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## Elite Ideologies and Popular Support for U.S. Foreign Policies\*

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Historians of U.S. foreign relations have long focused on the decision-making processes, motivations, and negotiations of policymakers. Yet to understand the implementation of policy in a large democracy such as the United States, we must also comprehend how policymakers were able to acquire public consent for their policies—or at least avoid strong public opposition to them. How, for example, have policymakers been able to get Americans to support the decision to go to war, or conversely, to begin to see a hated enemy as a valuable ally? A specific instance of the latter was the post-World War II decision to make the recent enemy, Japan, into a valuable “junior ally” or “bulwark against communism” in East Asia.<sup>1)</sup> The political reasons for this policy have been straightforward: the Cold War was intensifying, and this caused the

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1) For a fuller treatment of this topic, see: Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

United States to abandon earlier policies that had sought to democratize Japan and to make Japan pay for the damage it wreaked during its imperialist rampage throughout the Asia-Pacific region. U.S. policymakers reacted to the perceived communist threat by deciding to prioritize Japanese economic recovery to make Japan a model capitalist country in East Asia to the disadvantage of the Asian victims of Japanese imperialism. This “reverse course” was an about-face of policy, but the American public easily went along with this decision—why? This phenomenon is especially curious since Americans had come to hate Japan ferociously during the war.

The answer is that elite policymakers were able to obtain broad popular support for their foreign policies by drawing upon long-standing narratives or ideologies in U.S. culture about Americans and non-Americans. Ideological thinking, therefore, helps explain how policymakers gain support for their foreign policies—in particular, support for drastic policy changes. “Ideology” or “ideological thinking” in this content is not meant to be an indictment, although the word “ideology” retains a negative connotation in the United States. Many continue to think of “ideology” as a pejorative—some continue to think of it as synonymous with Marxism, as was commonly believed during the Cold War. During the Cold War, American policymakers, mainstream intellectuals, and others believed that “ideology” was what the other side had: namely, “a system of wrong, false, distorted, or otherwise misguided beliefs.”<sup>2)</sup> What they themselves believed, Americans labeled simply as commonsense or “the truth.” But since the Cold War’s end, American scholars of American foreign relations have increasingly been better equipped to recognize

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2) Teun van Dijk, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 1–2.

that Americans have not been immune to ideological thinking. Viewing ideological thinking as an everyday characteristic of all peoples, rather than an unfortunate flaw of enemies, scholars such as Michael Latham have been able to argue that U.S. policies also operated with an ideology. During the Cold War, this was modernization theory.<sup>3)</sup> Latham and others can make such arguments because they defined ideology in a way similar to Michael H. Hunt, who called it an “interrelated set of convictions or assumptions that reduces the complexity of a particular slice of reality to easily comprehensible terms and suggests an appropriate way of dealing with that reality.”<sup>4)</sup>

To clarify the concept even further, we should note that ideologies are not simply any interrelated set of beliefs that suggest paths of action. They are integral to what Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci called the “cultural hegemony.” Gramsci concluded that elite classes held control by consent of the ruled through a cultural hegemony, by which he meant the everyday narratives and ideas that make the socio-political hierarchies and economic inequities appear natural and commonsensical. An example of a “naturalized” narrative in the United States is the prevailing idea that it is “the land of opportunity,” where anyone possessing determination and a strong work ethic can “make it” and attain financial success. Americans continue to believe this story, even though statistics tell us that social mobility is much more limited than people are led to believe by American media,

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3) Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and ‘Nation Building’ in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); David C. Engerman, et al., eds., *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

4) Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

movies, school lessons, and handed-down tales. Since these naturalized narratives serve the powerful, they can be characterized as “elite ideologies.” But it is important to keep in mind that these naturalized narratives or elite ideologies are not a result of a vast conspiracy by ruling elites to hoodwink the poor and disempowered. Instead, they are deeply held beliefs shared by many within a society, regardless of socioeconomic status. And though these beliefs ultimately benefit the ruling elites, the elites themselves find the ideologies compelling because they cannot be “beyond” ideologies any more than they can be beyond their own cultures.<sup>5)</sup> Dominant or elite ideologies, then, are a subset of culture—defined here as a discursive system. This culture or discursive system shifts as a small number of counter-hegemonic narratives succeed in challenging the veracity and “common sense” of dominant ideologies.<sup>6)</sup>

