



The Vanishing ‘Shining City on a Hill’: A Window Into America’s Decline

Patrick R. Romain

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“The shining city on a hill” has long been used as a metaphor for American Democracy. In *The Vanishing ‘Shining City on a Hill’: A Window Into America’s Decline*, author Patrick R. Romain seeks to demonstrate that the shining light is in danger of going out as the United States backslides into what he terms an “illiberal democracy.”

Romain, who was born in Haiti and grew up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo before immigrating to the U.S. and attending Harvard, casts a wide net in presenting his case. Over more than 500 pages, his book covers immigration, news media, elections, foreign policy, the economy, government spending, social polarization, wealth inequality and Donald Trump’s second term as president.

The book is written in an objective, sober and largely neutral tone of voice. It is, in one sense, a refreshing departure from the overheated rhetoric that characterizes many books about American politics. On the other hand, readers might find the author’s detachment vexing at times. While it’s hard to quarrel with Romain’s findings — he provides factual information supported by a long list of references — one wishes he would more clearly articulate where he stands on the many issues he discusses. For instance, the most he’ll say about American foreign policy — an extremely contentious issue around the world — is that it has been “ineffectual.” Questions regarding its legitimacy and legality are not addressed.

Regardless, Romain deserves credit for synthesizing a broad range of information without straying from his book’s central thesis; he displays a good deal of knowledge of his subject. The book is comprehensive in that it touches on more or less every aspect of the U.S. political system but somewhat superficial in that it doesn’t dig very deeply into any of them — and, indeed, could not possibly do so in a single volume.

Ultimately, the book should satisfy those seeking an overview of the challenges hindering America’s position in the world today.

Also available in hardcover and ebook.