Basha i Novosejt, Aurelie (2021) *Joseph Darda, Empire of Defense: Race and the Cultural Politics of Permanent War.* Review of: Empire of Defense: Race and the Cultural Politics of Permanent War by Darda, Joseph. Journal of American Studies, 55 (1). pp. 206-207. ISSN 0021-8758.

Joseph Darda, *Empire of Defense: Race and the Cultural Politics of Permanent War*,

(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019, $27.50. Pp. 264; ISBN 9780226632926.)

In *The Empire of Defense*, Joseph Darda poses an important and timely challenge: to consider how racial structures and ideologies have led the United States to a situation of permanent war. The chapters follow a broadly chronological sequence from the end of the Second World War to the current day, which Darda describes as "one long imperial campaign." (15) He weaves together contributions from scholars across a range of disciplines as well as references to literature, film, popular culture and news sources in a way that invites discussion. In its methodological approach, the book is a compelling piece of truly interdisciplinary research.

Darda forces political historians to reconsider familiar events and periods, such as the creation of the national security state in the aftermath of the Second World War. He argues that the language of national security was steeped in racism and ultimately, invited a shift towards perpetual war. Words like "defense" rather than "war", he notes, ensured the "transformation of war from an event to a normal" (6) just as the language of limited war, which cast enemies as "illiberal and illegitimate … racialize[d] the state's enemies." (8) His central argument that racial hierarchies were inherent to how the United States came to consider issues of national security is perhaps the most likely to elicit debate. At times, however, "race" as a concept seems to stand in for any process of "othering".

Underlying Darda's account is potentially a chicken-and-egg situation. Where he suggests that racist mindsets were a central contributing factor to the formation of ideas of national security, I would argue that deploying racially-coded language was above all a public relations device. Since the Second World War, the United States has only fought

limited wars and the special challenge of these wars has also been about how to "sell" them, how to ensure continued public support in the face of ambiguous objectives and missions. Historians like myself tend to focus on the bureaucratic structures that enabled the militarization of U.S. foreign policy and society, which was sold by deploying language that was steeped in fear, including racial fear. However, our two views are not necessarily in disagreement and our two disciplinary perspectives re-join on Darda's comment that the "national security state has continually identified a *new* new normal that, officials have argued, warrant the unending growth of military and intelligence infrastructure. There is nothing new about the new normal." (200)

Of all the sections in the book, the post-Cold War chapters were the most convincing. His retelling of the Gulf War, the War on Terror and especially the Iraq War were gripping. In particular, his description of the process that led to Army Field Manual 3-24, which loosely sought to draw lessons from the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program in Vietnam to help the United States fight counterinsurgencies in the post-Cold War world and drew on an impressive array of military and civilian officials as well as human rights scholars, is a particularly remarkable story of how an élite consensus is forged and can leave key questions unanswered.

Darda's book would be particularly useful in an American Studies overview course, juxtaposed against more traditional diplomatic and political histories. The challenge of teaching American Studies can sometimes be in showing students the value of interdisciplinarity and that blind spots are inherent to more narrow disciplinary approaches. Darda provides a thought-provoking counterpoint to those who would ignore the importance of race. His book provides another lens with which students can consider the larger sweep of post-1945 history across its political and cultural expressions.

Aurélie Basha i Novosejt

University of Kent