Therefore, this essay on the role of ideologies in gathering consent for policies examines the ongoing process of reproducing hegemonic knowledge. Although ideologies are neither monolithic nor unchanging, the narratives that have shaped and buttress U.S. policy derive from

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5) What Gramsci called “cultural hegemony” is not equivalent to political scientist Joseph Nye’s notion of “soft power.” As Randolph B. Persaud has pointed out, “soft power” suggests a purely utilitarian tool—as if cultural hegemonic power is “something done to others, out there in the wider world,” rather than an ongoing process that describes the way the United States or any state functions. Nye’s advocacy of “soft power” is a strategy for those who want to rally, maintain, and even further American power abroad. Randolph B. Persaud, “Shades of American Hegemony: The Primitive, the Enlightened, and the Benevolent,” *Connecticut Journal of International Law* (Spring 2004): 268–270.

6) For example, feminists and women’s rights advocates pushed the discourse such that it is now “common sense” that women are capable of more responsibilities and skills than in the past.

a longer genealogy of western imperialism that continues today.<sup>7)</sup> Notions of modernity—especially in rationalizing the capability of self-rule—took shape during the Enlightenment, inflected Cold War policies, and continue to influence policy in our contemporary moment. A variety of ideologies regarding race, gender, and maturity were involved in this process, as well as other narratives about revolution, political economy, and religion. I argue that the staying power of ideologies derives from their personification into binary, anthropomorphic figures. This is how an entire country could be depicted and acted upon as if it were a singular, developing human being.

## READINESS FOR SELF-RULE

Since the age of Enlightenment, the denial of political freedom and economic justice has been possible with a series of rationalizations that have been sustained in one form or another. Although an espousal in the “natural rights of man” should be a detriment to racialized colonization, westerners simply invented a range of rationalizations as to why some people did not meet the qualifications of manhood. Or, to put it another way, they came up with reasons as to why some humans were not really adults capable of self-rule or ready to appreciate the social and political freedoms promised by modernity.

Apart from race, two other criteria to determine readiness for self-rule were also biologically based: gender and maturity. By virtue of their gender, of course, women did not fit into the category of “all

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7) See the argument in Kevin Hoskins, *The Wages of Empire: ‘Cuba Libre,’ and U.S. Imperialism*, Ph.D. dissertation (Brown University, forthcoming).

men.” But why gender was and continues to be the basis for exclusion and disempowerment is less apparent. To talk about gender does not mean a focus on women as subjects per se, but the perceived differences between the males and females beyond biological differences. This perception of difference has been common throughout many societies and eras—so common that the differences appear innate rather than as a consequence of socialization. Magnifying the supposed differences in temperament and thus ability between the genders signified relationships of power, as Joan Scott pointed out.<sup>8)</sup> Thus power differences among nations have often been expressed through gendered references implying weakness, dependence, emotionality, and irrationality on one side and strength, rationality, and discipline on the other.

Gender is a malleable ideology—indeed this versatility is what gives any ideology its resilience and utility. Pundits and policymakers have frequently resorted to gendered metaphors to explain differentials in power and to argue for the subjugation or “mentorship” of another people. For example, the feminized rendering of occupied Germany by Americans after World War II was relatively brief in comparison to American notions of a feminized Japan or an effeminate India that predated the war and continued throughout the twentieth century.<sup>9)</sup> By virtue of being non-western, the latter two nations were and are often orientalized as being feminine in culture—and by extension, as a people. Scholars who have expanded Edward Said’s original thesis with

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8) Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1053–1075.

