and across the Mediterranean: “By the next century, German will be spoken only at Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, and Goering’s Monday night poker game in Hell.” Don’t hold out any hope of greater fertility in the supposedly traditional societies of southern Europe amid Catholic Spain and Italy, or orthodox Greece: they are depopulating at rates even more rapidly than in liberal Scandinavia or Germany.

But why this demographic suicide—and why now?

It is not just due to the old twin banes of bounty and license, since wealthier North Americans are managing to increase their populations. Instead, statist economies in Europe stifle economic growth, and encourage an enervating prolonged adolescence, in which kids stay at home, unable to buy a home, marry, or raise three children without sacrificing their perceived good life.

In the post-Cold War era, as Steyn points out, the United States subsidizes continental defense, so money is freed for more liberal European entitlements. And in turn, an aging population is insidiously assured that the socialist nanny state, not children and grandchildren, will care for the growing number of sterile Euros in their dotage—with the help of plenty of unassimilated others (thus “Eutopia evolves into Eurabia”).

The obsession with the pampered life also arises check-by-jowl with militant secularism: if there is no God, no eternal soul, no hereafter predicated on conduct in the here and now, then the European present, in the most sensual sense—whether on the beaches of Rhodes or in the drug dens of Amsterdam—is all that matters. In this new religion of worshipping youth’s fleeting moments, such things as dirty diapers and 2 a.m. feeding simply get in the way of drink, drug, sloth, and firm flesh. And then in Steyn’s morality tale, poor complacent Europe at the millennium finally met its antithesis—a lean, fertile, zealous, deeply religious tribal folk, energized by Middle East petro-wealth, that interprets postmodern Western liberality as decadence and derides freely offered magnanimity as appeasement born out of our spiritual weakness.

Second, Steyn focuses on “the unsustainability of the advanced Western social-democratic states,” especially in light of their Islamic enemies. And he is fearless in reminding us of the nature of the terrorists. They are not the touchy multicultural “Other.” Nor are they merely “different,” much less victims of sexism, racism, and colonialism from an evil West according to the tenets of the “dull opiate of multiculturalism.” For the most part, radical Islam is fascistic, an all-inclusive hate-the-West club, mired in self-contradiction, pathological lying, and perennial victimization. It attracts the educated, the playboy, the wealthy, almost anyone from the Middle East who can’t

figure out why the purity of Islam can't quite produce iPods and skyscrapers—objects of desire that soon foster envy from, and self-hatred for, that very desire.

Where else other than in the writing of Mark Steyn might we be reminded that the inconvenient truth of Islamist savagery: row on row of the corpses of Russian children in Beslan; Mariam Farahat, the mother of three suicide murders, who jump-starts a political career from the grassroots Palestinian adulation of her martyred, Jew-killing sons: “She and her Hamas colleagues were elected because this is who the Palestinian people are, and this is what they believe.” And do we remember the even earlier gruesome murder of the Jordanian Prime Minister, whose still dying body was soon descended on by one of his Dracula-like terrorist assassins, eager to lick the blood oozing from his wounds? Critics would denigrate such anecdotes as sensationalism, but Steyn produces them on nearly every page to demonstrate their ubiquity, to show that something really has gone terribly wrong with the Islamic Middle East—and perhaps worse still in a West that keeps quiet about it all.

So Steyn's third theme is this most privileged generation in the history of the West—and surely the least appreciative of what we inherited from others. We are suffering “civilization exhaustion.” It may not be that we are simply stupid in the lengths that we go to appease the Islamists, but rather that we are deathly afraid of them. Of course, our appeasement is not because we are weak—indeed, the economy and military of the United States are stronger than ever. Rather we are petrified that the use of massive force against such enemies will not only cost us blood and treasure, and perhaps a notch or two off the good life, but also will shatter all our easy falsities about who we are—refined children of the Enlightenment whose logic and largess surely can uplift misguided others who are only in need of our reason and tolerance.

Steyn is merciless to these self-appointed moralists, safe inside the citadel of Western freedom, economic propriety, and the United States military, who, from the very ramparts they damn, praise the enemy ramming the gates below. On Robert Fisk's pathetic appeal to release his friend Daniel Pearl on grounds that beheading is counterproductive to the otherwise noble cause of Islamism in Afghanistan, Steyn notes:

Somehow the apologists keep missing the point: the story did get out. Pearl's severed head *is* the message. That's why they filmed the decapitation, released it on video, circulated it through the bazaars and madrassas and distributed it worldwide via the Internet. It was a huge hit. The message got out very effectively.

Steyn is not, however, all sarcasm and fury. In a concluding chapter, he outlines a multifaceted ten-point strategy of dealing with radical Islam, from embracing women's rights in the Middle East to marginalizing the pernicious UN, EU, and other gutless transcontinental organizations that in their cowardice trash the United States because it politely defers to their impotence in a way that the Islamic fascists most certainly do not.

Steyn ends this welcome book with a clarion call to ignore cheap criticism and press on with the fight against barbarity, for our civilization itself is at stake, and no one but America can save it: “We have been shirking too long, and that's unworthy of a great civilization. To see off the new Dark Ages will be tough and demanding. The alternative will be worse.”

Amen to that.

Notes

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1. *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*, by Mark Steyn; Regnery, 256 pages, \$27.95. [Go back to the text.](#)

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This article originally appeared in *The New Criterion*, Volume 25 November 2006, on page 65

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