

SARAH TRYPHENA PHILLIPS LECTURE
ON AMERICAN LITERATURE AND HISTORY

AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE AND
THE ASIAN FRONTIER, 1943–1973¹

By CHRISTOPHER THORNE

Fellow of the Academy

Read 3 December 1986

IT has long been a historiographical commonplace that the famous thesis presented by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 on 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' is open to doubt on a number of grounds.² And yet, of course, we repeatedly encounter evidence of the profound influence subsequently exercised by that thesis upon the thinking both of prominent individuals—Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt, for example—and of the American people at large.³ To take simply one specific example that lies within our period, although in a field other than Asia, Turner's concept was central for James Webb, who became head of NASA in 1961. Setting out, in his own words, to ensure America's 'control of the destiny

¹ This essay is concerned primarily with US relations with East and South-east Asia. South Asian affairs are also touched upon, but those of South-west Asia are excluded from the purview of the paper. The author's warm thanks are due to Dr Rosemary Foot, Professor Lloyd Gardner, and Professor Walter LaFeber, who provided helpful comments when the essay was in draft form.

² F. J. Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (New York, 1963). For a general critique see, e.g., the Introduction to this edition by H. P. Simonson; also R. Hofstadter and S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Turner and the Sociology of the Frontier* (New York, 1968), and David Potter's submission that 'many of the traits which were attributed to the frontier influence . . . could equally well be accounted for by the impact of abundance': *The People of Plenty. Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago, 1954), p. xx.

³ Turner, argues William Appleman Williams, 'gave Americans a nationalistic world view that eased their doubts, settled their confusions, and justified their aggressiveness . . . His interpretation did much to Americanize and popularize the heretofore alien ideas of economic imperialism and the White Man's Burden': 'The Frontier Thesis and American Foreign Policy', *Pacific Historical Review* (November 1955).

of the world', he wrote to a Presidential aide in 1965 that, just as the wild forces of the frontier had been 'harnessed and utilized by the pioneer', generating in the process 'those qualities which have made for the American democratic system', so, in space, 'an entire nation is developing technology which puts it, as an organized entity, very much in the same position as the pioneer was individually on the frontier'. As Walter MacDougall observes in his fine study of the politics of the space programme: 'Where Khrushchev and the Soviets expected the new age to fulfil their dreams of a future Utopia, Webb and his American technocrats expected it to restore a past apotheosis.'¹

Like its own intellectual history,² the concept of the frontier has to it far more facets than can be explored in this present exercise. It will be sufficient to illustrate by alluding to two of them which have relevance within the particular context of United States-Asian relations. One is the association of the frontier, not only with opportunity and optimism, but with danger and foreboding. Turner's very thesis, with its emphasis upon the recent closing of a Western land frontier which until then had 'promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people', suggested, as Richard Hofstadter has written, 'the frightening possibility . . . that a serious juncture in the nation's history had come'³—as indeed was to be the case when President Truman and his successors summoned their fellow-countrymen to face the potentially mortal threat of 'world communism' and when the shock of *sputnik* paved the way for James Webb's drive into the new frontier of space. Fear, as much as confidence, was to underlie those strivings in Asia that culminated in Richard Nixon's frenzied bombing of North Vietnam.

¹ W. A. MacDougall, . . . *The Heavens and the Earth. A Political History of the Space Age* (New York, 1985), pp. 387-8. See also E. B. Skolnikoff, *Science, Technology, and American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 211 ff. On the post-war elevation of the scientist and technician to near super-human status see, e.g., P. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light* (New York, 1985); and for a wry commentary, P. Schrag, *The End of the American Future* (New York, 1973), ch. 4.

² See, e.g., the work of Walter Prescott Webb, who extended his study of the American frontier (in such volumes as *The Great Plains*, first published in 1931) into the development of a thesis concerning the expansion of the entire, Western 'Metropolis' from the late fifteenth century onwards: *The Great Frontier* (Austin, Texas, 1964; first published, 1951).

³ R. Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York, 1967), p. 149. And see, e.g., Walter Prescott Webb's formulation of the American *malaise* of the 1930s as 'The Crisis of a Frontierless Democracy' in *Divided We Stand* (New York, 1937).

Less tangible has been that frontier in American life and literature constituted, in Leslie Fiedler's words, by 'the last horizon of an endlessly retreating vision of innocence', by 'the margin where the theory of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face'.¹ This 'horizon' too, however, has been intertwined with the territorial frontier itself, as has been the 'demon virtue' (in Michel Crozier's phrase)² with foreign relations generally. Where Asia was concerned, China in particular became linked to the expectation that the scope of America's 'original goodness' could be enlarged and its vision confirmed. Of General Stilwell's labours in that country during the Second World War Theodore White later wrote: 'He came of a tradition . . . of Americans who felt so strongly we were the good people that wherever they went they were convinced they, as Americans, brought virtue.'³ A decade or so on, with China 'lost', it was South-east Asia in its turn, as depicted for example in the immensely influential novel, *The Ugly American*,⁴ that seemed to offer to a nation grown oleaginous and complacent a new opportunity, not merely to bestow that virtue upon others, but to recover the leanness of virtue and innocence for itself. And when that particular fantasy, too, had been blown away amid the 'brutal and brutalizing'⁵ conflict in Vietnam, it was to the final obliteration of Fiedler's 'last horizon', both for the individual and for the society as a whole, that the memoirs and novels of American combatants repeatedly returned.⁶

¹ L. A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1975), pp. 27, 37, and *passim*.

² M. Crozier, *The Trouble With America* (trs. by P. Heinegg, Berkeley, 1984), ch. 7.

³ T. H. White, *In Search of History* (New York, 1978), p. 178.

⁴ W. J. Lederer and E. Burdick, *The Ugly American* (New York, 1958).

⁵ H. Morgenthau, 'Vietnam, Shadow and Substance', *New York Review of Books* (16 Sept. 1966), reprinted in L. S. Kaplan (ed.), *Recent American Foreign Policy. Conflicting Interpretations* (Homewood, Ill., 1968).

⁶ For a valuable survey see J. Hellmann, *American Myth and the Legacy of Vietnam* (New York, 1986). Of particular interest are Hellmann's reflections on the possible relationship between the challenge of Vietnam, as seen in the early 1960s, and the search for that 'middle landscape' wherein the nation's 'pastoral ideal' could be fully harmonized with that 'American machine' whose image had by the mid-nineteenth century become, in Leo Marx's words, 'a transcendent symbol: a physical object invested with political and metaphysical identity [that would] roll across Europe and Asia, liberating the oppressed people of the Old World—a signal, in fact, for the salvation of mankind': *The Machine in the Garden. Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964), p. 206. See also H. N. Smith, *Virgin Land. The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York, 1950).

Eighty years before Robert Stone's *Dog Soldiers*,¹ for example, suggested that 'the American mythic landscape of unique character and mission overlays a moral desert',² before Michael Herr depicted Vietnam as 'the turnaround point' for the drive westwards along the 'Trail of Tears',³ Turner had forcefully argued that the frontier was essential to the process of regeneration, to 'perennial rebirth'. And in this as in other respects, the concept had come to form part of what has been termed 'the official American ideology'.⁴ In Donald Devine's words, it 'made Americans *think* they were different and helped them identify with the nation'.⁵ In short, it had constituted one element in the shaping of American political culture.

In what follows, this term, political culture, will be employed as 'a shorthand expression to denote the emotional and attitudinal environment within which the political system operates'.⁶ As will be evident from the material advanced below concerning the American case in particular, it is a concept which overlaps to some extent those of 'national character' and 'national style',⁷ while having a strong contextual relationship to the construct labelled 'public opinion'.⁸ Commonly employed in the singular with respect to an entire political system, the term is none the

¹ R. Stone, *Dog Soldiers* (Boston, 1973).

² Hellmann, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

³ M. Herr, *Despatches* (London, 1978), p. 46.

⁴ The phrase is employed by Warren L. Susman in his *Culture As History. The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1984), p. 17. And see, e.g., Simonson, in Turner, *op. cit.*, and H. McClosky, 'Consensus and Ideology in American Politics', *American Political Science Review*, lviii (June 1964).

⁵ D. J. Devine, *The Political Culture of the United States. The Influence of Member Values on Regime Maintenance* (Boston, 1972), p. 89.

⁶ D. Kavanagh, *Political Culture* (London, 1972), p. 10. Perhaps the more common definition is the one established by Professor Almond and his colleagues: the 'particular pattern of orientations to political actions' within which each political system is embedded. G. A. Almond, 'Comparative Political Systems', *Journal of Politics* (Aug. 1956); G. A. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, 1963). See also, e.g., W. A. Rosenbaum, *Political Culture* (London, 1972), and Devine, *op. cit.* On the related concept of political system see, e.g., D. Easton, *A Framework For Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965). For a study of a polity other than that of the United States see, e.g., S. White, *Political Culture and Soviet Politics* (London, 1979).

⁷ On these, with reference to the United States in particular, see, e.g., Potter, *op. cit.*, chs. 1, 2; S. Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles, or The Setting of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1968), part ii; G. A. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1950), ch. iii. M. H. Hunt's valuable *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, 1987) appeared too late for me to be able to profit from it when preparing this essay for publication.

⁸ See, e.g., Rosenbaum, *op. cit.*, ch. 5.

less understood to acknowledge that, as one political scientist has put it, 'in virtually no society is there a political culture pattern [that is] typical of almost all individuals or social groups'. (Indeed, the development of strongly 'deviant' political subcultures can herald the dissolution of the political system itself.) Studies within the United States, for example, have revealed marked discrepancies in this respect on such bases as race, geographical location, and degree of engagement in public affairs—even if the differences in values which were involved tended until the early 1960s to be played down or ignored in such a way as to create 'the illusion of consensus which for many purposes can be as serviceable as the reality'.¹ Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that the values which individuals or groups profess are not sufficient in themselves as a guide either to the actions of those concerned or to the working characteristics of the political system to which they belong. What we are referring to, then, when employing the term 'political culture' in respect of a society and system which is at least relatively 'integrated' in this regard, is a predominant pattern of widely proclaimed values which influences, but does not determine, political and social behaviour; a value-system which can be seen as operating at the levels of the community itself (that is, in relation to its fundamental political beliefs and 'rules of the game'), of the regime (that is, the particular arrangements which regulate political demands, debates, and decisions), and of the immediate, day-to-day exercise of authority.