9) See Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945–1949* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947–1964* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).

a gendered analysis have demonstrated that gendered visions underlay notions about the exoticism (and eroticism) of the “Other.”<sup>10)</sup>

Just as importantly, a gendered perspective frames what pundits and policymakers have thought not only of other peoples, but also of themselves. Thus those who advocated war with Spain in 1898 derided William McKinley as an old woman when he hesitated about entering the conflict, while sixty years later, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations favored “toughness” to disastrous consequences in Vietnam.<sup>11)</sup> At the same time, the gendered self-image included a conviction that one’s own society treated women better than other “less advanced” peoples. This notion can be seen in the Americas as early as Cabeza de Vaca’s observation in the sixteenth-century that the *indios* worked their women too hard, but was often repeated during the Cold War and beyond regarding Asian men’s treatment of Asian women.<sup>12)</sup> Since the

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10) For example: Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (New York:Routledge, 1995); Meyda Yegenoglu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York:Oxford University Press, 2002); Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe’s Myths of Orient* (London: Saqi Books, 2008); Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

11) Kristin L Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).

12) Ivar Núñez Cabeza De Vaca, *Chronicle of the Narvaez Expedition* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002); Katharine H. S. Moon, *Sex Among Allies* (New York Columbia University Press, 1997); Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America*. (New York:NYU Press, 2004); Dorinne Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*. (New York: Routledge, 1997); Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally*.

end of the Cold War the trend is visible in American popular discourse about Muslim societies.<sup>13)</sup> This gendered rationale helped justify wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, and has tragically brought more suffering, particularly upon Afghani women.<sup>14)</sup>

Likewise, the ideology of maturity has helped to deny self-determination, usually to nonwhites. Analogies corresponding to the natural life cycle have long been used as conceptual devices to justify political privilege and dominance. “Maturity” signified ability, wisdom, self-control, and entitlement to status and power. Colonial powers have used the rhetoric of maturity to justify their rule over non-white peoples. Images of the Filipinos, Cubans, Hawaiians, or Puerto Ricans as babies—often squalling—or as students in a classroom led by “Uncle Sam” were abundant in American media at the turn of the 20th century.<sup>15)</sup> In the words of William Howard Taft, the first governor-general of the Philippines, “our little brown brothers,” would require “fifty or one hundred years” of U.S. supervision “to develop anything resembling Anglo-Saxon political principles and skills.”<sup>16)</sup> This practice of depicting

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13) Kelly Shannon, *Veiled Intention: Islam, Global Feminism, and U.S. Foreign Policy since the late 1970s*, Ph.D. dissertation (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2010).

14) RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, a group formed to broadcast the misogynistic abuses of the Taliban, argue that the presence of U.S. forces worsened the safety of Afghani women. See: <http://www.rawa.org/index.php>. Iraqi feminist Yanar Mohammed likewise argues that the Obama administration has not improved the dire straits in which Iraqi women find themselves and that the re-imposition of sharia law in Iraq diminished the minimal rights women enjoyed under Saddam. [http://www.democracynow.org/2010/3/19/seven\\_years\\_of\\_war\\_on\\_anniversary](http://www.democracynow.org/2010/3/19/seven_years_of_war_on_anniversary).

15) See the cartoons from the era of the Philippine-American War collected in Abe Ignacio, et al., *The Forbidden Book* (San Francisco: T’Boli, 2004).

16) Quoted in Stuart Creighton Miller, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American*

colonized or otherwise disempowered peoples as immature or even helpless “dependents” needing the firm hand of American guidance continued into the twentieth century and beyond.

〈Figure 1〉 “Not Yet Ready to Walk Alone,” *Jacksonville (Florida) Times*, February 1949



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Conquest of the Philippines, 1899–1903 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 134.

〈Figure 2〉 “Iraq’s Baby Steps,” *Ventura County Star*, February 2005



Unlike race or gender, however, immaturity could be a transitional stage, not a permanent fate. After World War II, when the United States focused on exerting hegemonic power without formal colonial structures, it took more seriously its and other imperialist powers' false promises to bestow freedom when the natives "grew up." American policymakers and media justified the country's occupation of Japan as necessary because the Japanese were "not yet ready to walk alone." Still, they were not expected to be under direct American "tutelage" forever, and indeed, after seven years of occupation, the Japanese regained their national sovereignty. Contrasting sharply with permanent colonial paternalism, this "liberal paternalism" was selectively applied during the postwar period—again, according to a sliding scale of perceived readiness for self-rule.<sup>17)</sup>

