

## REVIEWS

Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*  
Penguin: London 2005, £8.99, paperback  
386 pp, 0 141 01700 7

Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World*  
Penguin: London 2004, £8.99, paperback  
422 pp, 0 141 00754 0

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## IMPERIAL MARGARINE

The often disappointing results of decolonization have bred a revisionism that forgets why colonialism was discredited in the first place. The British historian Niall Ferguson became an outstanding popularizer of this current with the publication of *Empire: How Britain Created the Modern World* and *Colossus: the Rise and Fall of the American Empire*. Written as if to teach us statesmen and citizens how to be good imperialists, they have become bestsellers, and an obligatory reference point in debates on empire. Their author—who in an important earlier work, *The Pity of War*, had shone a withering spotlight on the patriotic militarism of the Great War—has gone in quick succession from Oxford to New York University, and thence to Harvard.

Ferguson's attention to economic history is welcome, since it is a sub-branch of the discipline ignored only at great intellectual cost. He is more cautiously to be commended for calling empire by its name. He believes that Britain invented capitalism and, with it, what he sees as the most valuable ideas and institutions of the modern world—the English language, private property, the rule of law, parliamentary structures,

individual freedom and Protestant Christianity. Admirers would see inclusion of Protestantism as an example of impish fun, tweaking the tail of the politically correct, but we can be sure that Ferguson is quite serious. The complacent British self-regard of *Empire* easily segues into endorsement for American national messianism in *Colossus*, with the Anglo-American imperial formula—which he dubs ‘Anglobalization’—offering the colonized the best hope of capitalist success. As a historian of the English-speaking peoples Ferguson seeks to rescue Winston Churchill’s account from its contemporary entombment in countless forbidding leather-bound volumes. He offers a pacier narrative, garnished with good quotes from the great man; but the neo-conservative gloss he adds to the Churchillian vision would surely have inspired reservations in someone who, after all, helped to found Britain’s welfare state. By contrast, Ferguson sternly insists in *Colossus* that if the us is to make a success of empire it will have to cut social programmes to the bone.

Ferguson’s claim about the decisive contribution which empire makes to development is meant to hold for the future as well as the past. But the evidence he relies on is very selective: the only empires he really has time for are those of Britain and the United States. His failure to introduce any proper comparative dimension is in striking contrast to the serious attention he gives to all the major belligerents in *The Pity of War*. While he exhibited a command of a wide range of German and Austrian sources in that book, the bibliographies of *Colossus* and *Empire* do not include a single work not in English. The overall decline in the quality of Ferguson’s work between *Pity* and these two later books is a performative rebuttal of his faith in the magic of the market, since they were hastily produced in response to demand.

While good yarns make *Empire* readable, Ferguson misses, or misconstrues, crucial aspects of imperial logistics and political economy. It is quite a feat to write the history of the British empire and omit any real discussion of the Royal Navy during the critical period 1650–1815. This is *Henry v* without the battle of Agincourt. Only a quite modern state could have built, manned and supplied a permanent force of over a hundred ships of the line. If Ferguson has consulted the work of N. A. M. Rodgers—an author whose outlook he would find very congenial—he could have given readers a glimpse of what life aboard an 18th-century warship was really like and explained why the British outgunned the French. And if he had consulted Robert Brenner’s *Merchants and Revolution* and John Brewer’s *Sinews of Empire*—authors he might find less congenial—he could have achieved a better grasp of the economic

foundations. Likewise, Ferguson gives a lively sketch of the us empire in the days of ‘manifest destiny’ and the ‘big stick’ in the early chapters of *Colossus*, but pays little attention to the huge diplomatic and economic effort that subsequently went into the construction of a global chain of military bases (an aspect well covered by Chalmers Johnson in *Sorrows of Empire*). The suspicion grows, confirmed by his enthusiasm for Bush’s invasion of Iraq, that Ferguson, like other neo-conservatives, is seduced by the romance and rhetoric of empire, but when it comes to its logistics and economic rationale he is in denial.

