

Empires are rarely seen in a good light or as good entities because of the fear they invoke in people and the power they use to subjugate other nations to their will. The Mongols were not a group you wanted to get an ultimatum from and the Qin dynasty has a reputation just as stained despite its age. In every sense of the word they were empires; strong, able, and tyrannical because they could be. The U.S is no different. An empire is defined as “A major political unit having a territory of great extent or a number of territories or peoples under a single sovereign authority.” (Merriam-Webster) which is attained through imperialism. Also known as the practice of acquiring territory and expanding one's political powers to other lands. Both of which the U.S is and does, and in this essay I will explain to you how such a title affects the people under its rule in 3 parts: The beginning of how imperialism leads to capitalism, the middle which focuses on how capitalism leads to inequalities that keep an empire going, and finally the end where we will explore how capitalism screws over everyone. Get comfortable guys, this is how you build a nation.

Imperialism is how you get to be an empire. You take lands that are undiscovered or just simply don't belong to you and give the people a choice, submit, die, or face so much unfairness that death feels like relief. The first widespread example of this in the Americas was the manifest destiny. It was an idea pushed by colonists at the time and founded by John L O'Sullivan in 1845 that claimed Americans, or Angelo-saxons, as gods chosen people (Wolf). As America was dwelling deeper into christianity and religion became more common, so did this idea, and it promoted this blameless ideal where americans control over the world was seen as inevitable and righteous. However, when it came to their views on the people already living in the world under their own regimes that didn't matter. Those nations were on thin ice and would fall under America's greatness, in their eyes, in truth the only thing dropping was indigenous populations.

In “Impressions of an Indian Childhood” by Native American woman Zitkala-Ša she explains how western expansion affected her family and how the hatred her mother felt for the government was passed down to her. After the death of her uncle, her sister, and then later her father from being forced to migrate out of their home, her mother was left rightfully distraught. She told Zitkala-Ša that the “pale-face” were the reason her family was dead and when speaking of getting water from the river that ran close to their home she said, “If the paleface does not take away from us the river we drink.” (Zitkala-Ša) showing just how much the Native Americans had lost already. They had significantly less hunting ground, less fishing ports available, and had an overall harder time keeping up traditions due to the west's constant attempts to so call, modernize them. For no particular reason either. They tried to pull native americans into capitalism so they could feed the machine and that was all. It wasn't in an attempt to better anyone's lives but the elites who would've gotten more of their lands which they were already losing to people who were trying to migrate here. Everyday was a battle and while facing the loss of family and possible starvation they were still fighting the government who wouldn't stop trying to push them onto more reservations with bad living conditions and resources. Then in 1887, only 40 years after the popularization of the manifest destiny, the Dawes Severalty Act was signed. This act distributed the reservation lands to families in an attempt to bring the natives who did live on these reservations into the capitalist world yet again, but this time with private property and a path to citizenship. Also I feel I should explain capitalism for those who don't know. The official definition for capitalism is: “An economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods,...investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods...determined mainly by competition in a free market.” (Merriam-Webster) and this act thrust the Native Americans

straight into it. It was cruel and unfair, it not only sold off more Indigenous lands but also eroded Native American control of the little territory they had left while also making them poorer. This is why I said earlier that imperialism leads to capitalism, eventually there will be too many people under one rule and too few assets to give them. Some citizens who have been conquered by an empire must have nothing. No private property or say in what goods get priced at what value, and most importantly no control. The mass population of an empire has to be nameless, civilians buying in a free market so that corporations can compete in them, but that's only the economic consequences of capitalism. What about the societal implications?

There are many but the main societal problem with a system like this is greed and loneliness. Capitalism promotes that anyone can make it and encourages you to do it alone, then while you're out chasing venture after venture because entrepreneurs are always looking for more, you realize that somewhere along the line you made an endless amount of money and no relationships. This is why statistically the unhappiest people are billionaires because capitalism breeds competition and individualism and creates environments where it's hard to make friends. It's frankly a system that needs to go. There's no reason why companies that makes 100x your income a year should be deciding how high to price that bottle of lotion you buy or those eggs you eat. Those are necessities that should not be put out of your price range; and sure, you can claim that not all companies are bad and you may be right for now, but corporations eventually get selfish despite what morals they had at the start. That's just how it is. Walt Disney once said "We don't make movies to make money, we make money to make movies." (Goodreads) Do you see Disney plus saying the same thing though? No, you don't, because it's a 10 billion dollar platform with CEOs that don't believe that. Capitalism is a curse that lets companies get richer and territory sparser as private property rids young adults and teens of third places and options

for out of house exploring. The kicker to all of this is that it is necessary. An empire thrives off of control and classicism. Every new territory claimed and people deemed citizens cannot be equal, someone needs to be at the bottom so they can always strive for the top. You cannot have imperialism without capitalism and you cannot have capitalism without inequality, the good news is that that's everything an empire is about.