17) Shibusawa, *America's Geisha Ally*, 54–95. Nonetheless, American policymaking

The ideologies of race, gender, and maturity were and are mutually reinforcing. Stereotypes or notions about women, nonwhites, and children not only overlapped, but also provided rationales for the others. Women were considered weak, weepy, and emotional like children. Children enjoyed frivolities and were fey like women. Nonwhites were deemed undisciplined, unschooled, and ignorant like children. Children were portrayed as “little savages” (and literally believed to be so, according to turn-of-the-century recapitulation theory).<sup>18)</sup> On the other side of the binary, then, were notions of white adult men being cool, levelheaded, responsible decision-makers. The interlocking characteristic of the ideologies explains their strength and, indeed, can add up to a simplified worldview that bifurcates people into those who should be in control and those who should be controlled.

## DEVELOPMENT, CIVILIZATION, AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

Also constituting this simplified, binary-based worldview have been other ideologies having little to do with biological difference. Instead, they were based upon nationalism and fear of revolutions, as Hunt discusses in *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, as well as free trade, Christianity, and western civilization or modernity.<sup>19)</sup> That free trade and Christianity can be seen as an “interrelated set of convictions”

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elites selectively applied liberal paternalism.

18) Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

19) I am not discussing the notion of “alternative modernities” because I am not convinced that the western, universalist bias can be eliminated by this concept.

about how to understand and act in the world is self-evident and need not be explained further here.<sup>20)</sup> Western civilization or modernity functions as an ideology because it assumes that western civilization is the historical apex of human achievement in the arts, the academy, jurisprudence, governance, economic productivity, civic institutions, and society. It is the universal standard to which all other peoples should aspire—and indeed, be helped to do so under the direction and mentorship of westerners. This ideology, from which modernization theory sprang, has deep historical roots that date to the period of European overseas imperialism.<sup>21)</sup> Notions about development intrinsic to the ideology of civilization, moreover, have underlain the nationalist narrative of the United States: American exceptionalism. It is through the prism of this teleological narrative of destiny and progress that Americans—both leaders and the broad public—have understood their nation’s ascendancy to power and global role.

The ideology of American exceptionalism explained to Americans why they were particularly suited, even destined, to be world leaders, but also that they must be ever vigilant in maintaining their fitness. American exceptionalism held that America was founded by healthy, young, vital, and hardworking people who freed themselves from the shackles of European/British imperialism and acquired control of a largely empty continent that was abundant in natural resources. This settler-colonial narrative dates from the 1780s and 1790s when it

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20) For further discussion see Diane Kirby, “Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, ed. by Richard H. Immerman and Petra Goedde (London: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). This volume is already cited in the first footnote.

21) For further discussion of western civilization as an ideology, see Federici, *Enduring Western Civilization: The Construction of the Concept of Western Civilization and Its “Others”* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

offered an attractive national identity to counteract the centripetal forces pulling apart the new nation after the successful revolution. The American Revolution became not simply the action of aggrieved provincials, but “a shot heard around the world”—the first sound in a noble fight for human liberty. Over time, “Americans—white Americans especially—came to see the founding of free and equal people as their calling in the world.”<sup>22)</sup> But Americans also believed that this exemplary status had to be maintained—through constant movement, said Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893—lest they lapse into senescence and enervation. Thus, John Foster Dulles stated in 1950: “There may come a time in the life of a people when their work of creation ends. That hour has not struck for us. We are still vital and capable of great endeavor. Our youth are spirited, not soft or fearful.”<sup>23)</sup> Dulles’ statements demonstrate that notions about the developmental lifespan of civilizations were also gendered and raced.<sup>24)</sup> The “spirited” and “not soft” youth Dulles invoked were of a specific gender and race, not to mention age. Such notions help explain why, a decade later, Sargent Shriver and the Kennedy administration fretted about American youth and believed that the Peace Corps would help young Americans experience the “frontier” life-style and “retain what Theodore Roosevelt had called “the barbarian virtues” at the turn of the century.”<sup>25)</sup> Stemming from Jeffersonian republican fears of “overdevelopment” and effeminization of American society, preserving “vitality” and “vigor”

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22) Joyce Appleby, “Recovering America’s Historic Diversity: Beyond Exceptionalism,” *Journal of American History* 79 (Sept. 1992): 419–431.

23) Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally*, 90.

24) Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization*.

25) Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*; Fritz Fischer, *Making Them Like Us* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1998).

(usually at the expense of the indigenous) remained a concern among policymakers since “the closing of the frontier.”<sup>26)</sup>

Thus the existential stakes in spreading the “blessings of our liberty”—i.e., spreading U.S. liberal economic systems and/or democratic institutions, especially to “Third World” natives—made the struggle with the Soviet Union especially charged ideologically. The struggle symbolized not only the opposition of capitalism and communism but also competing exceptionalist claims.<sup>27)</sup> Marxism and liberalism, both economic and political, came from the same Enlightenment lineage. As such, adherents saw their chosen way as universal and following a single trajectory of development over time. Although W. W. Rostow meant his “Non-Communist Manifesto” to be the antithesis of Marx’s, they both believed that there existed a singular model of economic growth towards modernity.<sup>28)</sup> The Soviets and the Americans disagreed, of course, over whether capitalism or socialism was the final epoch of history or the best way to attain “modernity.” Yet both modernization theory and Marxist theory were universalist, secular, devoted to science, and materialist. Both held that “men” could shape the world, and both believed that democracy was best protected and run by elites—whether they be John F. Kennedy and the “best and the brightest” or Nikita Khrushchev and the Communist Party. Moreover, they purported to champion anti-colonial struggles and racial equality, a claim the United States became better at arguing as the Civil Rights

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26) ]See Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

27) Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 39.

28) W.W. Rostow, “The Stages of Economic Growth,” *The Economic History Review* 12:1 (1959): 1–16.

movement gained victories. Likewise, both the Americans and the Soviets viewed national governments that either disagreed or resisted their particular favored path to modernity—communist or liberal capitalist—as problems to be solved either through appeasement or elimination.<sup>29)</sup>

The “tragedy of American diplomacy,” according to William Appleman Williams, was that the exceptionalist narrative undermined U.S. commitment to democracy and self-determination for the “Others.” He recognized that Americans had a deep-felt commitment to democracy and wished to share this system with the world, but that by also insisting that other people attain and practice democracy in ways sanctioned by the United States, Americans undermined the very principle of self-determination they sought to promote. This has meant either overthrowing or trying to overthrow “uncooperative” national leaders—including those that were popularly elected—and often installing undemocratic leaders whose policies aligned with the interests of the United States. American leaders were not always comfortable with the choices they had made, but not uncomfortable enough to undo their decisions. JFK stated that while a best case scenario for a Third World country was “a decent democracy,” he believed that if the United States were not given that choice, “a Trujillo regime” had to be supported in order to prevent “a Castro regime.” And although the U.S. State Department “blanched” at the bloodshed and sheer violence of their brutal clients in Guatemala, they still did not recommend a policy change.<sup>30)</sup>

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29) For instance, the two rival powers either supported or attacked, either directly or covertly, the governments of Cuba, Guatemala, Chile, Nicaragua, North or South Vietnam, North or South Korea, South Africa, Ethiopia, Somalia, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. See Westad, *Global Cold War*.

30) Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*

Modernization theory failed to acknowledge what the peoples of Guatemala and elsewhere knew from experience: exploitation from imperialism and capitalism. The word “justice” does not appear in Rostow’s “The Stages of Economic Growth.”<sup>31)</sup> The theory denied the historical relationship between poorer and richer countries, and instead looked at each state as if it were hermetically sealed in order to determine when it was ready for “take-off.” Modernization theory was thus compatible with authoritarian governance by drawing on a paternalist and racist rhetoric that categorized non-whites as children, needing a firm strongman to maintain order.<sup>32)</sup> And the grinding poverty and cycles of violent political unrest undergirded American perceptions that nations of the Third World/Global South needed guidance by the “advanced” nations.