The rhetoric and romance are dark-hued. Ferguson allows that Anglo-American empire involved much destruction and atrocity—but with ultimately beneficial results. His case is that dragging the world into modernity was—is—bound to be a very difficult and ugly proceeding. Those on the receiving end of Anglo-American imperialism are lucky since at least British and American imperial tutelage proved more benign than that of other modern empires, such as the Germans, the Japanese, the Soviets, or even the French, Portuguese and Spanish—though little is heard of these. If you could find an Algonquin or native Tasmanian descendant they would probably not agree. Ferguson does not shrink from considering the crimes of colonization—one chapter in *Empire* is called ‘White Plague’—but he constructs a sort of cosmic balance sheet in which, as with the Bank of England in its heyday, the credits comfortably outweigh the liabilities; the empire’s misdeeds are redeemed by its eventual achievements. Someone had to foster the advance of capitalism and representative institutions, and the international order has to be policed by someone. Surely John Bull and Uncle Sam did—and do—a better job than any likely alternatives?

Ferguson more than once reminds us of the culminating moment, justifying all that had gone before, when the British empire stood alone against Nazi barbarism. His apology for the imperial past is projected into an unending future, as if we were forever frozen in the year 1940, facing the grim alternatives that were then present. (There are, of course, still many Britons—some, like Ferguson, not even born in 1940—who will go to their graves stammering about the ‘finest hour’.) While he rightly draws attention to the imperial nature of Britain’s war effort he fails to register the growing disenchantment with empire of many Britons, especially soldiers—as witness the proceedings of the Cairo ‘armed forces parliament’ in 1944.

The empires of the modern period slighted the humanity of subject peoples, and sacrificed the latter to the insatiable demands of a capitalist

accumulation process. In these respects they marked a step down from their supposed model, since Rome did not foster racial hierarchy, did not expose peoples' livelihoods to market forces and eventually extended citizenship to all. Ferguson sees it differently. He admits that Britain's 'first empire' was marred by pillage and rapine, with a swollen slave trade from Africa, looted cities in the Americas and horrendous famine in Bengal. But the settlement of the North American littoral was a great achievement and a more responsible imperialism, born in the 1780s, was able to purge the empire of its early excesses and to discover more graceful ways of letting go than were in evidence in 1776.

This approach misses the systemic features of imperial exploitation of the colonized and enslaved. Consider Ferguson's treatment of colonial slavery. He readily acknowledges that the slave trade was an abomination and briefly evokes the 'sweet tooth' of the British consumer. But he fails to explain why there were so many more British than, say, Spanish or French, consumers, even though the obvious answer is that his beloved capitalism had made far greater inroads in Britain than on the continent. At one point in *Empire* he bizarrely says, of a country that had blazed the trail of capitalist agriculture, that it was 'economically unremarkable' in 1615.

Ferguson's favoured theme is empire's economic success and yet he ignores the enormous contribution made by plantation slavery to British economic growth in the 18th and early 19th century. *Empire* contains no account of the working day of slaves on Caribbean sugar plantations, nor of how such slaves kept body and soul together, nor of the value of slave produce in imperial and European trade—around a third in 1801–2. Attending to these aspects would have confirmed some of his most cherished theses—but at the expense of others. Thus trade with the plantation zone furnished Britain with a large mass of profits, elements of a new world of exotic consumption (sugar, tobacco, dye stuffs) and the crucial raw material for the Industrial Revolution (cotton), as well as an important market for British manufacturing exports. Other parts of the Atlantic system—the fisheries, the New England provision merchants, the slave traders—all contributed to an Atlantic boom based on slave toil as much as on domestic wage labour. If he wished, Ferguson could have gloried in the fact that this Atlantic traffic in slaves and slave produce was propelled by the momentum of free trade, spilling beyond the borders of an increasingly ineffective mercantile system. The very term *laissez faire* was coined by a colonial trader. But he overlooks this and instead exaggerates the role of the chartered companies.

Ferguson's focus on the slave trade and neglect of what fuelled it gives a new twist to the dictum of a great imperial historian, whose work he ignores. Eric Williams, the West Indian nationalist leader, author of *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) and long-time prime minister of Trinidad, once observed that British historians often wrote as if their country had only undertaken the largest branch of the Atlantic slave trade of any colonial power 'in order to have the satisfaction of suppressing it'. Ferguson is light on sanctimony—unabashed relish in imperial might is more his style. But he offers consolation too: 'what is very striking about the history of the Empire is that whenever the British were behaving despotically, there was almost always a liberal critique of that behaviour from within British society.' His method here is uncannily reminiscent of what Roland Barthes, in *Mythologies*, called 'Operation Margarine':

take the established value which you wish to restore or develop and first lavishly display its pettiness, the injustice which it produces . . . then . . . save it *in spite of itself*, or rather by the heavy curse of its blemishes . . . the Established Order is no longer anything but a Manichean compound and therefore inevitable, one which wins on both counts, and is therefore beneficial.