Political scientists have been wont to consider the development and influence of political culture within the framework and perspective of the domestic system alone, rather as sociologists have for the most part treated the international environment as no more than a passive 'setting' within which an aetiology is to be arrived at.³ Yet it is evident, of course, both that the external,

¹ McClosky, *op. cit.*; and see Devine, *op. cit.*, and Rosenbaum, *op. cit.*, pp. 148 ff. Note Merle Curti's comment, from a broader historical perspective: 'There has been no consensus about either the meaning of American democracy or its origins and conditioning circumstances or the degree of importance it has had in our national experience'. *Probing Our Past* (New York, 1955), p. 29.

² See Devine, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 ff., and Easton, *op. cit.*

³ See C. Thorne, 'Societies, Sociology, and the International. Some Contributions and Questions, with Particular Reference to Total War' in M. Mulkay and W. Outhwaite (eds.), *Social Theory and Social Criticism* (Oxford, 1987); also, for sociological studies which set out to make good this deficiency, A. Giddens, *The National State and Violence* (Cambridge, 1985);

[Footnote 3 continued on page 344]

and perceptions of the external, have played a significant part in the shaping of American political culture, and that the political culture, in its turn—perhaps more homogeneous when considered in this context rather than in relation to domestic issues and social sub-divisions—has exercised upon the country's dealings with foreign peoples and states, not merely an indirect influence (that is, via the workings of the domestic political system), but a direct one in terms of assumptions and attitudes.¹

From its earliest days, the essential qualities of the Republic and its body-politic were defined in terms of contrast with older societies and states, while thereafter issues surrounding the admission of new immigrants, for example, were bound up with questions concerning the nature and functioning of the political system and, beyond that, the identity and meaning of what came to be termed 'Americanism'.² Conversely, only an awareness of American political culture enables us to understand, say, the manifestation in the country's foreign relations of the 'article of faith', as Stillman and Pfaff described it in the mid-1960s, 'that all men are at bottom the same', and the conviction 'that American history—particularly the success of federalism and material prosperity in damping down social discord—provides a proto-typical solution for the world's disorders'.³ Without such an awareness, we cannot fully comprehend why, alongside a self-confidence *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world that is, in Sanford Ungar's phrase, 'part of the national ideology',⁴ we can also trace, as James Chace has recently done, a long-standing fear of 'the foreign', together with that 'exaggerated sense of vulnerability' which has fuelled the T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions. An Introduction to the Analysis of a Political Phenomenon* (Cambridge, 1972).

¹ This is not to suggest, of course, that political culture, in this or any other case, plays a consistent or decisive role in determining foreign relations or foreign policies. It is one influence among many, greatly varying in strength and as regards those aspects of foreign relations which it affects. It follows from this that the present essay merely seeks to explore one particular dimension which may contribute to an understanding of American dealings with Asia during the period in question.

² See, e.g., P. Gleason, 'American Identity and Americanization' in S. Thernstrom (ed.), *The Harvard Encyclopaedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980). See also the admirable survey by Hugh Brogan, *The Pelican History of the United States of America* (Harmondsworth, 1986).

³ E. Stillman and W. Pfaff, *Power and Impotence. The Failure of America's Foreign Policy* (New York, 1966), pp. 23, 29. And see, e.g., P. M. Kattenburg, *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-75* (New Brunswick, 1980), pp. 69 ff.

⁴ S. J. Ungar (ed.), *Estrangement. America and the World* (New York, 1985), Introduction.

quest for complete immunity from external threats.¹ Without it—to give one final and more specific illustration—we cannot achieve a complete interpretation of a document such as the now-celebrated survey of the United States' position *vis-à-vis* international communism that was submitted to the National Security Council in April 1950, NSC 68, with its emphasis upon the 'unique degree of unity' to be found in American society, and upon the strength residing in 'the people'; with its conviction that once the facts of a situation were placed before that 'people', there would emerge a 'common view' and a 'solid resolute expression of [the national] will'; but with its underlying sense of fear, none the less, and its warning that the Soviet Union possessed the capacity to 'turn to its own uses the most dangerous and divisive trends in our own society' and of evoking 'the elements of irrationality in human nature everywhere'.²

* * *

The authors of NSC 68 proclaimed their confidence that the American spirit and will could meet the demands of the new frontiers where freedom stood in peril—frontiers which Truman had publicly depicted in global terms in his 'Doctrine' of 1947.³ And Turner himself, in 1893, for all that 'Manifest Destiny' on the North American continent had now been fulfilled, had looked ahead to new opportunities wherein the nation could preserve its unique strengths and realize its full potential. 'He would be a rash prophet', he wrote, 'who should assert the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominating fact, and unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wide field for exercise.'

¹ J. Chace, 'A Quest for Invulnerability', in *ibid.*

² NSC 68, 14 Apr. 1950, National Archives, Washington DC. All subsequent National Security Council material referred to is from this archival source. Extracts from NSC 68 can also be found in, e.g., T. H. Etzold and J. L. Gaddis (eds.), *Containment. Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950* (New York, 1978). On the concept of 'the people' see, e.g., Susman, 'The People's Fair', in *Culture As History*.

³ See, e.g., R. J. Donovan, *Conflict and Crisis. The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1948* (New York, 1977), ch. 30. Although it was widely acknowledged within official circles that Truman, in seeking aid for Greece and Turkey, had referred to universal tasks facing the Republic for rhetorical purposes, none the less in 1966 Dean Rusk would be citing Truman's message to Congress as the basis for the policies currently being pursued in South-east Asia. See W. C. Gibbons, *The U.S. Government and the Vietnam War. Executive and Legislative Roles and Relationships, 1945-1960*, vol. 1 (Princeton, 1986), p. 30.

Turner's voice was of course only one of many that were being raised in this sense at the time, the call taking on a special urgency as economic growth, relied upon to prevent the nation breaking asunder, seemed no longer a certainty. 'Whether they will or no,' wrote Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1890, 'Americans must now begin to look outward'; new outlets must be found for what Elihu Root called the country's 'surplus of capital'.¹ And in what Walter Hines Page termed 'the opening of the Orient'—an 'opening' that took more solid form in 1898 with the acquisition of Hawaii and the Philippines—there seemed to many to be not only a new commercial frontier, but also special scope for the American mission to civilize and to redeem the world. The Republic, one of its Secretaries of State, William H. Seward, had proclaimed earlier, must take up the original purpose of Columbus and make its way 'constantly westward . . . until the tide of the renewed and the developing civilizations of the world meet on the shores of the Pacific Ocean'. The very occasion for Turner's own paper in 1893 was the 'World's Columbian Exposition' of that year in Chicago, whose exhibits and 'message', in the words of a recent and detailed study, 'left a lasting imprint on the American cultural landscape', not least by providing its visitors with 'ethnological, scientific sanction for the American view of the non-white world as barbaric and childlike . . .'²

Asia was by no means the only new frontier where the Republic could direct its resources, energy, and goodness (Central America being another). But as the culminating point of the drive westwards and as the location of potentially enormous markets; as the home of the ancient civilizations of mankind (a notion which Walt Whitman, for one, had emphasized in such poems as 'Facing

¹ On the specific writings and speeches chosen to illustrate the expansionist mood as it existed around the turn of the century see R. Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy. Cultural Politics and Foreign Affairs* (New York, 1983), chs. 1, 2; R. Hofstadter, 'Cuba, the Philippines and Manifest Destiny', in *The Paranoid Style*; W. A. Williams, *The Roots of the Modern American Empire* (New York, 1969), *Empire as a Way of Life* (New York, 1980), and 'The Frontier Thesis', loc. cit.; R. Bell, *Last Among Equals. Hawaiian Statehood and American Politics* (Honolulu, 1984), ch. 1; E. R. May, *Imperial Democracy. The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York, 1961); W. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions. The United States in Central America* (New York, 1983), ch. 1; R. Drinnon, *Facing West. The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (New York, 1980), ch. xix.

² R. W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair. Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago, 1984), ch. 2.

West from California's Shores' and 'Passage to India')¹ and yet as a vast *tabula rasa* awaiting the American message, it was the East which held the pre-eminent place in the dream of fulfilling the nation's destiny.² Moreover, for all that the assumptions of racial and cultural superiority over 'new-caught, sullen peoples' that were prevalent among white Americans at the time were matched by notions commonplace in Europe also, the new opportunity and mission in Asia were seldom seen as being akin to the overseas ventures of the Old World. The belief, rather, was that they would be approached on a uniquely enlightened basis, whereby, as Melville had expressed it in *White Jacket*, 'national selfishness is unbounded philanthropy; for we cannot do a good to America, but we give alms to the world'.³ Theodore Roosevelt's insistence that the country's entire future would be determined above all 'by our position on the Pacific facing China' chimed with that of Woodrow Wilson, that America possessed 'the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world'.⁴ Not until the late 1960s would Professor Fairbank, for one, come to emphasize the similarities that had existed in the nineteenth century between the 'treaty-port' attitudes of Americans and Europeans in the Far East, and to suggest that the Vietnam war itself was but 'an updated use of gunboat diplomacy, in lineal succession to the American expedition to Korea in 1871 or the suppression of Boxerism in 1900'.⁵

At this point, however, it becomes necessary to introduce an important qualification into the argument, as regards both the period between the late nineteenth century and Pearl Harbour and the subsequent years which are the particular concern of this essay. For notwithstanding the enthusiasm and endeavours of missionaries and entrepreneurs around the turn of the century,

¹ And see R. Asselineau, *The Evolution of Walt Whitman. The Creation of a Book* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 302.

² See also, e.g., E. L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation. The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago, 1968), p. 171, and *passim*; T. McCormick, *China Market. America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago, 1967); R. Van Alstyne, *The Rising American Empire* (Oxford, 1960), ch. 8; Smith, *Virgin Land*, p. 25, and *passim*; Hellmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9; and for a broad survey of the actual role of the United States, Young Hum Kim, *American Frontier Activities in Asia* (Chicago, 1981).

