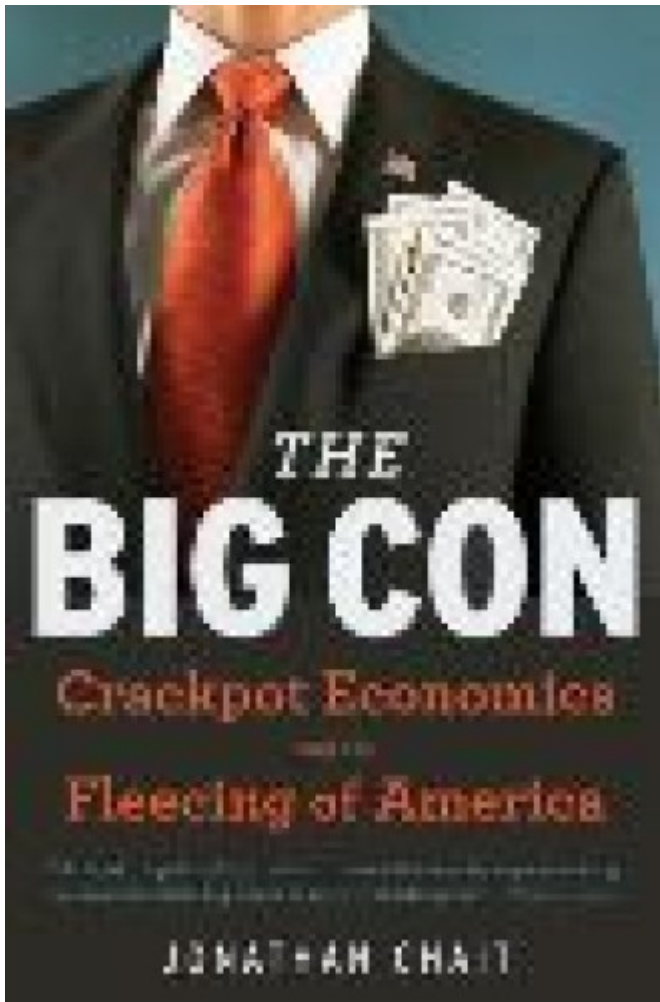


# The Century recommends

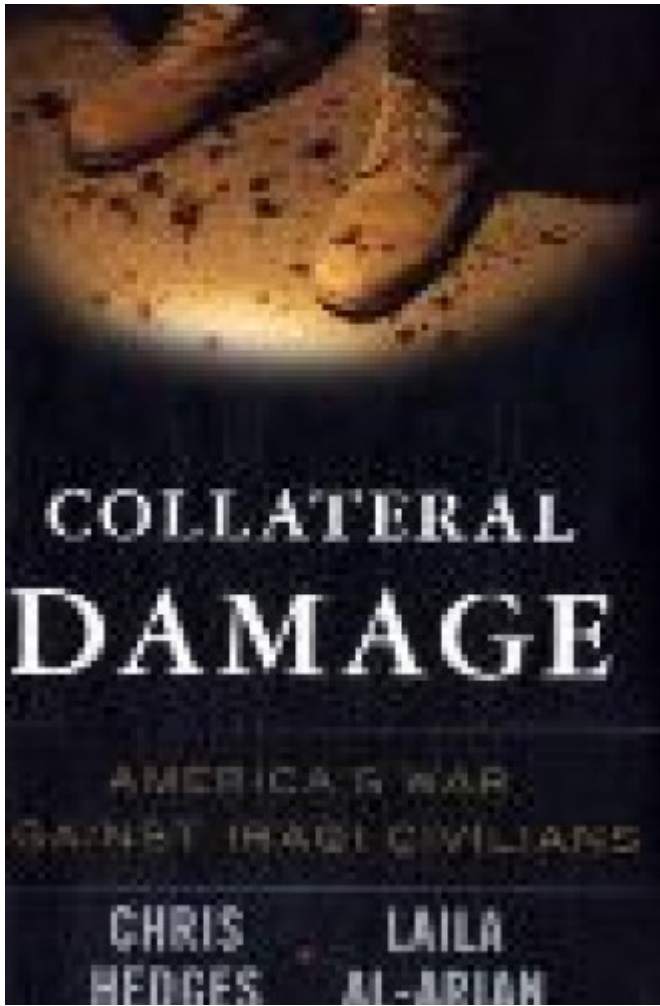
Books in the [December 16, 2008](#) issue

## In Review



## **The Big Con: Crackpot Economics and the Fleecing of America**

Jonathan Chait  
Mariner



**Collateral Damage: America's War Against Iraqi Civilians**

Chris Hedges and Laila Al-Arian  
Nation Books

# THE LIMITS OF POWER



The End of American  
Exceptionalism

ANDREW J. BACEVICH

Professor of History and International Studies  
at Boston College

## **The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism**

Andrew J. Bacevich

Henry Holt

Since the Reagan era, a version of supply-side economics that is persuasive only to fringe economists and to right-wing editorial writers has shaped debate over public policy. According to this view, tax cuts are magically curative: they stimulate growth in the economy, which in turn sparks a rise in government revenue. The circle is thereby squared: one can cut taxes and increase government spending at the same time. Chait offers an invaluable summary of how media and corporate lobbyists have made this belief a staple of politics even in the face of empirical evidence to the contrary.

Chris Hedges (author of *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*) and Laila Al-Arian interviewed 50 American veterans of the war in Iraq. Many of them talk freely about

the atrocities against innocent civilians being carried out by Americans in Iraq. For some interviewees, this openness seems to be a way of dealing with their own sense of culpability and guilt. One of the problems the soldiers faced in Iraq was that the rules of engagement were not clear. Many soldiers also bring with them a cultural or racial bias. Furthermore, few knew anything about the culture of the Iraqis or spoke their language.

Bacevich offers a lucid analysis and critique of American culture, politics and militarism, looked at through the lens of Reinhold Niebuhr. The problems begin with the people, not just the government. American claims to promote democracy and liberty around the world serve to cloak the way that military power is used to maintain the U.S. standard of living. A retired army colonel who lost a son in the Iraq war, Bacevich has taught at West Point and now is at Boston University.

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