Barthes's term is an *hommage* to a French fifties TV ad which first concedes that the oily yellow spread is an unappealing substitute, but then insists that those brave enough to try it will be pleasantly surprised. The analogy strikes a chord here both because British consumers bought margarine from Unilever, a quintessentially colonial company, and because colonialism was, at best, an inferior substitute for modernization.

Ferguson's abstracted account of the slave trade is followed by a salute for evangelical abolitionism, nicely evoked in the life of John Newton, and for the spirit of the Clapham Sect. We never learn how or why the abolitionists eventually prevailed, nor does he describe the contribution of the anti-Establishment brands of Non-Conformity, whose role in the 1830s was more important than that of the Clapham Sect. Ferguson is happier recounting the brutal deeds of pirates and slave traders than he is with taking the measure of an accumulation process that sponsored a gigantic—and in some ways very modern—system of forced labour, with meticulous record-keeping and close invigilation. Ferguson's own moral book-keeping is suggested by a brief comment on the colonial contract labour of the late 19th century: 'There is no question that the majority of [indentured labourers] suffered great hardship . . . But once again we cannot pretend that this mobilization of cheap and probably underemployed Asian labour to grow rubber and dig gold had no economic value.' Or as

'Operation Margarine' has it: 'What does it matter, after all, if Order is a little brutal or a little blind, when it allows us to live cheaply?'

India was the mud-sill of the second British empire just as slavery had been of the first. Modern scholarship endorses nationalist historiography's bleak verdict on British rule in the sub-continent, which de-industrialized India and fatally weakened its agriculture. The work of Amartya Sen, recently extended and developed by Mike Davis, has now given us some explanation for the recurring famines in British India, with millions dying of hunger in the 1870s, 1890s, 1900s and 1940s. A political order that excluded the huge majority of Indian subjects, and a colonial government blinded by laissez-faire economics and Malthusian beliefs about over-population led to repeated disaster. Ferguson, however, treats the famines of the 19th- and 20th-century Raj as a minor issue, taking place off-stage and quite uncharacteristic of the exalted conduct of the Indian Civil Service. After a sympathetic account of the lordly but lonely status of the imperial official running a province, Ferguson observes in a footnote: 'It is fashionable to allege that the British authorities did nothing to relieve the drought-induced famines of the period.' The belittling use of the word 'fashionable' apparently excuses him from addressing the argument. Instead he supplies an example of another lone Magistrate of the Second Class, rendering the angst and 'hearty breakfast' of the ICS man with feeling while leaving unplumbed the reasons for the hopelessly inadequate official response. Ferguson believes that decolonization was hasty and premature nearly everywhere, and likes to point to the often disappointing results of independence as justification for a new imperialism. But in the case of India he fails to confront the fact that independence did end the ravages of mass famine. The empire's failure simply to keep many millions of its Indian subjects alive is a profound challenge to his central argument.

Without leaving the familiar confines of national historiography, Ferguson would nevertheless like to make large claims for British, and later American, empire. He draws on David Landes's *Wealth and Poverty of Nations* to establish the key preconditions of economic advance. Distilling what he has gleaned from Landes, Ferguson identifies a set of crucial institutional ingredients for successful development. The ruling power should secure rights of private property and personal liberty; enforce rights of contract; and provide stable, honest, moderate, efficient and non-greedy government. Colonial rule delivered these conditions and persuaded investors that their money was safe.

If we assemble a list of the most dramatic examples of economic breakthrough and advance it soon becomes clear that the items listed by Ferguson and Landes are optional; indeed, that candidates should be advised, like those taking an old-fashioned exam paper, to attempt only two questions. Britain 1750–1830; the United States 1790–1860; Germany 1870–1923; Japan 1880–1940; Russia 1890–1914 and 1930–50; France 1950–70; Spain 1960–90; the South East Asian ‘tigers’ 1960–90; China 1980–2004. It is regrettable but true that several of these industrializing societies scored highly on corruption and greed, and would have low marks for human rights, democracy and clarity of property rights. But indubitably each of these states was possessed of that real independence which, by definition, colonies do not enjoy. Indeed these transformative episodes bear out Paul Baran’s classic argument in *The Political Economy of Growth* (1954) that autonomous states would be best able to attain economic progress.