There are many inequalities I could speak on, racial for example ranging from indigenous people to African Americans to Japanese internment camps in the U.S, or I could go the gender route and talk about how women are constantly underpaid and undervalued. Like do you know a woman is why we have wifi? I didn't, had to learn that from tiktok, but I digress, instead of those inequalities im going to focus on an inequality that encapsulates all of this unfairness at once, that being financial inequality and how capitalism feeds an empire. In the late 1800's onward the U.S was selling a pipe dream. Come to the new world and work at the mines, make bank and go home, that was most peoples plans and even to this day people come here just to send money back to their home country. Also just like back then, these people are blamed for things like job insecurity where you have the poor telling other people who are also poor that they need to stop taking all the jobs. Regardless if they were jobs no one else wanted to do, like blowing through mountains for 10 cents an hour with no protective gear. Yet, despite the awful conditions and trash pay, people worked these jobs because financial insecurity was rampant among anyone not blessed with generational wealth or status. As I said, the point of the lower class is to dream of the top, but not to get there. For the misfortunate and ordinary, capitalism is a breeding ground for stagnation, most people will not make it out of poverty or past middle class because the system is working how it's designed to, keeping the bottom at the bottom while the top keep rising, however during world war 1 things changed for a while. The previously undesirable class

of women, African Americans, and Natives were relied on. While over 2 million men were drafted into the war, including native american and black men, women of all colors were left to run the country. They were given jobs to keep the economy circulating and to replace the men that couldn't fill the positions and these jobs often had higher wages and broader positions. The lower class was growing and not only that but women were at the center of it. For once people seemed equal, women made up a majority of workers at the time, the wage gap was near disintegrated, men of all colors joined the war effort and through the working women poor families were getting wealthier. Then the men came back.

After the war ended in 1919 America went back to what it knew and within weeks businesses were firing African Americans and women in mass from their high paying jobs to make room for the returning soldiers. This threw a lot of African American families into poverty since many had migrated to the cities and now were forced to live there with little to no income and this mass firing also wrecked havoc on white housewives who were forced back into homes with their male family members and husbands who were suffering from PTSD from the war. Then came the progressive era where politically and socially things were changing for the better but the underlying issue of financial disparity was still an issue. By this point big businesses were already controlling the means of production and labor industries and families were so poor that by 1880 over 1 million children under 16 were working as much as their parents (Wolf). Through photojournalism by Jacob Riis, middle class citizens and the elite began to see the conditions these people were living in on a daily basis and helped other poor people push for change. The attention the photos got brought forth more art criticizing the rich and progress towards better labor laws, and as shown in the week 12 slides this wasn't a primarily black struggle. Many African Americans were even more impoverished due to racial discrimination

resulting in even less fair working conditions and pay, but white Americans had it harshly as well, just like it is today. Poverty does not discriminate and In week 13, New deal a square deal for the negro, we see many different quotes of people who are for and not for a minimum wage requirement for African Americans. Now that's a whole nother conversation but if we focus purely on financial disparity in general then this quote sums up poverty pretty well. Down the list someone says: "That is a condition that the white people of the South do not wish to see and are certain to protest, for after all, the Negroes, as the New York Times comments, have no better friends than the white people among whom they live and who will not willingly see them done an injustice." (Thomas) further proving my point. Even in 1933 other groups of people beyond the black community were feeling the effects of capitalism, but what this quote also shows is how they tried to offset it by sticking together. A thing the notoriously wealthy don't do and the reason why billionaires are so unhappy. They spent so long doing conquest after conquest, much like the American government, that they now lack this integral part of human connection, community. You don't see rich neighborhoods having block parties or juneteenth celebrations, you don't see community centers overrun with teens and adults on their days off, you don't see people going for walks with their friends and taking the bus together, you don't see people talking. The problem with capitalism is that it screws over everyone. It makes the crazy rich sad, the middle class stagnant, and the poor unsatisfied and struggling; and the problem with an empire is it does that and more. It colonizes nations like how europe and the U.S did Africa, it kills monarchs and turns their beloved countries into tourist hot spots while erasing the real traditions and Natives history like Hawaii, and it has the audacity to debate among itself about weather seizing control over a group of people who don't want their sovereignty is something they should do anyway. Empires are selfish, money hungry, degenerate nations with good PR

and the U.S is one of them. So, what does that mean for us? Nothing much, just a long history full of unfairness and greed until karma comes back for us all.

Sources

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