³ Quoted in Tuveson, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁴ Quoted respectively in Dallek, *op. cit.*, p. 47, and Tuveson, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

⁵ J. K. Fairbank, *China Perceived. Images and Policies in Chinese-American Relations* (New York, 1974), pp. 94 ff.

the majority of Americans remained, not only profoundly ignorant of, but also largely indifferent to, matters Asian—especially once the threat of continuing immigration from that part of the world had been removed by legislation in the 1920s.¹ (Those Asians who had already arrived in the Republic had frequently been met with hostility and with legislation that restricted their property rights, in California and elsewhere.) Moreover, even after the conflict against Japan had brought unparalleled American might into the western Pacific (the ‘sense of the American purpose as Triumph over Evil became unshakable in me’, recalled Theodore White later of his experiences as a war correspondent in 1945, ‘almost maniacal, as I began to flick around the map of Asia which was opening to our conquests’),² there were again to be times when Asian affairs were seen by American policy-makers and their public as being of less than primary importance.

Eisenhower, for example, like Acheson before him, looked above all in a European direction when it came to considering the long-term interests of the Republic.³ In the estimation of the CIA in September 1947, the Far East ranked third behind western Europe and the Near and Middle East in terms of the need to contain the Soviet Union,⁴ and the general public, the State Department, and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were all prepared in 1948 to stand aside as the hold of Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist regime on the Chinese mainland neared its end.⁵ In that same year, also, both the Joint Chiefs of Staff and

¹ See, e.g., P. A. Varg, *The Making of a Myth. The United States and China, 1897–1912* (East Lansing, Michigan, 1968), p. 117; W. I. Cohen, *America’s Response to China* (New York, 1971), pp. 57 ff., and *passim*.

² White, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

³ See, e.g., S. E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower. The President* (London, 1984), p. 33. On Acheson’s readiness—at least until 1949—to accommodate radical change in China, including the fall of Taiwan to the People’s Republic, see W. I. Cohen, ‘Acheson, His Advisers, and China’ in D. Borg and W. Heinrichs (eds.), *Uncertain Years. Chinese–American Relations, 1947–1950* (New York, 1980).

⁴ CIA survey, ‘Review of the World Situation as it Relates to the Security of the United States’, 26 Sept. 1947, Modern Military Records branch, National Archives, Washington DC.

⁵ See, e.g., E. R. May, *The Truman Administration and China, 1945–1949* (Philadelphia, 1975), pp. 30 ff., 83 ff.; A. T. Steele, *The American People and China* (New York, 1966), p. 47; N. B. Tucker, *Patterns in the Dust. Chinese–American Relations and the Recognition Controversy, 1949–1950* (New York, 1983). Also, e.g., NSC 6, ‘Staff Report on Short-Term Assistance to China’, 26 Mar. 1948, and NSC 34, State Dept. report on ‘United States Policy Toward China’, 13 Oct. 1948.

the National Security Council as a whole were looking to 'the liquidation of the U.S. commitment of men and money in Korea',¹ while the experience of the war that ensued in that country, none the less, reinforced the long-standing belief in military and political circles alike that direct embroilment on the ground on the Asian land-mass should be avoided.² The very withdrawal from South Vietnam that brings to a close the period covered by the present essay, like the 1969 'Nixon Doctrine' which preceded it, was to represent in part an acknowledgement that there were other parts of the world that were of greater importance for the national interest; that, in the phrase Henry Kissinger applied to Cambodia, the struggle in South-east Asia had become merely 'a cruel sideshow'.³

And yet, when all the necessary qualifications have been established, it remains the case that, even aside from the immediate task of avenging Pearl Harbour and destroying Japanese militarism, from around the mid-1940s to the end in Vietnam, Asia in general and East and South-east Asia in particular did take on some of the characteristics of a significant frontier for the United States in a number of respects. The Cairo Conference of 1943 provided an early focus for a network of questions concerning what was likely to emerge—and what one would wish to emerge—from the forthcoming defeat of Japan, the turmoil in China, the repercussions of Western defeats and invigorated nationalism in South-east Asia, the foreshadowing of new levels of anti-imperialist and inter-communal conflicts in India.⁴ The war with Japan was not only bringing about a vast increase in the American military and economic presence in those parts of the world; it was providing new evidence and an enlarged audience for those like Pearl Buck who had long argued that a special mission and opportunity awaited the Republic in Asia—not least,

¹ NSC Report on 'The Position of the United States with Respect to Korea', NSC 8,2 Apr. 1948, together with NSC 8/1 (16 Mar. 1949) and NSC 8/2 (22 Mar. 1949). And see, e.g., R. Foot, *The Wrong War. American Policy and the Dimensions of the Korean Conflict, 1950-1953* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985).

² See, e.g., R. H. Spector, *Advice and Support. The Early Years of the U.S. Army in Vietnam, 1941-1960* (New York, 1985), pp. 202, 271, and *passim*; Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 129 ff.; R. K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), p. 20.

³ See, e.g., T. Szulc, *The Illusion of Peace. Foreign Policy in the Nixon Years* (New York, 1978), p. 8, and *passim*.

⁴ For a broad survey and further questions see C. Thorne, *The Issue of War. States, Societies, and the Far Eastern Conflict of 1941-1945* (London and New York, 1985; paperback edn., re-titled *The Far Eastern War*, London, 1986).

in China. *Mutatis mutandis*, it was creating a new hearing for the shades of those who had proclaimed America's trans-Pacific destiny fifty years and more before. For Commodore Dewey and his admirers 'the hand of God' had been present in Manila Bay in 1898; now General MacArthur was completing a greater triumph still in fulfilment of the Lord's purpose, secure in the personal conviction that 'the future and, indeed, the very existence of America were irrevocably entwined with Asia and its island outposts', that 'here was western civilization's last earth frontier'.¹

Well before the war's end, there were those—and they included not only elements of 'big business' but also individuals such as Henry Wallace and Owen Lattimore—who were vigorously reviving the old notion that Asia could prove to be 'a market of enormous size': a market, indeed, that would now be a crucial one for United States exporters if a return to the massive unemployment of the 1930s were to be avoided. (The left-of-centre magazine *Amerasia* singled out India in particular as the country's 'new economic frontier'.)² There was also the wider consideration, as urged upon President Truman at the end of 1945 by one of his special representatives in the Far East, that 'the aspirations of the United States for an expanding world economy in which we, like other peoples, can find security and rising living standards, demand a peaceful and developing Orient'.³ And for some—most notably, perhaps, Chester Bowles during his eight years as Ambassador to India in the 1950s and 1960s, and, less happily, as Under Secretary of State at the beginning of the Kennedy administration—it was the poverty of the East itself which presented the greatest challenge of all as the post-war scene began to unfold. Convinced, as he argued in 1953, that 'the history of our time will hereafter be written in Asia', Bowles couched his appeal to his countrymen in familiar language:

We Americans are a pioneer people, still respectful of the old Puritan concepts of common decency and hard work, still guided by moral principles, still stirred by the call of the frontier. Now a new frontier

¹ D. MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (London, 1964), p. 32; and see, e.g., pp. 310–11.

² See C. Thorne, *Allies of a Kind* (London, 1978), pp. 402–3, 564, and *passim*; also, e.g., *Asia and the Americas* (April 1944).

³ Edwin A. Locke, Jr., to Truman, 'The Current Situation in China', 18 Dec. 1945, Leahy Files (RG 218), National Archives, Washington DC. And see, e.g., R. J. Barnet, *Roots of War. The Men and Institutions Behind U.S. Foreign Policy* (London, 1973), ch. 6.

awaits us, working with peoples of all races and religions in the economic, social, and political development of every underdeveloped continent, which is this century's main adventure. If that becomes the great positive mission of America, then I believe that we will rediscover the creative, courageous spirit of our frontier days, and relearn those truths which once we held self-evident.¹

Bowles, of course, for all the conventionality with which he, too, sought 'the restoration of a past apotheosis', was widely regarded in Washington as an idealist, over-given to lofty generalization.² He represented, none the less, albeit in a particularly zealous and single-minded form, an impulsion that figured far more widely in America's dealings with Asia in our period, however much it became adulterated with romanticism and self-regard or was simply obscured and overridden at times. The 'blue-collar' class which was to furnish those 'hard-hats' who shouted vociferously for the prosecution of the Vietnam war had startled Michel Crozier in 1947-8 by their goodwill and spirit of generosity.³ Dean Rusk, so central in the process of decision-making which led to and sustained that same devastating conflict, had urged, as President of the Rockefeller Foundation, that Africans and Asians would not and should not continue to tolerate the existing unequal distribution of the world's wealth and the slights to which they had long been subjected.⁴ Young Americans serving in the Peace Corps in the hope of giving practical effect to the kind of possibilities outlined by Bowles; the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations making significant contributions to development programmes in India, for example; Harry Truman 'dreaming of a TVA in the Yangtze Valley'; an unsung individual like George D. Childs, encountered by Kenneth Galbraith in a small town in Rajasthan, the only American for hundreds of miles, who for four years had been organizing a school for training young Indians in the operation and maintenance of heavy construction vehicles:⁵ they remind us that there was more than mere rhetoric

¹ C. Bowles, *Ambassador's Report* (London, 1954), pp. ix, 401-2; and see, e.g., Bowles, *A View From New Delhi. Selected Speeches and Writings* (New Haven, 1969), p. 265, and *passim*.

² See e.g., G. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York, 1982), p. 170, and for Bowles's own account of the difficulties he experienced as Under Secretary of State, his *Promises to Keep. My Years in Public Life, 1941-1969* (New York, 1971), pp. 302 ff.

³ Crozier, *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 14.

⁴ See W. I. Cohen, *Dean Rusk* (Totowa, N.J., 1980), pp. 15, 81.

