



Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic

Chalmers Johnson

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The long-awaited final volume of Chalmers Johnson's bestselling

***Blowback* trilogy confronts the overreaching of the American empire and the threat it poses to the republic**

In his prophetic book *Blowback*, Chalmers Johnson linked the CIA's clandestine activities abroad to disaster at home. In *The Sorrows of Empire*, he explored the ways in which the growth of American militarism and the garrisoning of the planet have jeopardized our stability. Now, in *Nemesis*, he shows how imperial overstretch is undermining the republic itself, both economically and politically.

Delving into new areas--from plans to militarize outer space to Constitution-breaking presidential activities at home and the devastating corruption of a toothless Congress--*Nemesis* offers a striking description of the trap into which the dreams of America's leaders have taken us. Drawing comparisons to empires past, Johnson explores in vivid detail just what the unintended consequences of our dependence on a permanent war economy are likely to be. What does it mean when a nation's main intelligence organization becomes the president's secret army? Or when the globe's sole "hyperpower," no longer capable of paying for the vaulting ambitions of its leaders, becomes the greatest hyper-debtor of all times?

In his stunning conclusion, Johnson suggests that financial bankruptcy could herald the breakdown of constitutional government in America--a crisis that may ultimately prove to be the only path to a renewed nation.

Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic Details

Date : Published February 6th 2007 by Metropolitan Books (first published February 1st 2007)

ISBN : 9780805079111

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Format : Hardcover 354 pages

Genre : Politics, History, Nonfiction, Economics

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Pat says

Well written and concise. Johnson does well in staying focused on his premise that past actions of the U.S. have/will catch up to us. His analysis is supported with appropriate research and acknowledges where the U.S. has fallen short in our recent past to live up to the ideals of Constitutional Democracy. Not overtly partisan as many books of this nature can be, Johnson's *Nemesis* shows disdain across the board for covert and often overt selfishness in both the private and public sector as the primary reasons for this failure.

Kevin says

I thought this book was great. A brilliant argument of the absurdity of the war on terror and really interesting history of the CIA. An interesting side note: I listened to part of this book on audiobook (sorry, i downloaded it for free) at work in the hospital cafeteria, not on headphones (because they are prohibited) but on loud computer speakers. other people would listen for a few seconds and then remark on how sad it made them feel. I'm pretty sure the rest of the staff thought I was insane.

Nick says

Chalmers Johnson's third book about the pernicious influence of militarism on our country is excellent. I was a participant in or observer of many of the incidents Dr. Johnson discussed in his first book, "Blowback", and worked with him when I was the US Information Agency's Japan desk officer from mid-1985 through mid-1987. Dr. Johnson, a patriotic, Republican economist with extensive international experience, raises interesting questions about the extent to which "the military-industrial complex" has jeopardized our domestic political system and Constitution while damaging our long-term interests and standing abroad. He makes his points with readable prose and ample evidence. Reading this book while the news that our vice president considers himself exempt from all laws when it suits his ends made an interesting real world, real time illustration of Johnson's argument.

Matthew says

I've read a few books like this--leftist critiques of American foreign policy--in the last few years, and I often find them problematic. Many of them have good information, and good research, and good writing. But in the end don't really amount to anything.

I feel like *Nemesis* is one of these. I already know that American foreign policy is arrogant, aggressive, and short-sighted. I already know that the CIA tortures people. I already know that the Bush administration has drastically increased executive powers. None of this is new for me, and I assume that it will not be new for

anyone else who would pick up a book like *Nemesis* in the first place.

Johnson's main contribution is to liken 21st century America to Imperial Britain and Rome. It is only possible to make this rather grandiose argument by highlighting certain details and ignoring others. For example, Johnson claims that America very much resembles Rome on the eve of the civil wars that led to the downfall of the Republic, ignoring the fact that by the time the Republic fell it had already seen a burst of imperial expansion that left it in control of the entire Mediterranean. He also compares America under Bush to the British Empire, leaving aside the fact that Britain's most dramatic expansion occurred after the Glorious Revolution and the ascendancy of Parliamentary (rather than executive) power.

The point is: America is neither Rome nor Britain, and historical analogy is the last refuge of those who can't grasp the current situation. For those who are trying to understand what *is* going on, false analogies are dangerous. This is especially true in a time of crisis, because the analogy allows you to feel like you know how to solve the problem, but suggests the wrong solutions. For a much more interesting and, I think, accurate analysis of 21st American foreign policy, I would suggest Klein's *Shock Doctrine*.