Notwithstanding an empire that covered a quarter of the world’s land surface, the British had little success in spreading the institutional package Ferguson mentions except to colonies of settlement in North America and Australasia. (The survival of parliamentary democracy in India could be counted only in part, since it was, after all, the Indian nationalist movement which pressed for and utilized representative structures in the colonial period.) As Ferguson acknowledges, the economic advance of these regions was based on wholesale dispossession of the natives. Apparently he sees the latter as redeemed in the long run by the economic and political progress that it made possible, rather as fellow travellers believed that Stalin should be condoned because of the Dneprostroi Dam and victories of the Red Army.

The destruction of native peoples by European conquerors provoked the memorable indictments of Las Casas and Montaigne, Voltaire and Chateaubriand. But these are not mentioned by Ferguson—perhaps on the grounds that they were insufficiently Protestant and Anglo-Saxon. Instead he asks rhetorically how the settler–native encounter could have had any other result. And however brutal the history of Anglo-Saxon settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing, he urges that it was not as deliberate and cruel as Nazi and Stalinist imperialism. Formerly, enlightened apologists of empire would lament the disappearance of indigenous peoples. But today’s imperial realists have no time for such mawkishness. Ferguson brusquely insists that the ‘Anglicization of North America and Australasia’ was one of the British empire’s great achievements.

The subtitle of *Empire—How Britain Made the Modern World*—should have given Ferguson some pause since the sad state of the world does indeed reflect the legacy of Britain's empire and of other modern imperiums. Many of the most intractable communal divisions were deliberately fostered, if not invented, by the imperial policy of divide and rule; while at a deeper level, the division of the world into rich and poor regions was first established by empire. Any enumeration of the world's most dangerous and difficult communal conflicts would include the stand-off between Pakistan and India, and the Arab–Israeli clash. The partition of Cyprus and the still unresolved conflict in Northern Ireland, the deep racial tensions in Guyana and Fiji would also figure on such a list. In the post-apartheid era, the racial legacy of empire and colonization is being gradually dismantled in South Africa, but problems remain in many parts of the continent. Ferguson urges that ethnic sentiment and division long preceded colonization. He rightly observes that expatriate colonizers were often the driving force behind injurious racial privileges and distinctions. Yet liberal imperial strategists from Locke to Gladstone went along with colonial racism because that is what empire was based on. Nor does he register the fondness of imperial administrators for cultivating the so-called 'martial races' at the expense of other colonial subjects. Whitehall policy-makers did not always like the results their strategies produced and the communal fault lines were not always of their making, but imperial favouritism nevertheless has much to answer for—after all, they were in charge. (Likewise, today's neo-imperialists bear some responsibility for aggravating communal divisions in the Balkans and Iraq.)

The division of the world into rich and poor regions roughly follows the former boundaries between imperial and colonized areas, even though it has sometimes been partially counteracted or qualified by resistance or by prior institutional or natural endowments. The colonial experience weakened the ability of the colonized to negotiate an advantageous relationship to the emergence of a capitalist world market, and often condemned them to subordination and neglect. In *Colossus*, Ferguson cites the disappointing performance of most ex-colonies as part of his case for empire, when it would be more logical to conclude that the empires did not, in fact, really equip the colonized with survival skills. The poor record of Britain's African former colonies leads him to plead that 'even the best institutions work less well in excessively hot, disease-ridden, or landlocked places'. He concedes that India's overall annual rate of growth between 1820 and 1950—0.12 per cent—was



pitifully low but refuses to hold selfish imperial arrangements responsible because 'the supposed "drain" of capital from India to Britain turns out to have been comparatively modest: only around 1 per cent of Indian national income between the 1860s and the 1930s, according to one estimate of the export surplus.' But obviously a country growing at only 0.12 per cent a year would have had many good uses for that 1 per cent lost annually. Ferguson himself points out that Britain's school-enrolment rate was eight times that of India's in 1913.

Empires did not invent the uneven development of capitalism but they did much to consolidate it. Having inherited or established a hierarchical structure of advantage, they reinforced it. Plantation slavery, for instance, brought great wealth to some in the Atlantic colonies, but it did not generate sustained and independent growth in the plantation zone, as the post-emancipation experience of the US South, Caribbean and Brazilian North-East testify. The infrastructural improvements made by empires were those needed to facilitate the movement of troops and the export of commodities; other purposes were disregarded, often to catastrophic effect. In a process which Mike Davis has called 'the origins of the third world', Western incursions into China from the Opium War onwards weakened the Qing authorities and prevented them from maintaining the country's vital system of hydraulic defences. With its customs service run by a consortium of foreign powers, China suffered a de-industrialization almost as severe as that of India.