⁵ Truman's comments are quoted in A. L. Hamby, *Liberalism and its Challenges: FDR to Reagan* (New York, 1985), pp. 72-3. On American contributions

[Footnote 5 continued on page 352

and manipulation to Richard Nixon's assertion in 1967 that 'Both our interests and our ideals propel us westward across the Pacific . . .'.¹ 'I want them to say', insisted that 'child of the passing frontier', Lyndon Johnson, 'when the Americans come this is what they leave—schools, not long cigars'. 'The promise of America has always been freedom from narrow boundaries. The frontier. The future . . . More choices . . . The freedom of alternative lives.'²

Yet long before Johnson was reiterating this vision, other and sterner tasks had been given priority. Truman's 'Yangtze TVA' was not for a country that had been 'lost' to communism. Eisenhower's wish to see the US Army in Korea employed in programmes of social and economic development had easily been ignored by Dulles and the Pentagon.³ John Kennedy's call, 'facing west on what was once the last frontier', for the nation to assume new duties on 'a new frontier . . . of unfulfilled hopes and threats', had become above all a call to arms—the 'macho' Green Beret soldier overshadowing the Peace Corps volunteer as they each in their way furnished the symbolism of what rededication and atavistic resourcefulness could once again achieve, out beyond the confines of urban enervation.⁴ Asia, declared Johnson himself in 1967, had become 'the outer frontier of disorder', a frontier to be civilized, as had his native Texas in its time, 'a rifle in one hand and an axe in the other'.⁵ (Every night during those Vietnam years in the White House, he recalled later, he had dreamed that he was tied to the ground, unable to move, surrounded by people crying out 'Coward! Traitor! Weakling!'; a failure on the frontier; 'an unmanly man'.)⁶

There is neither space nor need here to rehearse in detail the stages by which the policy of 'containment' became extended to the Far East; by which dominant perceptions of United States

to development in India, including the instances mentioned, see, e.g., Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, p. 340; J. K. Galbraith, *Ambassador's Journal. A Personal Account of the Kennedy Years* (London, 1969), p. 226, and ch. xix.

¹ *Foreign Affairs* (Oct. 1967).

² D. Kearns, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* (London, 1976), pp. 64, 267, 331.

³ Ambrose, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

⁴ Drinnon, *op. cit.*, chs. xxiv ff.; Hellmann, *op. cit.*, chs. 1, 2; and Kattenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 110 ff.

⁵ W. A. Williams, T. McCormick, L. Gardner, and W. LaFeber, *America in Vietnam. A Documentary History* (Garden City, N.Y., 1985), p. 216. And see, e.g., the private thoughts of Robert McNamara, reported in *ibid.*, pp. 246–8.

⁶ Kearns, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

interests in Korea, Taiwan, and South-east Asia shifted from according such territories peripheral status to judging them to be of major—even, eventually, ‘vital’—concern;¹ by which ‘globalism’, as it soon was called, came to be seen in high places by the early 1960s as the only alternative to isolationism,² its adoption as a set of assumptions fostered by much earlier envisionings, on the part of Wilson and others, of ‘world-leadership’ and ‘world-policing’ roles for the Republic,³ as well as by those more recent triumphs of the American economy and armed forces in the conquest of evil between 1941 and 1945 (triumphs which in many eyes completely eclipsed the contribution made by the Soviet Union).⁴

A thorough survey of this process in regard to Asia would of course take in the actions and words of others: the Sino-Soviet Pact of February 1950, for example, and the invasion of South Korea by the North; the entry of Chinese forces into the ensuing conflict after Peking’s warnings against a UN advance north of the thirty-eighth parallel had been ignored; Khrushchev’s declaration of support in January 1961 for wars of national liberation.⁵ Not least, it would also require us to examine how it was that

¹ See R. D. Buhite, ‘“Major Interests”: American Policy Toward China, Taiwan, and Korea, 1945–1950’, *Pacific Historical Review* (Aug. 1978).

² See, e.g., T. Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention* (New York, 1969), p. 16, and R. Aron, *The Imperial Republic. The United States and the World, 1945–1973* (trs. by F. Jellinek, London, 1975).

³ See, e.g., Tuveson, *op. cit.*; A. K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny. A Study of Nationalist Expansionism in American History* (Chicago, 1963, originally published Baltimore, 1935); E. M. Burns, *The American Idea of Mission. Concepts of National Purpose and Destiny* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1957); F. Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (New York, 1963); L. C. Gardner, *Safe For Democracy. The Anglo-American Response to Revolution, 1913–1923* (New York, 1984).

⁴ See, e.g., Thorne, *Allies of a Kind, passim*, and *The Issue of War*, chs. 7–9; A. W. DePorte, *Europe Between the Superpowers. The Enduring Balance* (New Haven, 1979), p. 112, and *passim*. Many who by the later 1960s were strongly criticizing the consequences of these ‘global’ assumptions and ambitions had themselves subscribed to such reasoning in easier times. George Kennan, too, whose strong opposition to the trend had been expressed much earlier, had none the less contributed to its development. See his ‘X’ article in *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947), with its call for ‘confronting the Russians with unalterable counterforce at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interests of a peaceful and stable world’ and its depiction of ‘a test of the overall worth of the United States as a nation among nations’.

⁵ See, *inter alia*, B. Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War: Liberation and the Emergence of Separate Regimes, 1945–1947* (Princeton, 1981), and its forthcoming companion volume; Foot, *op. cit.*; R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War*, vols. i (London, 1983), and ii (London, 1985).

the conviction became established in Washington itself that the new People's Republic of China was not simply 'a tool of Soviet imperialism in Asia', in Acheson's words (it was 'not Chinese', declared Rusk; merely 'a Slavic Manchukuo on a larger scale'),¹ but was more anarchically dangerous than the Soviet Union itself. (Some evolution of Chinese attitudes might occur, observed Robert McNamara privately in 1965, but such a process would 'take much longer because they started from further back than [the] Soviet Union in [the] industrializing process'; meanwhile, Peking's ambitions must be checked, if necessary by the use of nuclear weapons. 'Just ahead', warned Rusk in the privacy of a cabinet meeting in 1967, 'we face the prospect of a billion Chinese . . . Asia has about a decade to pull up its socks and get ready to face [them] . . . We can't duck it . . . This is a desperate threat to the American people.' Again, the fear.)²

It is important to note that moves towards the establishment of a new frontier in Asia were under way before the Korean war erupted and the Chinese themselves entered that conflict. Well before 1950, decisions had been taken to divide that peninsula in the interests of containment,³ and to reverse those occupation policies in Japan which might hamper the industrial recovery of that country, so that it could become a partner of the United States, as Professor Schaller puts it, 'in dominating the future of Asia'.⁴ Versions of the 'domino theory' were becoming accepted in relation to the Far East long before Eisenhower popularized the notion, with Japan itself, for all the triumphs proclaimed for MacArthur's work there as missionary and proconsul, seen from

¹ In employing such language Acheson had his domestic audience in mind, not least those on Capitol Hill; Rusk, too, entertained the *arrière-pensée* of 'shaming' the Chinese communists into resisting Moscow's blandishments. None the less, such statements contributed to the establishing of a dominant set of assumptions and policy restrictions (notably, the refusal of diplomatic recognition) cast in their own mould. See, e.g., D. A. Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith. U.S. Policy Against the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1949-1955* (Baton Rouge, 1986). In similar vein Acheson described Ho Chi Minh as 'a mortal enemy of native independence in Indochina'. *The Pentagon Papers* (Senator Gravel edn., Boston, 1971), i. 41.

² Williams *et al.*, *America in Vietnam*, pp. 240-6; L. Berman, *Planning a Tragedy. The Americanization of the War in Vietnam* (New York, 1982), p. 170. See also, e.g., R. M. Blum, *Drawing the Line. The Origins of the American Containment Policy in East Asia* (New York, 1982); M. Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: the Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York, 1985), pp. 252-3, and *passim*; *Pentagon Papers*, i. 435 ff., ii. 799, 817, 822, iii. 729.

³ See Cumings, *op. cit.*

⁴ Schaller, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

Washington as likely to seek 'the best possible bargain with the USSR and its Communist sympathisers' unless a new American resolve were forcefully demonstrated.¹ (In 1954 Admiral Radford, as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, would be insisting still to Winston Churchill that if Indo-China were lost 'Japanese thoughts would turn toward Asiatic Communism with which they would believe the future to lie'. 'If we don't assist Japan, gentlemen', Eisenhower would be telling Republican Congressional leaders in private in that same year, 'Japan is going Communist. Then instead of the Pacific being an American lake, believe me it is going to be a Communist lake.')²

Japan's position and potential were crucial; Japan must be kept apart, in matters commercial as well as political, from the newly infected Chinese; Japan must be guaranteed the raw materials and markets of South-east Asia—an informal 'empire', it was acknowledged, not unlike the one she had set out to annex by force not long before—which would enable her to develop without continuing to be dependent on US aid.³ All the more reason, therefore, to label South-east Asia itself as a region that must be preserved from what the State Department in July 1949 described as 'a coordinated offensive plainly directed by the Kremlin'.⁴ In the same year, the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, by authorizing the President to expend \$75 million in 'the general area of China', paved the way for aid to be furnished to the French in Indochina in 1950, with Truman's own endorsement of NSC 64 in April 1950 cementing a commitment that was to take the country into its longest war.⁵ Might not India, too, move into 'the Communist orbit', asked the NSC staff early in 1951, whereby 'for all practical purposes the whole of Asia will have

¹ CIA 4-49, 'Review of the World Situation', 20 Apr. 1949.

² Quoted in L. C. Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam* (forthcoming); and see G. C. Herring and R. H. Immerman, 'Eisenhower, Dulles, and Dienbienphu: "The Day We Didn't Go To War" revisited', *Journal of American History*, lxxi (Sept. 1984).

³ See Schaller, *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 291-2, and *passim*, and W. S. Borden, *The Pacific Alliance. United States Foreign Economic Policy and Japanese Trade Recovery, 1947-1955* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1984). More negatively, emphasis was also placed on the dangers that would ensue for the West if Moscow were to secure the raw materials of South-east Asia, in addition to the manpower of China: e.g. NSC 51, 'U.S. Policy Toward Southeast Asia', 1 July 1949; NSC 150, 'U.S. Objectives and Courses of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia', 30 Dec. 1953.

⁴ NSC 51, 'U.S. Policy Toward Southeast Asia', 1 July 1949.

