In the few years immediately following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, comparisons between ancient Rome and the contemporary United States seemed omnipresent in Western intellectual life. Suddenly op-ed pages were replete with columnists’ ruminations on the fall of Rome; numerous news magazines featured artists’ renderings of George W. Bush clad in centurion’s gear and a laurel crown; and public intellectuals filled bookstores with hastily-produced tomes dedicated to likening the Roman and American empires.\footnote{For a study of numerous works of these types, see Eric Adler “Post-9/11 Views of Rome and the Nature of ‘Defensive Imperialism’,” \textit{International Journal of the Classical Tradition} 15 (2008): 587-610.}

Journalist Cullen Murphy, for instance, entered the fray with \textit{Are We Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2007), a text, as was typical of such efforts, chiefly based on tertiary sources for Roman history. Murphy’s work concluded with various policy prescriptions for American statesmen that purportedly resulted from the author’s study of the Roman past; these suggestions, however, appeared curiously consistent with Murphy’s likely views before he checked out his first book on Roman history from the library.

With a change in American administrations, however, texts such as Murphy’s seem to have disappeared from the shelves and journalists no longer strive to present selected lessons for the US from potted explications of Roman antiquity. This suggests, of course, that the erstwhile fetish for likening the United States to ancient Rome was chiefly aimed at criticizing or defending the Bush presidency. Thus foreign policy hawks scrambled to disassociate America’s post-9/11 bellicosity from Roman imperialism while doves gleefully expounded upon Roman precursors to the Bush administration’s \textit{modus operandi}. With the end of the Bush years, despite the continued American mil-
itary presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, lucubrations on the Rome-America connection appear passé. Since labeling President Obama a reincarnation of Julius Caesar likely appeals only to the political far Left and various paleo-conservatives, Roman history appears to have receded quickly from our newspapers, political journals, and the current affairs sections of our local bookshops.

Before this occurred, however, Thomas F. Madden threw his hat into the ring with *Empires of Trust: How Rome Built—and America Is Building—a New World*. At first glance, Madden’s book is a welcome addition to the literature on the topic. Its author, a history professor whose academic work pertains chiefly to medieval Europe, clearly possesses a far greater understanding of Roman antiquity than various journalists who tried their hands at similar projects. Although the scholarly community may sneer at Madden’s attempt to reach a lay audience, classicists should celebrate the appearance of such popularizing books. With the number of humanities majors at American colleges and universities declining in recent years, the field needs more scholars—not fewer—dedicated to the production of these efforts.

Before commencing with an assessment of *Empires of Trust*, then, we should note that Madden explicitly aimed his book at the interested lay reader. Rather than present a churlish review that excoriates the author for writing a book lacking the trappings of academic works, we must recognize that Madden’s often breezy discussion of Roman history does not attempt to conform to the conventions of scholarly monographs. In short, it is best to judge *Empires of Trust* on its own terms.

Madden makes clear his intention to reach a broader public in the book’s preface (pp. ix-xiv). The horrors of 9/11, he asserts, compelled him to abandon the rarified world of medieval scholarship for a spell in favor of educating a larger audience about Western history. Originally intending to dispel readers of the impression that contemporary America was akin to ancient Rome, Madden came to conclude that the US—though in many respects dissimilar to Rome—“has some important things in common with the youthful Roman Republic” (p. xiii). As a result, he insists, his book avoids political partisanship in favor of elaborating on purported connections between the Roman and American republics. Already one notes differences between Madden’s approach and those of likeminded commentators. As his various contributions to National Review Online as well as sundry sentiments in *Empires of Trust* suggest, Madden is a conservative who supports an aggressive approach to the War on Terror. All the same, in stark contrast to his fellow hawks, Madden blithely labels America an empire, and does not shirk from equating Rome and the US.

For instance, in Chapter 1, “Empires of Trust … and Other Ones” (pp. 1-20), Madden begins to elaborate on the parallels he detects between the Roman and American republics. According to him, ancient Rome and the United States are well nigh unique in their imperial strategies. Unlike brutal “Empires of Conquest” or acquisitive “Empires of Commerce,” Rome and the US, despite their supposed isolationist impulses, unwillingly became the progenitors of “Empires of Trust”—powerful communities of allies based on “an internalized moral compass” (p. 12) opposed to imperial excesses. Although Madden characterizes the growth of Rome and America as a sanguine devel-