

Michael Parenti's The Sword and the Dollar

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Michael Parenti, in his book, *The Sword and the Dollar*, caters a wide variety of eye-opening morsels of U.S. imperialism and foreign intervention. Together, they provide a shockingly unpalatable departure from the standard fare of patriotic, self-righteous rhetoric usually served at the table of American consciousness by U.S. foreign policy chefs. Parenti's intriguing assertions regarding the U.S. government, from the political and economic usury of Third World nations to the lust for military preponderance, furnish plenty of food for thought to the average American citizen. Americans, for the most part, are simply not accustomed to seeing terms such as intimidate, expropriate, and annihilate supplant the commonly advanced images of assistance, benevolence, and compassion associated with their concept of the implementation of U.S. foreign policy. *The Sword and the Dollar* gives the reader a very "non-American" perspective of America's role in world affairs, one that quite appropriately elucidates the often inscrutable attitudes of hate and distrust shown the U.S. by foreign nations, particularly those of the Third World.

In the first chapter, Parenti states the book's dual purpose as a treatise on U.S. imperialism and a discourse on the U.S.-U.S.S.R. arms race. He defines imperialism in terms of U.S. interests and capitalistic considerations that result from the melding of predominately similar attitudes inherent at both ends of the two-pole U.S. political spectrum. He then draws a distinction between what may be the actual purpose of U.S. policy and its accompanying statement of justification, further stating that U.S. foreign policy is delineated to benefit neither Third World peoples nor the American populace but rather the elite of America, "those who know how to be well served."

In subsequent chapters, Parenti discusses the economics of capitalist expansionism and then takes a brief trip down the annals of imperialism, both European and American. Corporate America is then thrust into the spotlight as the protagonist that follows inexorably the economic credo of capital gain. Through corporations' political influence and control at home, a drama of national subversion, coercion, and manipulation is exported by the U.S. Although it may seem beneficial at face value, it is a masquerade that actually spells doom and gloom for the majority of citizens of any small country unfortunate enough to merit its attention. If nothing else, one point concerning imperialism is made perfectly clear: corporate America vehemently opposes giving up what it considers rightfully its own with regard to acquisition, and it will spare no effort to keep from doing so.

Parenti provides myriad examples of blatant, U.S. inspired injustices and sadistic practices that, when strung together, tend to startle the American reader to the point of taking his breath away. They leave him quite incredulous and make him wonder if the U.S. being discussed by Parenti is, in fact, the same U.S. in which he lives. Ample documentation, however, is provided to substantiate even the most likely of prevarications.

Soviet expansionism and arms proliferation are given a brusque treatment by Parenti, who asserts that the Soviets are involved in a perpetual game of “catch-up” with regard to nuclear weapons and weapons technology. The Soviet military-industrial complex is purported to be operating at a level of efficiency and productivity significantly less than that which would be necessary to compete with the U.S. on an equal footing, and Parenti insists that the U.S. has consistently turned a deaf ear to legitimate Soviet proposals for substantial arms reductions. Parenti also contrasts Soviet interventionism with that of the U.S., citing that the Soviets intercede on behalf of revolutionary forces while the U.S. restricts its aid to counterrevolutionary forces in order to maintain the status quo.

Undeniably, in even the brief period since the publication of *The Sword and the Dollar*, the change in the world political climate has produced a marked reduction in adversarial posturing between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Currently, the Soviets, who are fully occupied by their own internal political and economic situation, are unable to do much beside sit on the sideline of world affairs and watch in dismay as the U.S. runs rampant over whatever it chooses. Its new military presence in the Persian Gulf, which it most certainly will not totally relinquish, is evidence of possibly a new phase in American imperialism, one that could usher in a new era of peace or plant the seeds of war.

Imperialism, American style, has always been a self-serving matter. Perhaps, if in exchange for importing the wealth of other nations, America would start exporting the principles and tenets of its own domestic interpretation of democracy, we, as Americans, could initiate the formation of a world consensus of government and economy in our image that would be propitious and equitable for all concerned.