⁵ NSC 64, 'The Position of the U.S. with Respect to Indochina', 27 Feb. 1950. And see Blum, *op. cit.*; Spector, *op. cit.*; Gibbon, *op. cit.*, i. 65 ff.

been lost? And three years later, Nehru or no, they were advocating that the United States should 'seek to insure that in the event of general war India will make available manpower resources and strategic facilities for mutual defense efforts with the West'.¹

As Rusk (then Assistant Secretary of State) was insisting privately in May 1950—that is, before the North Korean attack—'The line must be drawn in Asia'.² And indeed, for all the alarm occasioned by the initial communist successes, the longer-term situation created by Pyongyang's dramatic assault in the following month came as something of a relief to those in Washington who had already become convinced of the need to embark upon a massive programme of rearmament and overseas military aid. (Acheson and Paul Nitze of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff had presented their case for such a programme in April, in NSC 68, but Truman had postponed giving his formal approval, with that autumn's mid-term elections in mind.)³ Now Congress and the American people, like the country's economic resources, could be fully mobilized. Now means could be found, above all through an 'international military Keynesian stimulation of [the] world economy', to remove that wide 'dollar gap' between the United States and its political allies which the European Recovery Program showed no signs of bridging.⁴ Now Japan's economy could receive a vigorous new impulsion.⁵ Now the Republic could take that 'dramatic and strong stand' which Dulles had envisaged in May as being the only means of preventing a 'series of disasters' which would entail the 'loss' of Japan and South-east Asia (including the Philippines) and the jeopardizing of the oil supplies of the Middle East.⁶

Here, then, was an urgent new frontier across the Pacific—for all that its defence entailed a costly and frustrating land war between 1950 and 1953 and, further south, support for a Euro-

¹ NSC 98, 'The Position of the United States With Respect to South Asia', 5 Jan. 1951; NSC 5409, 'South Asia', 19 Feb. 1954. And see H. W. Brands, 'India and Pakistan in American Strategic Planning, 1947-1954', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* (Oct. 1986).

² Schaller, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

³ As it was, Truman approved the conclusions of NSC 68 'as a statement of policy to be followed over the next four or five years' on 30 Sept. 1950. NSC 68/2.

⁴ See, e.g., Borden, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 50, and *passim*; Barnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 163 ff.

⁵ See Schaller, *op. cit.*, pp. 196 ff.

⁶ Dulles memo. for himself, 18 May 1950, quoted in Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam* (forthcoming).

pean colonial presence that was disapproved of both as a species and in its own particular. (Even the strong pressure which Washington had eventually brought to bear on the Netherlands, in 1949, to grant independence to Indonesia had been precipitated, it should be noted, less by a concern for the nationalists' cause *per se* than by a growing conviction that Dutch intransigence was jeopardizing America's own economic and security interests in the region.)¹ Though Eisenhower as President held back from committing American forces to battle during France's Dien Bien Phu crisis in 1954, the conviction that South-east Asia was now a vital interest was reinforced under his aegis,² and he himself vigorously emphasized to his successor, during a 'hand-over' survey of the region, that 'it was imperative that Laos be defended'.³

Moreover, despite the frustrations and perils which manifestly lay in wait in the neighbouring territory of South Vietnam when the focus of attention was switched in that direction soon afterwards, it is important to recall that the challenge there was seen in Kennedy's Washington not only as a matter of self-protection (the alternative to standing firm in South-east Asia, advised Johnson as Vice-President, was 'surrender[ing] the Pacific and tak[ing] up our defenses on our own shores', with the waters to the West becoming 'a Red Sea'),⁴ but, as Korea had been in the summer of 1950, an opportunity: an opportunity wherein recent setbacks such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Vienna summit would be set aside, the Soviet and Chinese leaderships would be made to draw back by a display of the Republic's true metal, and (as indicated above) the urgently needed regeneration of the American nation itself would be quickened. Indeed, the assertion that had been made in December 1950, by the chairman of a joint

¹ On the Indonesian case see R. J. McMahon, *Colonialism and the Cold War. The United States and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence, 1945-49* (Ithaca, 1981). The disputes among American officials over whether to support anti-colonial nationalisms in South-east Asia or to reinforce the European imperial powers as bulwarks against communist subversion can also be followed in, e.g., the files of the State Department's Philippine and Southeast Asia Division, RG 59, National Archives, Washington DC. And see, e.g., Williams *et al.*, *America in Vietnam*, pp. 90 ff., and the latter sections of Thorne, *Allies*.

² See, e.g., NSC 177, 'U.S. Objectives and Causes of Action With Respect to Southeast Asia', 30 Dec. 1953; *Pentagon Papers*, vol. i; Gibbons, *op. cit.*, vol. i; Spector, *op. cit.*

³ Clark Clifford record of Eisenhower-Kennedy conference of 19 Jan. 1961: *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 635.

⁴ Johnson report, 1961: *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 56-9.

State and Defense Department committee that had examined the country's interests in South-east Asia, continued to hold good:

In the eyes of Asia, failure will for the predictable future compromise, if not destroy, America's influence and prestige. America without Asia will have been reduced to the Western hemisphere and a precarious foothold on the western fringe of the European continent. Success will vindicate and give added meaning to America and the American way of life.¹

* * *

Whether the emphasis was upon wide opportunity or desperate defence, or both (it was 'the life and death of the nation' that was at issue in Vietnam, asserted Rusk in 1965),² it had above all been the dictates of perceived self-interest and of international power-politics that had engendered the series of new commitments that culminated in a full-scale American land war in Vietnam from 1965 onwards. Government spokesmen continued to insist: 'The United States has no *national* military objectives anywhere in Southeast Asia'³—this for the benefit, not only of the world at large, but of those many Americans who remained convinced of their country's inherent disinterest abroad. But at the same time—1965—the Assistant Secretary of Defense was privately estimating that US military objectives in South Vietnam in reality had nothing to do with 'helping a friend' and only 10 per cent to do with 'permitting the people of [that country] to enjoy a better, freer way of life'. To the desire to keep that territory and its neighbours out of Chinese hands he accorded a weighting of 20 per cent; to the vital consideration of preserving America's 'credibility', the need 'to avoid a humiliating US defeat (to our reputation as a guarantor)', one of 70 per cent.⁴ 'I don't think we ought to take this [Saigon] government seriously', argued Henry Cabot Lodge in the same year, about to return as US Ambassador in that city. '... We have a right and duty to do certain things with or without [that] government's approval.'⁵ And what Americans must do, he cabled back from Saigon itself,

¹ 'Final Report of Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia', 6 Dec. 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950*, vi (Washington DC, 1976), 164 ff.

² *Pentagon Papers*, iv. 636.

³ e.g. *ibid.*, ii. 805, iii. 715. Emphasis added.

⁴ McNaughton draft memo., 'Plan of Action for South Vietnam', 24 Mar. 1965; *ibid.*, iii. 348–51. On the lasting emphasis placed on America's 'credibility' see, e.g., J. Schell, *The Time of Illusion* (New York, 1986).

⁵ Berman, *op. cit.*, p. 108. And see *Pentagon Papers*, iv. 99.

was 'endure . . . and learn' until opportunities came along, as had their pioneer forebears 'from Plymouth Rock to the Far West'.¹

The Ambassador's Turner-esque imagery was much in evidence during this period. 'It is hard to plant corn outside the stockade when the Indians are still around', observed General Maxwell Taylor to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the term 'Indian country' was commonly employed in the US Army in Vietnam to denote those areas not under full control. Outside the war-room of the C.-in-C. Pacific in Honolulu a notice read: 'Injun Fightin, 1759. Counter-Insurgency, 1962', while on the spot Johnson as President adjured his troops to 'nail the coonskin to the wall'. Turner himself, of course, had emphasized in 1893 that it had been 'by a series of Indian wars' that the frontier had been won, as 'savagery' and 'civilization' came face to face. Now, as Frances Fitzgerald has observed, the language employed in and concerning Vietnam 'put [that] . . . war into a definite historical and mythological perspective: the Americans were once again embarked upon a heroic and (for themselves) almost painless conquest of an inferior race'.²

There is extensive evidence of a strong racist dimension to American approaches to Asian affairs in general in the period under review, whether in respect of no more than the patronizing attitude adopted by Acheson and some of his senior advisers to the Chinese in the late 1940s, or of a growing contempt—in Vietnam, as in both Korea and China earlier—towards those whom one had come to save but who failed to measure up to American standards and expectations, or, in its most extreme manifestation, of barbarities committed by troops in the field, on both the living and the dead.³ The underlying assumptions and attitudes involved had also been manifested during the Second World War, not simply with regard to the Japanese foe but also *vis-à-vis* the 'wogs' of India and 'slopeys' of China.⁴ Earlier still,

¹ See Berman, *op. cit.*, pp. 150 ff.

² F. Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake. The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York, 1973), pp. 491 ff.; Drinnon, *op. cit.*, ch. xxiii. Some of the code names chosen for American operations—'Rolling Thunder', for example—also echoed the Indian theme.

³ See, e.g., the comment of Heinrichs in Borg and Heinrichs, *op. cit.*, p. 286; the works of Drinnon, Cumings, Fitzgerald, and Herr already cited; H. R. Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds* (New York, 1958), and *No Peace for Asia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); S. M. Hersh, *My Lai 4* (New York, 1970).

⁴ See, e.g., Thorne, *The Issue of War*, and 'Racial Aspects of the Far Eastern War of 1941-1945', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, lxvi (1980);

[Footnote 4 continued on page 360]

they had fuelled the brutality with which Filipino nationalist resistance was crushed at the turn of the century.¹ The extent to which they had become embedded in the nation's internal history and culture from the seventeenth century onwards has been amply demonstrated by Richard Drinnon among others.²

In overall terms, it is difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle this element of racism from a network of attitudes which accompanied US dealings with Asian societies in our period. In this regard, Bruce Cumings's comment on 'the peculiar combination of warm-spirited good-will, benevolent naïveté, and arrogant ethnocentrism that Americans brought with them to Korea'³ has broader relevance. That ethnocentrism, racism, and ignorance contributed over these years to what Selig Harrison has summarized as the 'widening gulf' between the USA and Asian nationalists—including those in countries like South Korea and Japan where Washington's aims had to a considerable extent been achieved⁴—is evident enough. Yet the 'warm-spirited good-will' was also repeatedly on display, as illustrated above, even when wrapped in the cloying assumptions of the 'redeemer nation' ('The greatest help that America could give [the Chinese Government]', John Leighton Stuart, as post-war Ambassador, assured Chiang Kai-shek, 'was not money nor military advice but the dynamic force of our ideals'),⁵ or when harnessed to endeavours that were essentially destructive. From his post in Vietnam alongside Edward Lansdale—himself 'a professional

J. W. Dower, *War Without Mercy. Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986).

¹ See, e.g., Drinnon, *op. cit.*, chs. xx, xxi; M. Heald and L. S. Kaplan, *Culture and Diplomacy. The American Experience* (Westport, Conn., 1977), ch. 6; R. Hofstadter and M. Wallace (eds.), *American Violence: a Documentary History* (New York, 1970), pp. 283 ff.; also, for a related perspective, W. L. Williams, 'United States Indian Policy and the Debate over Philippine Annexation: Implications for the Origins of American Imperialism', *Journal of American History*, lvi, No. 4 (March 1980).