Ferguson's neoliberal agenda leads him to scant the way that non-Anglo-Saxon empires promoted economic integration and coordination by non-market means. In an off-the-cuff remark in *Empire* explaining 'why it was that Britain was able to overhaul her Iberian rivals', he fails to explain the source of Spanish wealth but says of Britain that 'she had to settle for colonizing the unpromising wastes of Virginia and New England, rather than the eminently lootable cities of Mexico and Peru'. Both the Spanish and the British certainly looted American silver and gold. But Ferguson does not explain how this rival species of empire worked and seems to regard it as economically less impressive than the record of British settlement. Spanish administrators were, in fact, innovators who mainly relied on wage labour to mine and process the silver ore. In place of simple 'looting' they adopted a tribute system, echoing Inca and Aztec arrangements, which required native villages to supply either labour, foodstuffs or textiles to the royal warehouses. The king claimed a fifth of the silver mined. But he garnered much more by offering mining concessions and selling the tribute food and clothing in his

warehouses to the wage-earning miners. It was this ingenious system, not looting, which sustained a highly profitable system of exploitation for nearly three centuries. This was just one example of the productive organization promoted by Iberian imperialism and explains why the Mexican and Peruvian elites were so reluctant to break with empire. With Spanish American independence all such coordination ceased, and entry into Britain's informal 'empire of free trade' led to economic stagnation or regression.

Empires could promote a limited and usually self-interested species of colonial development. Often, as today, the imperial impulse stemmed from overweening confidence and missionary zeal as much as from sober calculation of material gain. When empires spread they did so partly because they could, partly because they were operating within a rivalrous multi-state system, and partly because, in metropolitan regions where capitalism was taking hold, consumers wanted colonial products. The Chinese imperial authorities did not bother to colonize Africa, though it would have been perfectly possible for them to do so. Starting with the Portuguese, the European maritime empires entered the lists, firstly because they saw an advantage they did not want to yield to others and secondly because those newly in receipt of rents, fees, profits and wages had a thirst for exotic commodities.

The emphasis which Ferguson puts on the imperial export of a neo-liberal institutional package places him squarely in the camp of those who believe that modernization and bourgeois democratic revolution can be introduced from outside. But in *Colossus* he warns that, as presently configured, the American imperial project suffers from fatal flaws since the us public is not willing to make the sacrifices necessary for it to succeed. On the one hand, very few elite or middle-class Americans are willing to spend many years of their life in far-away places introducing the natives to the secrets of Anglo-Saxon civilization. On the other, and despite mounting deficits, the us voting public is wedded to increasingly expensive entitlement programmes like Social Security and Medicare which simply leave no budgetary room for extensive overseas imperial missions.

Ferguson argues that Ivy League graduates will not flock for duty in distant and inhospitable outposts as graduates of Oxford did in the early 1900s: 'America's brightest and best aspire not to govern Mesopotamia but to manage MTV; not to rule the Hejaz but to run a hedge fund.' Like a number of his sallies this may be amusing, but also misleading. In a new book, *Imperial Grunts*, his fellow conservative Robert Kaplan shows

how the us political economy and commercial culture furnish conditions which offer many openings to Army recruiters. From Kaplan one learns that in the newly occupied lands, the visiting embedded journalist will be greeted with the cry, 'Welcome to Injun country!' Kaplan evidently finds the soldier's life as stimulating as do, he believes, those who signed up because they could not find other work or because it might offer them the chance of a college education later. He writes that those who have not experienced combat have missed something of the 'American experience', something 'exotic, romantic, exciting, bloody and emotionally painful, sometimes all at once'. Indeed Kaplan writes that 'it was ironic to keep reading stories about unhappy, over-deployed reservists, because those in the Special Operations community whom I had met here and in Eastern Afghanistan were having the time of their lives'. Kaplan is no Kipling, but Ferguson underestimates the culture industry's ability to maintain a supply of 'imperial grunts'.

He likewise underestimates the ability of the us education system to act as a magnet for overseas students who, under certain conditions, may well act as servants of American corporations, or ambassadors for liberal institutions or neoliberal economics, when and if they return to their home countries. So the personnel deficit may not, in itself, be decisive. There is the difficulty, however, that overseas graduates and PhDs may be convinced liberals yet fail to see how us imperialism is really promoting the values they have imbibed in its universities and colleges. They could well be swift to detect hollow or cynical uses of the rhetoric of liberation, especially if they remain affected by the national culture of their homeland.