Steve says

Definitely, a must-read for those following the exploits of our politicians and government. A primer on 21st century Manifest Destiny.

AC says

This book is not as rich or as original as "Sorrows of Empire" -- it is more journalistic, and less sustained. The material is also largely familiar to anyone who has read the newspapers or any books over the period concerned (Iraq). Finally, written before the Financial Crisis -- the GFC, aka, "The Great Fuck-up" -- the perspective has been somewhat overtaken by events.

Johnson, for example -- with the image of the collapse of the Soviet Union in mind - thought that the extension of empire would precede bankruptcy. He must have been quite surprised to discover that he had it backwards.

At any rate, it is sad to note his passing tonight:

<http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bi...>

Jerry Smith says

Part of the Blowback trilogy and as usual with Johnson's screeds, I find myself in almost total agreement with his analysis, although I expect this position to be unpopular among the population at large. I have read a

number of his books and although they all come at this subject from a slightly different angle, the message is always the same, namely that the US is an imperialist nation and is struggling to maintain that (and is guilty of crimes that all empires perpetuate) whilst pretending that it is a "shining city of the hill" and in somewhat special.

There is much that is strongly stated here but the case for an imperial presidency and increasingly so, holds a lot of water for me. This book was written well before the current vile administration and trains most of its fire on the efforts of George W Bush to keep everything from the population in general, and congress too which is a case well made.

Dark predictions as to what is likely to happen and that this hubristic empire is coming to the end that comes to all empires and the question is, how will it all end: Rome or Britain? I would love to hear what the late Chalmers J had to say about the current regime but I think he would see it as evidence of the coming denouement for the republic. I enjoyed this book as I did all his books, but Blowback was my first read of his and therefore made the most impact on me, Nemesis seems to be more of the same and whilst interesting, didn't enlighten me as much as I am familiar with the line of argument.

Kym Robinson says

While his book 'Blowback' had some real impact and covered a lot of issues relating to the American Empire in the later stages of the 20th Century, 'Nemesis' is a poor follow up. It is however an expected sequel given the events occurring at the time of its publication.

Much of what was raised in 'Blowback' is covered in sorts but with less gravitas. Instead Johnson attempts to liken the American Empire to that of both the British and Roman Empires and their periods in history. This is at points obvious and clunky. It is an easy thing to do, to simply liken one empire to the other and to adjust the historical templates to fit accordingly. Granted similarities do exist, just as differences do. The American Empire, like the British and Roman, are unique and distinctly their own. These early meanderings are a waste of pages and really divert as oppose to avert attention to contemporary matters and incidences. They serve as detailed analogies and yet the reader should not need any.

Chalmers Johnson eluded to it in his earlier book about the nature of economics and his political philosophy. He goes some what further accusing 'free market capitalism' and inviting the reader to also condemn this nonliving ideal for much of what drives the American imperialist interests. As though the IMF and Global Banks are inventions of the 'free market' and are not in actual fact in opposition to an unregulated and decentralised form of market economies. Again this is also another distraction and blathering attempt to explain a wider theory. It is at times an attempt to seek a identifiable 'blame' point by which to hang much of the vile conduct of the US military and foreign policy upon.

When Johnson does get to the heart of matters, US occupation, invasion, influences in regional politics right into the attempts to control space he is on point. He covers non partisan and ideological matters with a purity. Examples and historical conducts are left to condemn the contemporary and future masters who through the majesty of language, fear and governance continue to invite conflict and calamity to the World.

Johnson manages to delve past the illusions of US and Western self perception that demands the world see the US military as being a force for peace and security. Instead he depicts it as what it is, a forceful, violent self serving entity that does as it pleases. Married to the CIA and other US intelligence agencies the US

military has near omnipotent power and influence in many parts of the Earth with little regard for a constitution that it apparently serves. It is with confused belief that many support and praise the US military out of the rhetoric and advertising. In reality to its many victims it is a careless brutal force with little empathy and concern. And to its victims what pluses or benefits that it may bring are an unacceptable price.

This book is in some ways a bit of a mess. It is certainly worth reading and much that is covered is important for the reader, the book however goes into a few different directions that really do neither the subject matter or its victims justice. Johnson is a talented and well informed man and this book for my personal reading was a bit lacking.