The continued poverty and “instability” of the Third World/Global South persist as a legacy of colonialism, but in ways that appear to reaffirm the notions of the western and/or wealthy, industrial powers that the decolonized are not yet ready for self-rule. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon explained that intractable problems ensue after the achievement of state independence because the native leadership ended up reinforcing existing hierarchies established by the former colonialist rulers. Natives (often interracial mestizos), who were given a slightly privileged place in the colonial order, were the technicians, the teachers, the clerks, and the other low to middling

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(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

31) Rostow, “The Stages of Economic Growth.”

32) David F Schmitz, *Thank God They’re on Our Side: The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1921–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Schmitz, *The United States and Right-Wing Dictatorships, 1965–1989* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

functionaries that made the colony run smoothly. They lacked the education, training, and most certainly the capital resources to run a successful business enterprise—especially a new one based on a more equitable model. They therefore simply repeated or tried to reproduce the same productive models from the colonial days, and thus failed to diversify the economy and go by what has always worked in their experience. Moreover, the new nation was now shut out from the reliable, if dependent and peripheral, position in the colonial power's economic system.<sup>33)</sup> Some, like Haiti, were impoverished by having to pay an indemnity at gunpoint to its former colonial overlords for the losses they incurred with Haitian independence. Haitian scholar Alex Dupuy has pointed out that as a result of colonialism's social and economic relations and structures, the new Haitian elites were thus unable to maintain the plantation system, much less create an industrial infrastructure. This meant that they turned to commerce, to the import and export of goods. Haiti therefore made its wealth from circulation, not production, and it was vulnerable to the fluctuations of the world market. Moreover, the ruling elites were not a homogeneous monolith, but fragmented groups, constantly in competition, creating and perpetuating instability and authoritarian rule.<sup>34)</sup>

Because most American policymakers have not been fully cognizant of the deep historical—and man-made—roots to such poverty and cycles of violence, they have not trusted the colonized or decolonized to handle liberalism, either economic or political. American leaders, and most American citizens, believe that economic liberalism (the

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33) Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005), 97–144.

34) Alex Dupuy, *Haiti In The World Economy: Class, Race, And Underdevelopment Since 1700* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989).

capitalist system) best fostered political liberalism (democracy), and vice versa. The tricky question has always been: which one should come first? Lack of confidence in the colonized/recently decolonized nonwhite peoples—and a healthy dose of vested material interests—has meant that U.S. policy almost invariably supports efforts to ensure that economic liberalism is fostered and maintained, often times at the expense of political liberalism. And the rationale to prioritize economic liberalism over political liberalism has posited the former as a necessary developmental step: economic liberalism (or “free trade,” or “globalization”) will bring investment; investments will create jobs; the jobs will make the people industrious and create a strong civic society; the existence of a strong civic society will lay the foundation for democracy. But forgotten or neglected in this logical scheme is that nothing requires these jobs to be good jobs, with worker safety, good wages, and worker benefits—elements all necessary for a strong civic society by creating a sizeable and prosperous middle class. Moreover, as we know, efforts to make the jobs into good jobs were and continue to be brutally suppressed.<sup>35)</sup> Therefore, an essential link from capital investment to democracy has often been missing. As workers of the Global South have been telling us, democratic rights must be honored in order to ensure democracy and the establishment of democratic institutions. Capitalist development in and of itself does not bring democracy. We in the Global North cannot seem to hear this

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35) Aviva Chomsky, *Linked Labor Histories: New England, Colombia, and the Making of a Global Working Class* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008). For instance, in 2008, 76 trade unionists were murdered worldwide, with 49 in Colombia alone. Gustavo Capdevila, “Labor: Colombia Still Leads in Trade Unionist Murders,” Inter Press Service/Global Information Network (IPS/GIN) wire, 10 June 2009, <http://www.globalinfo.org/eng/reader.asp?ArticleId=65408>.

message sufficiently, if at all.

This essay has argued that ideological narratives, including nationalist founding myths, must be considered in order to understand the worldviews that guided and continue to guide policy. This belief that America still serves as a beacon to the world is manifest in the inaugural address of President Barack Obama:

And so, to all other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and we are ready to lead once more.<sup>36)</sup>

Obama's address is a paean to American exceptionalism. The theme of "only in America" resounded in Obama's addresses and in media commentaries leading up to the election and inauguration.<sup>37)</sup> To the surprise of country music fans who recalled George W. Bush using the same song in 2004, Obama chose Brooks and Dunn's song, "Only in America" to close his DNC nomination acceptance speech.<sup>38)</sup> For a

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36) "Barack Obama's Inaugural Address," *New York Times*, January 20, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/20/us/politics/20text-obama.html>.