² Drinnon, *op. cit.*; and see, e.g., Brogan, *op. cit.*, pp. 55 ff.

³ Cumings, *op. cit.*, pp. 201, 390. Looking back on his service as an official in the occupation regime in Japan after the end of the war, the diplomat John K. Emmerson—who had long specialized in the affairs of that nation—later wrote of himself and his colleagues as 'a confident and patronising lot. Obligated to democratize Japan, we knew only too little of the country we were trying to remold': *The Japanese Thread* (New York, 1978), p. 267. For Kennan's bitter observations on his fellow-countrymen in Japan see Schaller, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁴ S. S. Harrison, *The Widening Gulf. Asian Nationalism and American Policy* (New York, 1978).

⁵ Quoted in May, *The Truman Administration and China*, p. 12.

missionary of American democracy who used the military as a vehicle'¹—Daniel Ellsberg, for example, chose Lincoln's Second Inaugural when seeking to epitomize for his children their country's purpose in South-east Asia as he saw it at the time: 'With malice toward none; with charity for all . . .'²

The dimension of tragedy that was involved in this stands out all the more in the light of the hopes and expectations which many Asian nationalists—Ho Chi Minh among them for a time³—had for their part directed towards the United States. An element of irony was present, also, for in the same period when US officials were voicing their concern over the repercussions of undertaking a 'white man's war' in Vietnam—one possible implication being that America was a 'white man's' country⁴—the Immigration Act of 1965 was eliminating the last vestiges of ethnic and racial discrimination from entry into the Republic, with the consequence that by the early 1970s the arrivals there of Asians were to exceed those of Europeans.⁵

Assumptions concerning the innate superiority of what 'white' America, having civilized the barbarians on its own continental frontier, now had to bestow upon the East provide only one example of the ways in which the national culture and political culture, in the words of Drs Heald and Kaplan, provided 'less a backdrop than a vital cog in the workings of [United States] foreign affairs'.⁶ Further manifestation of this can be found in regard to the overall pattern of the means employed in an attempt to fulfil the aspirations and achieve the goals that were involved.

One thread that stands out in this pattern during our period, for example, is the repeated inclination in Washington—what Ernest May has called an 'axiomatic' response⁷—in the direction of checking unwelcome developments and securing one's aims in Asia by military means, by more fire-power, either as employed by oneself directly or as furnished to friends. Not surprisingly,

¹ Betts, *op. cit.*, pp. 173–4. On Lansdale see also Drinnon, chs. xxv, xxvi, and Graham Greene, *The Quiet American* (London, 1955), and for the flavour of his approach, *Pentagon Papers*, i. 573 ff.

² D. Ellsberg, *Papers on the War* (New York, 1972), p. 141.

³ See, e.g., Spector, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–1; Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 22; A. L. Patti, *Why Viet Nam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley, 1980).

⁴ See Drinnon, *op. cit.*, p. 447, and, e.g., *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 161.

⁵ R. Polenberg, *One Nation Divisible. Class, Race, and Ethnicity in the United States since 1938* (London, 1980), pp. 202 ff.

⁶ Heald and Kaplan, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

⁷ E. R. May, 'The Nature of Foreign Policy. The Calculated versus the Axiomatic', *Daedalus* (Fall, 1962).

this inclination was marked among the military themselves, though not universal there (General Ridgway, for one, argued strongly for restraint over Indo-China, and there were those staff officers who on occasions perceived the social and political limits to what force of arms could achieve).¹ At the same time, it repeatedly found expression in proposals made by highly placed civilian policy advisers, among whom special mention should be accorded Walt Rostow (in the words of colleagues, 'a fanatic in sheep's clothing', possessed of 'all the trappings of intellect but in the end no objectivity and no judgment'),² and Henry Kissinger, convinced 'that the only thing Asians respect[ed was] brutal power'.³ Ultimately, however, it was an inclination that reflected, not simply a 'substantial militarization of United States foreign policy', but the reflexes of an over-confident, over-fearful society which itself, under the aegis of the 'national-security state', had now become profoundly militarized. As Edward Burns has observed, 'The idea that resort to force is the most efficient means of disposing of baffling problems is one of the strongest of [America's] national myths.' 'Force', he continues, 'has likewise always been considered a justifiable instrument for the attainment of those noble purposes which Destiny has thrust upon us . . . The Chosen People have a God-given right to put to the sword those who would prevent us extending the sphere of our blessings.'⁴

And yet we also observe, none the less, that the MacArthurs and LeMays, the Radfords and Rostows, frequently failed to obtain the drastic military escalation for which they argued; that over both Korea and Vietnam, Presidents were subjected to fierce criticism from so-called 'hawks' for not abandoning restraint in the means employed against the foe. ('Why not victory?', as

¹ See, e.g., Spector, *op. cit.*, ch. 11; Betts, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6, and *passim*; Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 83; May, *The Truman Administration and China*, p. 15.

² Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, p. 61. And see *Pentagon Papers*, iii. 382, and Kattenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 84 ff.

³ Szulc, *op. cit.*, pp. 150, 669. And see S. M. Hersh, *The Price of Power* (New York, 1983), and J. W. Gibson, *The Perfect War. Technowar in Vietnam* (Boston, 1986).

⁴ Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 257. And see, e.g., G. Wills, *Nixon Agonistes. The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (New York, 1970, 1979), pp. 394-7; A. Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment* (New York, 1971), ch. 9, and *passim*; Colonel J. A. Donovan, *Militarism, U.S.A.* (New York, 1970); H. D. Lasswell, 'The Garrison State Hypothesis Today' in S. P. Huntington (ed.), *Changing Patterns of Military Politics* (Glencoe, 1962); Barnett, *The Roots of War*; D. M. Kennedy, 'War and the American Character', *The Stanford Review* (Spring/Summer 1975). On the Military Assistance Program to other governments, which began in 1950 see Yarmolinsky, ch. 10.

Senator Goldwater asked in the 1960s, depicting defeat as 'the only alternative'.¹ Moreover, considerable confusion often surrounded that employment of armed force, or the immediate threat of it, which the country's leaders did actually sanction. Repeatedly, as Dr Betts has demonstrated in detail, when the Republic's military leaders sought guidance as to political strategy, in the light of which they could develop their professional advice, they were given to understand that 'policy was a dependent variable, subject to re-evaluation in [the] light of tactical results' in the field and of military capabilities overall.²

One particular source of confusion lay in the perceived need, in the context of the political culture, to proclaim policy to Congress and the people in terms of the highest values and the widest scope, whereas 'the means employed were both consciously limited and purposely indirect'.³ Thus both Dulles and Eisenhower insisted that at stake over Quemoy and Matsu in the 1950s were 'the vital interests of the United States [and] the basic principles upon which world order is founded'; yet even within official circles, it was not entirely clear whether such rhetoric was designed merely to deter the Chinese and appease the right wing in Congress, or would require to be backed up by force in order to prevent the islands in question falling to Peking.⁴ Over Vietnam, that 'middle course' which Johnson pursued as the basis for maintaining a consensus in Washington was inherently laden with contradictions, as Gelb, Thies, and others have shown.⁵ And while the succeeding Nixon administrations were less inhibited

¹ B. M. Goldwater, *Why Not Victory?* (New York, 1962). Note also that behind the scenes, so to speak, on no less than five occasions during 1954 'virtually the entire NSC, JCS and State Department recommended [to Eisenhower] that he intervene in Asia, even using atom bombs, against China': Ambrose, *op. cit.*, p. 229. See also L. C. Gardner, 'The Atomic Temptation, 1945-1954' in Gardner (ed.), *Redefining the Past* (Corvallis, Oregon, 1986). Of course, perceptions regarding the likely responses of others (allies, Moscow, Peking) often played a significant part in establishing the limits that were set for the employment of military resources. But domestic considerations, too, were frequently present.

² Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ See Ambrose, *op. cit.*, pp. 232 ff., 483; T. Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (Boston, 1973), ch. 17, and p. 450; Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 89; A. L. George and R. Smoke, *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (New York, 1974), pp. 285-6, 363-7.

⁵ L. H. Gelb and R. K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam. The System Worked* (Washington DC, 1979), pp. 289-90, and *passim*; W. J. Thies, *When Governments Collide. Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968* (Berkeley, 1980).

in resorting to what the *New York Times* called 'stone-age barbarism' in their tactics against the enemy, and were more contemptuous of the democratic traditions of the American people, the bombing campaigns they continued and (secretly and unconstitutionally) extended again had the effect of pushing themselves, more than the enemy, towards the conference table.¹ Moreover, their very South-east Asian crusade itself, still proclaimed as a necessity for checking the evil influence of the Soviet Union and People's Republic of China, came to ring more hollow as a concurrent policy of *détente vis-à-vis* those two states was dramatically pursued in 1971–2, and their help sought to enable the United States to extricate itself from the costly frustrations of Vietnam.²

Of course, a wide range of military exercises was involved across these years, from what was widely seen, both domestically and internationally, as an appropriate response in the early stages of the Korean conflict to an apparently total disjunction between ends and means, as epitomized by the well-known remark of one officer in Vietnam, that it had been necessary to destroy a village in order to save it. And of course there are a number of levels at which one can seek to explain the policies and actions concerned. But if Kenneth Thompson is correct when he suggests that, not only in the post-war years but well before, the United States had 'proved itself singularly inept in coming to terms with force',³ then questions do arise that appertain to the political culture when viewed in long-term perspective.

