

Do Declinists Have a Point?

by Patrick Buchanan

*Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
is one with Nineveh and Tyre.*

So wrote Rudyard Kipling in "Recessional," his 1897 poem penned at the peak of the British Empire for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

Two decades later, in 1918, a fateful year for Germany, the great historical pessimist Oswald Spengler produced *The Decline of the West*. On the eve of Hitler's accession to power in 1932, Spengler wrote, "Optimism is cowardice."

About the continent that had been the cockpit of history for centuries, these "declinists" were right. The era of Britain and Europe was about to end and the American century about to begin.

Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Spain and Portugal had empires in 1897. Now, they are virtually disarmed, defended by Americans, unable even to police the Balkans. Though rich, they are no longer great, and with each decade their numbers decline. "This is the way the world ends," wrote the poet T.S. Eliot, "not with a bang but a whimper."

What brings this to mind is a review in which this writer was

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related to a new declinist school. And with America the last superpower and our economy the marvel of the age, this is rankest heresy, even in a conservative household where pessimism always had a room. Yet, as the millennium approaches, there is evidence to contradict the current mood of American triumphalism. Consider:

While the United States dominates air, sea and space, the U.S. defense budget has fallen to the smallest share of gross domestic product since the 1930s, just must than three percent. Our strife-ridden armed forces are down to pre-Pearl Harbor strength.

What was the greatest creditor nation in history, running trade surpluses yearly from 1900 to 1970, has run trade deficits almost every year since. We are now the world's great debtor.

Once we borrowed to build. Now we borrow to consume.

Our history is being reverse engineered. It took a century to achieve American autonomy. But dependence on foreign markets and our vulnerability to foreign financial crises is now as great as in Colonial days. The awesome industrial plant that won World War II is being sold off, broken up and carted away as the United States runs

annual merchandise trade deficits that could hit \$300 billion by 2000.

History teaches that when a nation shifts from production and manufacturing to a reliance on trade and finance, it is in decline. But perhaps we are, as

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the optimists reassure us, at the end of history.

U.S. foreign policy was once made by statesmen acting on what was best for America. It now appears to be a stapling together of the agendas of ethnic minorities. The Israeli lobby dictates Mideast policy. The Greek lobby blocks closer ties to Turkey. Cuba policy must pass a veto by Cuban-Americans. Americans of East European descent demand war guarantees for old homelands and get them. Our policy toward Azerbaijan is set by Armenian-Americans. We pledge American blood and hand out foreign aid to mollify voting blocs. Who speaks today for the national interest?

In our capital city a hiring hall has been established for the ex-senators, congressmen and cabinet officers who sign on and get rich doing the bidding of

their new foreign masters.

Immigrants from Latin America and Asia demand we maintain open borders, and both parties, fearful of being branded nativist, go along — although 75 to 80 percent of Americans beg for a moratorium.

Mexico City urges Mexican-Americans to vote its interests in U.S. elections. A Mexican consul says we should stop playing our national anthem at U.S.-Mexico soccer games if we wish to stop the kind of outrages visited on our flag and team last February in the L.A. Coliseum.

Not a peep of protest comes from U.S. officialdom.

American culture dominates, but even liberals are revolted at the crudity of our films and TV sitcoms and at a media where Jerry Springer tops the charts and Howard Stern reaches for radio gold.

In a quarter-century, 37 million unborn have been done to death, homosexuality has become a valid lifestyle, and drugs and sex are routine in junior high. From Rome to Weimar, these were signs of a dying civilization. But in

America, none dare call it decadence.

Panem et circenses, bread and circuses, marked the end of Rome. Our version is the Clinton scandals. We cannot get enough of them. Public affairs shows have been given up to endless babble about Monica and Bill — and been rewarded with record ratings.

This nation has enormous reserves of strength and vitality, but we are also exhibiting unmistakable symptoms of national cancer. **TSC**