

## Readings to accompany “Living in the American Empire”:

1) From John Woolman’s Journal, [chapter 1](#), paragraph 17, describing an event in about his twenty-first year:

I went to meetings in an awful [awe-filled] frame of mind, and endeavored to be inwardly acquainted with the language of the true Shepherd. One day, being under a strong exercise of spirit, I stood up and said some words in a meeting; but not keeping close to the Divine opening, I said more than was required of me. Being soon sensible of my error, I was afflicted in mind some weeks, without any light or comfort, even to that degree that I could not take satisfaction in anything. I remembered God, and was troubled, and in the depth of my distress he had pity upon me, and sent the Comforter. I then felt forgiveness for my offence; my mind became calm and quiet, and I was truly thankful to my gracious Redeemer for his mercies. About six weeks after this, feeling the spring of Divine love opened, and a concern to speak, I said a few words in a meeting, in which I found peace. Being thus humbled and disciplined under the cross, my understanding became more strengthened to distinguish the pure spirit which inwardly moves upon the heart, and which taught me to wait in silence sometimes many weeks together, until I felt that rise which prepares the creature to stand like a trumpet, through which the Lord speaks to his flock.

2) Later in the same [chapter 1](#), paragraph 24, about his twenty-third year, on slavery:

My employer, having a negro woman<sup>1</sup>, sold her, and desired me to write a bill of sale, the man being waiting who bought her. The thing was sudden; and though I felt uneasy at the thoughts of writing an instrument of slavery for one of my fellow-creatures, yet I remembered that I was hired by the year, that it was my master who directed me to do it, and that it was an elderly man, a member of our Society, who bought her; so through weakness I gave way, and wrote it; but at the executing of it I was so afflicted in my mind, that I said before my master and the Friend that I believed slave-keeping to be a practice inconsistent with the Christian religion. This, in some degree, abated my uneasiness; yet as often as I reflected seriously upon it I thought I should have been clearer if I had desired to be excused from it, as a thing against my conscience; for such it was. Some time after this a young man of our Society spoke to me to write a conveyance of a slave to him, he having lately taken a negro into his house. I told him I was not easy to write it; for, though many of our meeting and in other places kept slaves, I still believed the practice was not right, and desired to be excused from the writing. I spoke to him in goodwill; and he told me that keeping slaves was not altogether agreeable to his mind; but that the slave being a gift made to his wife he had accepted her.

---

1 The number of slaves in New Jersey at this time must have been considerable, for even as late as 1800 there were over 12,000 of them. The newly imported Africans were deposited at Perth Amboy. In 1734 there were enough of them to make a formidable though unsuccessful insurrection.

3) Other writers, some Quaker, from the 20th and 21st centuries, on war and empire:

Who can doubt that there is an American empire?—an ‘informal’ empire, not colonial in polity, but still richly equipped with imperial paraphernalia: troops, ships, planes, bases, proconsuls, local collaborators, all spread around the planet.<sup>2</sup>

War has no cause except the intention of governments to resort to it.<sup>3</sup>

Friends, militarism is a consuming monster, a growing power that pervades and perverts our society in a thousand ways, most of which we have trained ourselves not to see. If we ever begin to become more truly aware of this condition, our condition – watch out! There will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth, and suffering within and without.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1945 and 2008, the United States was the world’s dominant imperial power, filling the same role in the global political system that Britain filled during its own age of empire, and while that imperial arrangement had plenty of benefits, by and large they flowed in one direction only. With this in mind, we can move to a meaningful definition of empire. An empire is an arrangement among nations, backed and usually imposed by military force, which extracts wealth from a periphery of subject nations and concentrates it in the imperial core. Put more simply, an empire is a wealth pump, a device to enrich one nation at the expense of others.<sup>5</sup>

The Pentagon lists in its official property portfolio 4,775 sites, including 514 overseas outposts in 45 foreign countries. . . . This excludes hundreds of known US military bases in numerous nations. DoD also publicly acknowledges that it has personnel in more than 160 countries on all seven continents. And the annual cost of deploying these US military personnel abroad and operating these foreign bases approaches \$150 billion per year. . . . Scholar David Vine [says] “the secrecy is mostly to prevent domestic debate about the money, danger, and death involved, as well as to avoid diplomatic tensions and international inquiries.”<sup>6</sup>

... to maintain our empire abroad requires resources and commitments that will inevitably undercut our domestic democracy and in the end produce a military dictatorship or its civilian equivalent. The founders of our nation understood this well and tried to create a form of government—a republic—that would prevent this from occurring. But the combination of huge standing armies, almost continuous wars, military Keynesianism [boost economic growth by military spending], and ruinous military expenses have destroyed our republican structure in favor of an imperial presidency. We are on the cusp of losing our democracy for the sake of keeping our empire. 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.<sup>7</sup>

---

2 Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Cycles of American History*, 1994, page 141.

3 Ira De A. Reid, *Peace and Tranquility: The Quaker Witnesses*, 1958.

4 Chuck Fager, *The Core Quaker Theology: Is there Such a Thing?*, 2005, page 2.

5 John Michael Greer, *Decline and Fall: the end of empire and the future of democracy in 21st century America*, 2014, prologue.

6 Ben Norton and Nick Turse, *The US Has Military Forces in Over 160 Countries, but the Pentagon is Hiding the Exact Numbers*, 2019.

7 Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic*, 2007, pages 278-9.