It is pertinent in this connection, for example, to ask, with

¹ Note the acknowledgement of this by Johnson's Under-Secretary of Defense for the Air Force, Townsend Hoopes, in his *Limits of Intervention*, p. 82.

² See Szulc, *The Illusion of Peace*; Hersh, *The Price of Power*; W. Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London, 1979); and for masterly analyses of Kissinger's foreign-policy grand design, S. Hoffmann, *Primacy or World Order. American Foreign Policy Since the Cold War* (New York, 1978), and *Dead Ends. American Foreign Policy in the New Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983). Among the Johnson policy élite, William Bundy, for one, had come by 1967 to describe the American aim in South Vietnam as 'a return to the essential provisions of the Geneva accords of 1954' (*Pentagon Papers*, iv. 181), although it had been the USA which had played a major role in undermining those agreements. Away from the exercise of military power, it should also be noted that, whilst continuing to proclaim a crusade in order to preserve freedom of political choice for the people of South Vietnam, the Nixon-Kissinger regime was secretly working to ensure the overthrow of an elected government in Chile.

³ K. W. Thompson, *Political Realism and the Crisis of World Politics. An American Approach to Foreign Policy* (Princeton, 1960), p. 206.

Richard Hofstadter, why it is that, in the purely domestic context, although their history is replete with violence and their entertainment and literature 'suffused with violence to a notorious degree', Americans have displayed an 'extraordinary ability, in the face of the record, to persuade themselves that they are among the best-behaved and best-regulated of peoples'.¹ We should ask, also, why it is that, alongside men of the stature and maturity of George Catlett Marshall and George Ball, American public life appears to throw up into prominent positions so many who (as illustrated above in the case of Johnson; that of his successor needs no underlining) seemingly fear the questioning of their 'manhood', as they fear the questioning of their country's 'credibility', and find in displays of toughness both personal reassurance and the means whereby the nation as a whole (as the adolescent phrase has it) can 'walk tall';² should ask, indeed, whether or not there is something peculiarly American about the 'dark vision [and] obsession with violence' that Leslie Fiedler has traced in the nation's imaginative literature, and whether fantasies involving 'an escape from society' and its restraints have played some part in shaping attitudes towards the employment of violence abroad, as John Hellmann has recently suggested in regard to Vietnam.³

It is of course a great deal easier to pose such questions than it

¹ Hofstadter and Wallace, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

² See, e.g., the comment of Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, in 1969: 'We must avoid reacting in certain situations as though our manhood was at stake.' Quoted in Szulc, *op. cit.*, pp. 104 ff. And see the reflections of Lloyd S. Etheridge on the predominant characteristics of the American 'hardball-politics decision maker', engaged in an exercise that has 'nothing dispassionate about [it] save its impersonal callousness and lack of compassion. The dispassionate, calculated, sophisticated talking is a façade', Dr Etheridge continues, 'a surface expression of an extraordinarily complex system of powerfully charged imagination accompanied by fierce tensions, arrogance, stark fear.' *Can Governments Learn? American Foreign Policy and Central American Revolutions* (New York, 1985), pp. 147 ff. See also Kattenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4, 288-9; Barnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 95 ff.; Schell, *Time of Illusion*, pp. 372-3; C. W. Mills, 'Culture and Politics: the Fourth Epoch' in I. L. Horowitz (ed.), *Power, Politics and People. The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills* (New York, 1963); R. Wilkinson, *American Tough. The Tough-Guy Tradition and American Character* (New York, 1986). Note, e.g., the language and assumptions ('Since President Reagan took office in 1981, America's first international losing streak has been halted') proffered in Richard Nixon's *No More Vietnams* (London, 1986), and Wills, *Nixon Agonistes*, *passim*.

³ Fiedler, *op. cit.*, p. 28, and *passim*; Hellmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 ff.

is to substantiate the generalizations and possible causal connections that are involved. More straightforward a matter is noting the kind of problems which confronted Americans generally, and not simply MacArthur in his final clash with Truman over the way in which the Korean conflict should be prosecuted, in regard to the concept of limited war (as pursued by the President on that particular occasion), given the long-implanted belief that the Republic would draw the sword only in the cause of a righteousness that permitted of no compromise short of total victory, given that the foe was wont to be depicted, as in Korea, as the embodiment of evil, and given that the nation as a whole was (as it remains) 'dedicated to winning' in every sphere of its life.¹ But in order to explain further the kind of confusion involving political ends and military means which has been referred to above, we have to transfer our focus to an area of the political culture which is relevant also when it comes to understanding non-violent aspects of foreign relations: to understanding, for example, what Lucian Pye has summarized as the 'fundamental ambivalence' surrounding American foreign aid to Asia and elsewhere in our period, such aid, as he writes, being idealized one minute and denounced the next, with an attendant failure to resolve 'whether we were giving [it] primarily because it was in our immediate national interest or whether we were practicing indiscriminate worldwide generosity'.²

As has often been observed, the central values of American society 'point simultaneously in opposite directions'³—in the matter of foreign aid the contrary impulses of a belief in Christian charity and a conviction as to the virtues of self-reliance being evident. Evident, too, in relation to the question of how to deal with, say, North Vietnam, is the tension between an idealizing

¹ See, e.g., Foot, op. cit., and J. W. Spanier, *The Truman-MacArthur Controversy and the Korean War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959). The quotation on the American cult of winning is from Barnett, op. cit., p. 338.

² L. W. Pye, 'Foreign Aid and America's Involvement in the Developing World' in A. Lake (ed.), *The Vietnam Legacy. The War, American Society, and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1976). On the evolution of the 'Point Four' aid programme for non-European countries under the 1950 Foreign Economic Assistance Act see, e.g., Gibbons, op. cit., i. 68 ff. For a survey of US aid to, e.g., India and Pakistan see W. H. Barnds, *India, Pakistan, and the Great Powers* (London, 1972). On the related issue of human rights, as pertaining to American foreign policies, domestic politics, and political culture, see S. Vogelgesang, *American Dream, Global Nightmare. The Dilemma of U.S. Human Rights Policy* (New York, 1980).

³ Hoffmann, *Gulliver's Troubles*, p. 181; and see, e.g., Wills, op. cit., p. 145.

of 'frontier' toughness, the frontier gun, on the one hand, and on the other the value long placed on reason and restraint. In broader terms still, there is implanted in the political culture a fundamental ambivalence over, not simply the use of force, but the exercise of power¹ and the treatment of differing interests; an ambivalence that can spill over from the domestic society into the international one, wherein conflict is readily discerned yet for which a potential harmony and 'oneness' has so often been proclaimed;² an ambivalence which at times contributed to confusion and uncertainty over dealings, not only with enemies, but with allies, too—Chiang Kai-shek, Syngman Rhee, the French in Indochina, successive regimes in Saigon—who, while greatly dependent on American material support, repeatedly succeeded in resisting Washington's attempts to 'lever' them, as the phrase had it, into undertaking reforms which US officials believed were urgently required.³ For as Reinhold Niebuhr observed in 1952 (he was concerned with the domestic polity, but the relevance was there, *mutatis mutandis*, for matters external):

Our own culture is schizophrenic upon the subject of power. Sometimes it pretends that a liberal society is a purely rational harmony of interests. Sometimes it achieves a tolerable form of justice by a careful equilibration of the powers and vitalities of society, though it is without a conscious philosophy to justify these policies of statesmanship. Sometimes it verges on that curious combination of cynicism and idealism which characterizes Communism, and is prepared to use any means without scruple to achieve its desired end.⁴

The confusion which such 'schizophrenia' brought down upon the governance of the Republic in the context of rapid technological and industrial change between 1915 and 1945, with its accompanying refusal to acknowledge the possible relevance for

¹ 'Power' is understood here as in some instances representing a form of influence, depending on whether or not sanctions are involved. See the scheme set out in S. Lukes, *Power. A Radical View* (London, 1974), p. 32.

² Note, e.g., the huge sales achieved by Wendell Willkie's *One World* (New York, 1943).

³ On American confusion *vis-à-vis* the Nationalist regime in China in the latter stages of the Second World War, e.g., see Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, pp. 424 ff., 563 ff.; on issues of 'leverage' *vis-à-vis* the French in Indo-China and the South Vietnamese see, e.g., *Pentagon Papers*, i. 54, 75-81, ii. 203, 279 ff., 380, 406, 480, 498 ff.; and the comment of Spector, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

⁴ R. Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (London, 1952), p. 5. On what he describes as 'the politically exploitable ambiguities of the Revolutionary version of the doctrine of natural law' see Morton White, *The Philosophy of the American Revolution* (New York, 1978).

the American body-politic and society of developments in other lands, has been shrewdly explored by Professor Karl; its manifestations in the politics of 'left' and 'right' during the post-war years by Garry Wills among others.¹ Moreover, both before and during the period covered by the present essay, assumptions derived either from the myth of the underlying social compact or from the interest-group politics of the actual domestic American system often proved inappropriate when it came to making calculations regarding the exercise of power and influence in the wider, international arena.²

At the same time, considerations of power and position within the domestic political context itself frequently played a major part in the shaping of US policies in Asia. We can now trace in some detail the ways in which, for example, the situation in Congress helped Acheson to hold back from a greater degree of intervention in the Chinese civil war before 1949, yet helped ensure the adoption of a policy of rigid hostility towards Peking thereafter; how the 'China lobby' came to exercise significant influence on behalf of the Chiang Kai-shek regime in Taiwan, and helped reinforce the 'Great Fear' of McCarthyism, with consequences which included the loss by the State Department of most of its Far Eastern expertise;³ how the opponents of the

¹ B. D. Karl, *The Uneasy State. The United States from 1915 to 1945* (Chicago, 1983), p. 33, and *passim*; Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 159 ff., 219 ff., 466 ff., 496 ff. And see MacDougall's observation on the political-cultural dimensions of the subsequent, space-age establishment of a 'technocracy' (which he defines as 'the institutionalization of technological change for state purposes, that is, the state-funded and -managed R and D explosion of our time'): 'It seems that American leaders endorsed centralized mobilization of national energies on the assumptions that change meant progress; progress was good; and optimal distribution of its fruits would result from the natural play of pluralistic politics. The happy conclusion was that government need not worry about questions of value: more R and D, education, social equality, and so forth would spawn more wealth and power, which in turn would provide the wherewithal for more spending on welfare, defense, . . . and R and D . . . The objective of American technocracy was to avoid defining its objective.' . . . *The Heavens and the Earth*, pp. 5, 447.