60%

Trevor says

Stunning! This is an even better book than *Blowback*, which I thought was mind blowing. I am going to have to track down part two of this trilogy. This was almost painful to read. The detailed retellings of US involvement in torture at the start left me once again reeling in disbelief – no matter how often I hear this story I still find it hard to believe. The lies, deceptions and shameful punishments handed out to those who went against the President and told the truth reads like the most improbable of Le Carré novels, except we all know that this is pure fact. The future will struggle to believe our times, and we, as the citizens and electors of governments that have allowed this to happen have much to answer for.

His thesis in this book is a simple one. The US has two choices, it can retain its empire or it can remain a democracy – he cannot see how it can have both. If it is to retain its empire then there will need to be a move towards some form of military dictatorship. He believes the transfer of power to the executive under Bush came all too close to ending the democratic project in the US. The slow but inexorable diminishing of freedoms under the Bush regime truly takes the breath away once they are catalogued.

There are so many things I don't know about the US political system and when people explain them to me I realise the true depth of my ignorance. It took me years to work out what GOP stood for – I knew it had something to do with the Republican Party, but just what it was in relation to the Republican Party I had no idea. Like I said, the depths of my ignorance can be quite astounding. Who'd have thought it could just mean, Grand Old Party? But when this book explained the CIA I really had to wonder how it could be I could get to be this old and never have known how the organisation worked. I had no idea that the CIA isn't answerable to Congress or anyone else other than the President. Here is an organisation that seeks to kill the heads of state of other nations (as it did successfully in South Korea and attempted at on numerous occasions in Cuba and Libya) or that sells drugs to buy weapons to give to murderers in Nicaragua or that 'successfully' organises the overthrow of a democratically elected government and replaces it an evil monster, as in Chile and Iran – and not even the American Government gets to have over-sight of what it is up to. I'm stunned and shocked, ladies and gentlemen. Emperor Bush seems to have made exceptionally good use of this arm of his Royal Guard.

This book's dismantling of the excuse for much of the US military budget (I've heard of pork barrels, but this is incomprehensible) should be required reading for anyone with the right to vote in the US – witnessing the sheer waste of so many billions upon billions of taxpayer dollars (well, those that will need to be paid back by future generations that have been borrowed from Communist China and Japan) would, surely, have to send a patriotic American nearly insane. His description of military Keynesianism is as fascinating as it is

disturbing.

The section on Star Wars is nothing less than a case in point. This project is not about building a missile defence system, the idea is virtually laughable, this is about handing trillions of dollars over to a few obscenely wealthy corporations knowing that they can only fail to ever build what it is they are claiming to be seeking to build. His explanation of why any sort of war in space has to be a bad idea does beg the question why the US is contemplating such lunacy. As is his explanation of why the EU is building its own GPS system (Galileo) rather than rely on the current system that is run by the US Military (yes, it might have something to do with the fact that the US Military has threatened to turn this increasingly essential piece of infrastructure off at will if it decides this would be a good idea in its 'war on terror').

This book is named after a Greek God – the god of righteous punishment for those engaged in hubris – and it is written by someone who reminds me of another character from Greek myth – Cassandra. For surely, here is a man blessed with the gift of prophesy and yet, no one ever seems to believe him. His predictions for what will happen next to the US may have been forestalled by the election of Obama – but given the depth of the problems outlined here and the arrogance and bloody-mindedness of the US ruling elites his concerns still require careful consideration.

There is much at stake if he is ever proven right.

Karl says

I think I need to do some research and then reread this one.

Chloe says

I've been a big fan of Johnson's past two books, *Blowback* and *The Sorrows of Empire* and have been looking forward to reading this most recent work since I first heard of it. However, where the previous two books clearly positioned US' foreign policy as an off-shoot of the militarism which infects every level of our economy and warned that the US' overseas adventures (everything from overthrowing unfriendly governments to funneling arms to other governments) would eventually lead to a blowback against the US- a theory that was proven true when the US' strategy of arming and training the Afghani mujahideen in the 1980s came back to bite it on September 11- this new book seems like a collection of scraps that were left on the editing room floor when Johnson's previous books were published.

There's nothing especially new or ground-breaking here, though Johnson does a fantastic job of analyzing the Roman and British empires and juxtaposing their downfalls with the current state of US foreign affairs. Charting the vast network of American bases, prisons, and secret torture facilities is a vast task, but definitely one that Johnson is up to and the portrait he paints of a web of American influence is a very disturbing picture.

Unfortunately, by trying to tie his three most recent books together under a unifying theme, Johnson stretches his premise to absurd lengths and never really focuses, until the last 10 pages, on how all of the examples that he recites tie together into the sad picture of a flailing American empire that poses a threat not

only to treasured systems of American governance but also the future existence of Western Civilization.