Ferguson believes that the United States today faces a classic 'guns or butter' dilemma. If it faces up to its world responsibilities—as he hopes it will—then he believes it must take the axe to its domestic social programmes; 'guns and margarine', as it were. If Americans can steel themselves to sacrifice comfort at home they might just be able to live up to their destiny overseas. The 'entitlement crisis'—the difficulty of honouring the promises embodied in the Social Security and Medicare programmes—is greatly exaggerated by Ferguson and neo-conservative economists like Peter Peterson and Laurence Kotlikoff. On the other hand, liberal and radical analysts often go too far in playing down the likely cost of baby-boomer retirement and medical care in an ageing society. After all, the number of Americans aged over 65 is set to rise from 36 million in 2002 to 70 million in 2031.

Of course, a rich society like the us could absorb all likely ageing costs if it was prepared belatedly to follow the advice tendered by Representative Schuyler Colfax in 1862 and find a way to exact a levy on the presently untaxed mass of large share-holdings. (Colfax advocated a levy on stock-holdings in the same speech as that in which he successfully pleaded for an income tax, the first in us history.) The real problem is not an absence of resources to be mobilized but, as with France's Ancien Régime in 1788, the ability of wealthy individuals and corporations to protect themselves from effective taxation. As I have suggested elsewhere, the best way of forcing corporations to pay their share to the upkeep of a social infrastructure from which they all benefit would be to adopt the share levy proposed by Rudolf Meidner, the former chief economist of the Swedish trade unions. Requiring corporations to donate shares each year equivalent to a tenth of their profits to collective social funds would be one way to prepare for the financial strains of an ageing society.

Ferguson's hostility to Social Security chimes in with Bush's floundering attempt to initiate privatization of the programme, as demanded by so many neo-cons and neoliberals. It is almost as if war and empire are not being undertaken for the stated reasons, but for domestic purposes, because only war fever, and a climate of fear, can render acceptable the sacrifice of working- and middle-class social protection. Thus regime change and aggression abroad sets the scene for social counter-revolution at home. In *The Shield of Achilles*, Philip Bobbitt, perhaps a more influential writer and thinker than Ferguson, chillingly announces that a defining feature of the new 'market state' will be that it will no longer feel bound to protect the welfare of its citizens. There is a further synergy here between domestic and foreign policy. Just as it used to be said that Britain's empire was 'a system of out-relief for the aristocracy'—who filled all those governorships—so today the string of overseas bases is workfare for those who cannot find a decent job at home.

Many of the flaws and fantasies of the neo-imperial project stem from the domestic revolution which it seeks to project on the wider world. Thus the government of an advanced country can raise real resources through the privatization of national assets. But in the context of an underdeveloped, even if resource-rich, society, a programme of privatization simply benefits the large foreign companies who have the money to buy state assets. Ferguson exaggerates the gains made by colonized peoples in the imperial epoch. But the colonial states not only built railways and harbours; they also set up marketing boards and stabilization funds for

key colonial products. The neo-imperial project wants to make such state initiative impossible.

Ferguson supported the overthrow of Saddam Hussein and the occupation of Iraq because they would help to bring the Middle East under American control—he still argues this as justification for the war in *Colossus*. In pursuit of this objective the occupation has dismantled much of the Iraqi state, established a lien on its assets, partitioned the country and set the scene for a tangle of bloody conflicts, some nationalist, some anti-imperialist, and some virulently communalist. The occupation has incurred the hostility of huge numbers of Iraqis who loathed Saddam. This became clear on the second anniversary of the overthrow of Saddam on 10 April 2005, when 300,000 Iraqis demonstrated in Baghdad for the withdrawal of the occupying forces. So far as the scourge of terrorism is concerned, the illegitimate us presence has only served to exacerbate the problem. The jihadis led by Al-Zarqawi are neither numerous nor popular but they can only be isolated by a strong, indigenous, broad-based and unimpeachably Iraqi government—not by an uneasy alliance of us lackeys and Iranian stooges. The us invasion has cost 100,000 lives and brought about a rapid deterioration of public services that were already badly damaged by bombing raids and sanctions. Oil output is trickling and vulnerable. Only Kurdistan might offer the us the possibility of secure bases—but then it would have done so without an invasion. A hard-boiled observer such as Ferguson should have to conclude that the game is not worth the candle.