

## America the Almighty

by Stephen L. Damours

Review by Scott Hoffman

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*America the Almighty*, a devastating critique of American foreign policy, examines both healthy and dangerous trends in international relations. It shows how, all too frequently, the Bush administration has become the cause of the latter.

Damours identifies two primary currents in human society: universalism, which seeks the welfare of all humanity, and tribalism, which advances the local and parochial at the expense of the whole. Following a great build-up of international institutions (the United Nations, the Breton Woods financial bodies, et al.) after World War II, U.S. foreign policy has shifted decisively in the tribalistic direction, especially in the Bush administration. This has made us an arrogant bully in our conduct of foreign affairs, "a spoiled child with too much power."

The author shows how the U.S. has contemptuously defied or ignored international agreements - including the Kyoto environmental treaty, the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court (signed by Clinton and repudiated by Bush), and U.N. treaties on the rights of women and children. Almost half of *America the Almighty* deals directly or indirectly with the Iraq War and its aftermath -- Exhibit A in the case against U.S. tribalistic foreign policy. Citing voluminous documentation, Damours presents the most complete argument I've seen so far that the war was based on the falsehood of Iraqi possession of weapons of mass destruction, that it caused atrocities against "tens of thousands of innocent people," and that it's producing Middle Eastern hatred disastrous for America's war on terrorism.

America's tribalistic foreign policy may be calamitous in the long run for American citizens as well as the rest of the world, but it does not reflect the views of the great majority of the American people, as polls have consistently shown. Our great political challenge is to harness the widespread but not passionately held universalism of the American public toward the realization of a transformed foreign policy. American support of - rather than contemptuous opposition to - universalist trends widespread in many other countries could lead to new or strengthened institutions greatly reducing violence, poverty and pollution, such as a well-functioning International Criminal Court; UN peace enforcement units to stop civil wars and massacres at an early stage; UN police forces to maintain order in the aftermath of conflicts; a global environmental regulatory body; and an effective international labor organization.

In the long run, the world will need, and should have "a democratic system ... that requires compliance from all nations without requiring unanimous agreement among them." This system should be neither a relatively powerless confederation such as the existing United Nations, nor an all-pervasive centralized state, but "an arrangement both more democratic and more effective than the United Nations, but far less centralized and intrusive than the United States Federal Government. Democracy at all levels, central and local, is an essential ingredient in the mix." Is human nature capable of this change? Damours shows how large areas of the globe have moved from arenas of war to peaceful free-trade zones in a single human lifetime - the European Union being a prime example.

Stephen L. Damours' thoroughly researched and detailed presentation both of his condemnation of current American policies and of the kinds of solution possible gives his book impressive authority and solidity. It is moreover an interesting and involving read - my reactions ranged from horror and indignation over the catalogue of American misbehaviors in Iraq to hope and inspiration in the last chapter offering alternatives.

At the eve of an historic and critical presidential election, *America the Almighty* is an

indispensable call-to-arms.

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