If this is the first Johnson book you're looking at, I'd recommend looking to his earlier work first.

Beth says

This book was both hard and easy to read. I thought it was going to be very difficult to get through but in fact, by reading just one chapter a night, I was able to get through it quickly and easily, time-wise that is. There are only 7 chapters and each one is only 30 pages or so in length.

On the other hand, this book was very difficult to read because, as an American, I read it with such a heavy heart. I have read many books now about how horrible our government has been and the terrible deeds it has done both domestically and internationally. But the first chapter of this book ends by discussing how our government allowed, yes ALLOWED, the National Museum in Bagdad to be looted and did nothing, even though it had been told of the high probability of the looting, even though it had assured many people that it would protect the museum (and other nationally important institutions like the National Library), even though it did manage to protect the oil fields and the Oil Ministry building (with nary a window broken). The waste of our global human history is too sad to contemplate for long. And to know that my own government was so callus and disrespectful about such a global human treasure, that "... Secretary Rumsfeld compared the looting to the aftermath of a soccer game..." (p 47) causes me to feel real shame in my government. And it just gets worse from there.

This author published a book called *Blowback* in 2000 in which he predicted that America would experience some kind of retaliation for all the overt and covert misdeeds over the years and around the globe. No one paid much attention to the book until after 9/11. He then wrote another book called *The Sorrow of Empires* and now he wrote this book, the third in his unintended trilogy. He ends this book, published in 2006, by stating, "The likelihood is that the United States will maintain a facade of constitutional government and drift along until financial bankruptcy overtakes it. Of course, bankruptcy will not mean the literal end of the United States any more than it did for Germany in 1923, China in 1948, or Argentina in 2001-2. It might, in fact, open the way for an unexpected restoration of the American system, or for military rule, or simply for some new development we cannot yet imagine." (p 269/270)

So there is hope yet that we can come back to the Constitution and allow it to become once again the strength of this country, its founding principles recovered.

But in order for that to happen I think people must become informed about how far off the mark we have strayed. And this book is one step on that road to knowledge.

Eric Gulliver says

This book is the the third installment from Chalmers Johnson that was preceded by *Blowback* and *The Sorrows Of Empire*. It is the continuation of his thesis that spans the three books contending that militarism and a permanent war economy are incompatible with our republican form of government. In *Nemesis* (with a subtitle of "The Last Days of the American Republic," Johnson's primary objective is to demonstrate his fear of what the future will hold in terms of current patterns of preventive war and the role the US military, the CIA, and especially the power of the Executive will have in shaping that future. This is by far Johnson's most

dire and chilling warning as the book never fails to reach with validity, evidence, and solid allusions to the past. It is a vital read for any who still believes there is something to be salvaged of the United States' constitutional democracy.

Ron says

If you want a book that deeply explores why America seems to be (I'm being hopeful) headed down the wrong river, this is it -- with discussions on the rise of militarism; a comparison of Rome, Britain & America; the sordid history of the CIA; the basing of soldiers anywhere on the globe America pleases; the drive to militarize outer space; and more. To really get the full impact of what Chalmers Johnson is saying (and warning us all about), you should read the whole trilogy: "The Sorrows of Empire", "Blowback", and then "Nemesis".

And Nemesis is definitely the most appropriate metaphor to use for the continuing fall from grace that America is blindly and arrogantly treading: the Greek goddess of divine justice and retribution, it's in our (American citizens') best interest to use her as a mirror of ourselves. As Johnson says, "We are on the cusp of losing our democracy for the sake of keeping our empire [versus the opposite path as Britain took, for instance:]. Once a nation is started down that path, the dynamics that apply to all empires come into play -- isolation, overstretch, the uniting of forces opposed to imperialism, and bankruptcy. Nemesis stalks our life as a free nation."

I especially like a quote by Harry Browne starting the last chapter... "When America is no longer a threat to the world, the world will no longer threaten us." No truer words could be said about the dire necessity for America to learn once again how to become a respected member of the world community rather than its bully and self-appointed master.

America's path can be corrected, but we, her people, must become more aware, and then take action. Chalmers' "Nemesis" is a clarion call for us all to act, before it's too late.

Originally written on May 12, 2008 at 04:49PM

Kohl Gill says

Phenomenal. I already plan on reading this again in a while. What surprised me most were the parallels with thinkers like Thomas Barnett, as well as the notion of completely disbanding the CIA.