37) During his speech on race given on March 18, 2008, Obama asserted that "in no other country on Earth is my story even possible." The text of the speech can be found at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/23690567/>. David Berreby reminds us, however, that other nations have elected heads of state from "stigmatized ethnic minorities or 'foreign' enclaves," including: Britain, Peru, India, and Kenya. David Berreby, "Only in America? The wrongheaded American belief that Barack Obama could only happen here," *Slate Magazine*, posted 17 November 2008, <http://www.slate.com/id/2204822/>. First name needed when mentioned in note itself?

38) "Obama Uses Brooks & Dunn's 'Only in America' to Close Convention Speech," *CMT Blog*, posted 28 August 2008,

presidential nominee committed to uniting a “blue and red America”—and trying to get elected—this strategy made sense. As the new president, however, he spoke to the wider, global audience and said: “To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds.”<sup>39)</sup>

Every president since Truman has made a similar commitment. Some can argue that certain administrations were more sincere in this commitment than others. As Williams recognized, the impulse to help others spoke to a generosity among Americans, though this quality has been hardly exclusive to Americans. What has been unique is the global reach or hegemonic power of the United States. There have always been dissidents and moments of greater dissidence. Yet the majority of Americans have tended to see their hegemony as benevolent. It is a conviction that comes from an exceptionalist ideology about the nation’s historic mission in the world. And it helps to explain how U.S. policymakers and pundits can moralize and dictate to poorer countries that they embrace free trade when the United States and Europe have more protectionist measures on their agricultural products than the entire Global South combined.<sup>40)</sup>

After 9/11, Americans became increasingly aware of a global current of hostility directed toward them. Uninformed of Cold War history, many remain confused as to why this might be so. Or perhaps

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<http://blog.cmt.com/2008-08-29/obama-uses-brooks-dunns-only-in-america-to-close-convention-speech/>.

39) “Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address.”

40) Persaud, “Shades of American Hegemony,” 273. See also: Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2007).

informed by a Cold War history that focuses largely on the struggle with the Soviet Union, they forget the violence unleashed during this period on the peoples of the poorer and poorest nations on earth. And they do not understand the patterns of colonialism predating the Cold War that created the “Third World.” To be sure, some Americans are quite aware and critical of the U.S. foreign policies that propel the current grievances.<sup>41)</sup> Yet many Americans persist on thinking otherwise—that it might be “a clash of civilizations” or perhaps something intrinsic to the United States. Obama reinforced this stance by pronouncing also at his inauguration: “We will not apologize for our way of life nor will we waver in its defense.” Saying that the United States will be steadfast in defending the “American way of life”—a familiar phrase from the Cold War—continues to deflect attention from actual U.S. policies in the world. What’s best for America or, more accurately, for elite Americans, has not been what’s best for most people in America or the world. Most Americans do not know this or, perhaps, do not want to know this. It does not fit the stories we Americans have been telling about ourselves.

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41) For instance, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004). Even Osama bin Laden cites U.S. policies—support for “Israeli tanks in Palestine,” the WWII bombing of Japan, and economic sanctions on Iraq that starved millions of children. See Osama bin Laden, “Speech on September 11 Attacks,” 7 October 2001, reprinted in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *History and September 11th* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 244–245.

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**Abstract**

**Elite Ideologies and Popular Support for U.S.  
Foreign Policies**

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This article argues that elite policymakers gain broad public support for their foreign policies by drawing upon long-standing ideologies or narratives circulating within U.S. public discourse or culture. These ideologies are the mutually constituent elements of a nationalist self-image that not only helps differentiate Americans from non-Americans, but also serves to justify U.S. hegemonic power. The staying power of ideologies derives from the personification of nations into binary, anthropomorphic figures.

**Key Words**

U.S. Foreign Policy, Ideology, Civilization, Culture, History