

THE DAWN OF THE AMERICAN AGE

There is a deep-seated belief in America that the United States is approaching the eve of its destruction. Read letters to the editor, peruse the Web, and listen to public discourse. Disastrous wars, uncontrolled deficits, high gasoline prices, shootings at universities, corruption in business and government, and an endless litany of other shortcomings—all of them quire real—create a sense that the American dream has been shattered and that America is past its prime. If that doesn't convince you, listen to Europeans. They will assure you that America's best day is behind it.

The odd thing is that all of this foreboding was present during the presidency of Richard Nixon, together with many of the same issues. There is a continual fear that American power and prosperity are illusory, and that disaster is just around the corner. The sense transcends ideology. Environmentalists and Christian conservatives are both delivering the same message. Unless we repent of our ways, we will pay the price—and it may be too late already.

It's interesting to note that the nation that believes in its manifest destiny has not only a sense of impending disaster but a nagging feeling that the country simply isn't what it used to be. We have a deep sense of nostalgia for