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LIVE INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR
GARY BECK

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Book Review

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“...and I can only wonder/if someone watched/in ancient Rome/as the barbarian tide/engulfed the empire.”

Prolific New York author Gary Beck’s somber closing to his poem “Last Glance” in his most recent volume of prose poetry, [Lacerations](#) (2022) sums up what this book is about: The decline of the exceptional American empire. Beck examines the nation’s economic, moral, and infrastructural decline and the long-reaching effects on everyday life from the recurring location of Bryant Park (New York City) through the annual cycle of seasons. Traversing this book gives the reader a sober warning that if deep changes are not made, the United States of America is headed towards a truly unsustainable future that will involve much suffering.

[Lacerations](#) unfolds with a series of poems describing the deterioration of the nation, punctuated in between with supporting poems that examine the lagging economy, homelessness (including children), climate change, the wealth gap, corrupt corporations, healthcare inequality, and the overall theme of human suffering in what ought to be the best nation in the world. This theme is demonstrated in “Dangerous Time” where Beck writes, “I used to fear/ that incrementally/democracy was ebbing away/Now it’s rushing away...” The narrator’s perception that American democracy is

not what it purports to be is proven true, and the rest of the poems in the book demonstrate this observation.

Despite the deeply sobering picture that the book paints, however, [Lacerations](#) closes on a faint note of hope. In “A Mighty Oath,” Beck concedes, “...until things get worse/we’re still better than most.” America’s exceptionalism shines forth in this faint but still pulsing closing line, for even in a state of undeniable decline, the United State’s economy, infrastructure and morality is still greater than that of most other nations. The reader is left hoping that that a more sustainable future is forthcoming. [Lacerations](#) serves as both a warning, and a ray of hope for its readers.