² See, e.g., Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 417 ff., Gibbons, *op. cit.*, ii. 37, 85; and the works of Kearns and Thies cited above.

³ See, e.g., R. Y. Koen, *The China Lobby in American Politics* (New York, 1974); S. D. Bachrack, *The Committee of One Million. 'China Lobby' Politics, 1953-1971* (New York, 1976); Blum, *op. cit.*; D. Caute, *The Great Fear. The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York, 1978); E. J. Kahn, *The China Hands. America's Foreign Service Offices and What Befell Them* (New York, 1975); G. May, *China Scapegoat. The Diplomatic Ordeal of John Carter Vincent* (Washington DC, 1979); Schaller, *op. cit.*, ch. 14.

more radical reforms that were being enacted in Japan under the aegis of MacArthur's occupation administration successfully denounced the General's association with 'a small group of long-haired boys . . . who have helped put over . . . socialistic schemes [there];¹ how Dulles manoeuvred (for example, over the Geneva Conference of 1954) in order to safeguard himself against Senator Knowland and the Republican right wing,² succeeding Presidents were influenced, over South-east Asia, by what they saw as having been the political punishment that had attended the Truman administration's 'loss' of China,³ and the prospect of the 1972 election entered into the international calculations of Nixon and Kissinger.⁴

Again, however, it is the underlying political culture that is our particular concern. In other words, we have to go beyond the operation of committees and the mechanics of votes and opinion polls⁵ in order to understand how it was that a relatively small number of people could successfully associate support for the Chinese Nationalists with loyalty to the United States itself, and wherein lay the potency of the charge of being 'un-American' in foreign affairs; to appreciate how that 'socialism' whose malodorous presence was detected in the SCAP reforms in Japan had long before become, in Louis Hartz's phrases, a 'national heresy' and a 'technique of nationalist slander',⁶ and why there was, in contrast, much political capital to be made—by the American Friends of Vietnam in the 1950s, for example—out of the Catholicism of Ngo Dinh Diem, as it had been out of the Christianity of Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee before him.⁷ In broader terms still (and when due note has been taken of Michael Rogin's rebuttal of the notion that McCarthyism was

¹ See Schaller, *op. cit.*, pp. 112 ff., 131; Borden, *op. cit.*

² See, e.g., Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 181; Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, pp. 202 ff.; Mayers, *Cracking the Monolith*, pp. 128 ff.

³ See, e.g., Gibbons, *op. cit.*, ii. 98; Ellsberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 95 ff.; Gelb and Betts, *op. cit.*, pp. 221 ff.

⁴ See, e.g., the works of Szulc and Hersh cited above.

⁵ On this aspect see, e.g., J. E. Mueller, *Wars, Presidents and Public Opinion* (New York, 1973).

⁶ L. Hartz. *The Liberal Tradition in America. An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York, 1955), pp. 211, 217.

⁷ See Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 89 ff. and 299 ff. Dulles, whose own relationship with the Almighty was apparently close, proclaimed Chiang Kai-shek and Syngman Rhee 'Christian gentlemen who have suffered for their faith' and 'modern-day equivalents of the founders of the Church': Hoopes, *Dulles*, p. 78. And see, e.g., Szulc, *op. cit.*, p. 157; Barnet, *op. cit.*, pp. 323 ff.

essentially a populist, agrarian-radical outburst),¹ we need to comprehend how, to quote Edward Shils, 'the combination of a state of mind which does not take its own national identity for granted with a general looseness of the ties which bind individuals to locality and corporate bodies is conducive to an excessive recourse to the symbols of nationality when crises arise . . .';² how, too, for all the earlier and sometimes profound conflicts of interest and opinion encompassed by the history of the Republic, there had developed what Hartz has called America's 'colossal liberal absolutism'.³

Much has been written on the manner in which this 'absolutism' confined debate on the Republic's foreign relations between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s within a set of 'canonical assumptions'.⁴ Of course there were those, such as Senator Wayne Morse,⁵ who were prepared to question and even reject certain of these assumptions in public during this period. And there were those who, within the privacy of official debate, argued against the particular premisses and conclusions of NSC 68 (as did George Kennan and Charles Bohlen) or sought in vain to inject knowledge and/or realism into excited discussions on how to change the course of history in Asia (as did Paul Kattenburg within the State Department, for example, and George Ball in more exalted Washington circles).⁶ To an overwhelming extent, however, the institutions concerned with foreign affairs were, like individuals, imprisoned within what Dr Gelb has termed the 'consensus trap'.⁷

For all the attempts⁸ of the right in the 1950s and of the left at

¹ M. P. Rogin, *The Intellectuals and McCarthy: the Radical Specter* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967).

² E. A. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy. The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (London, 1956), p. 79.

³ Hartz, *op. cit.*, p. 285. And see, e.g., G. Hodgson, *In Our Time. America From World War II to Nixon* (London, 1977), ch. 4.

⁴ Stillman and Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵ See his arguments in Congress up to and including 1964, culminating in his opposition to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, as recorded in Gibbons, *op. cit.*, vols. i and ii.

⁶ See, e.g., Gelb and Betts, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 234-5; Gibbons, *op. cit.*, ii. 161; Ball, *op. cit.*, part vii. In these memoirs, Ball employs the heading: 'The Vietnam Aberration', which sits uneasily with his own acknowledgement (*ibid.*, p. 433) that the American involvement in that country 'was probably inevitable', marking the culmination of 'an uncritical globalism'.

⁷ Gelb, 'Dissenting on Consensus', in Lake, *op. cit.* Cf. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, ch. viii.

⁸ As embodied in, e.g., the 1954 Bricker Amendment and the 1973 War Powers Act respectively.

the end of our period to restrict the room for manoeuvre of the presidency in foreign affairs, the predominant mood of Congress during these years was reflected, rather, in the Formosa Resolution of 1955 and its successor that was occasioned by the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of 1964, with Senator William Fulbright, for one, asking in 1961 whether legislators had any choice, 'in a world of aggressive totalitarianism', but to 'vest the executive with powers unchecked and unbalanced'.¹ For all the dissenting reports filed by correspondents in the field in Vietnam, the eventual impact of the television coverage of that war, and the investigative tradition epitomized by the uncovering of the Watergate conspiracy, what stands out in retrospect where the mass media are concerned is the extent to which, in the words of Philip Geyelin of the *Washington Post*, the nation's news-gatherers, and particularly those responsible for setting policy, proved 'remarkably pliable'. (In turn, the lack of interest displayed for some time by editors in reports of the My Lai massacre, and in subsequent and larger-scale atrocities and American actions generally after 1968, appears to have reflected the indifference of a substantial proportion of the public at large.)²

Within the foreign-policy and defence bureaucracies, as among the military, the pressures to 'get on the team', as the phrase had it, became immense, with the initial consensus over fundamentals being reinforced by that particular American brand of hostility towards individual dissent (a 'deep and unwritten tyrannical compulsion', in Hartz's phrase) once the will of the people has been given form and articulation.³ The actual insistence by those in high office that the perceptions and reporting of subordinates conform to established expectations was not new with the Vietnam war (Henry Stimson had adopted this approach when critical appraisals began coming back from Chiang Kai-shek's China early in the Second World War, for example);⁴ but it was during

¹ See Gibbons, *op. cit.*, ii. 127-8, and vols. i and ii, *passim*; and on the overall trend, e.g., A. M. Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (London, 1974); A. Frye and J. Sullivan, 'Congress and Vietnam: The Fruits of Anguish', in Lake, *op. cit.*

² P. Geyelin, 'Vietnam and the Press: Limited War and an Open Society', in Lake, *op. cit.*; P. Knightly, *The First Casualty* (New York, 1975), chs. 14, 16; Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 408; Hodgson, *op. cit.*, pp. 268 ff., 391; Barnett, *op. cit.*, ch. 10; S. Karnow, *Vietnam. A History* (London, 1984), p. 488.

³ Hartz, *op. cit.*, p. 12. And see, e.g., Gelb and Betts, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 234-5; D. Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York, 1972); Lake, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 142 ff.; Wills, *op. cit.*, p. 517.

⁴ See Thorne, *Allies*, p. 174.

the 1960s that the processes involved acquired a level and extent summarized by Dr Betts in his detailed survey as one of 'fraud at the bottom of the chain of command, selectivity in processing data at the middle . . . , and selectivity of perception at the top . . .'.¹ 'Intellectual double-entry book-keeping' is how Dr Blum describes the related mental gymnastics that a number of senior State Department officials had earlier found it expedient to perform at the time when 'the line' was first being drawn in that part of the world.²

For those very few in the policy élite itself who, far from promoting this dishonesty and myopia, began to entertain serious doubts of their own, the very structure of the political system, together with its surrounding political culture, ensured that resignation offered little prospect as a means of establishing an effective opposition to the policy-set in question. (As Walter Lippmann had once written: 'One day you are at the pinnacle. The next day you are back in Lincoln, Nebraska, with nothing to do.')³ To an overwhelming extent, however, those who had attained such positions surrounding the presidency itself were preoccupied during these years, not with fundamental questions concerning ends, but with the means that would ensure the achievement of the ends and aspirations that were in place; with the 'how', not the 'why'.⁴ As Godfrey Hodgson has observed of the Kennedy and Johnson years in particular: 'It is depressing to . . . see how the written arguments of men with a reputation for clarity and intelligence—McNamara, John McNaughton, the Bundy brothers—were dominated by *cliché*, fixed ideas, unexamined assumptions and a persistent tendency to argue backward from predetermined conclusions.'⁵

Here again, the failures involved were in essence not those of this or that politician or 'president's man', however much we may be able to identify particular predilections and promptings

¹ Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 201. And see, e.g., Kattenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 169 ff., 230 ff.

² Blum, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

³ R. Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (London, 1980), p. 574. And see Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

⁴ See, e.g., George Ball's comment: *op. cit.*, p. 376; and Kattenburg's testimony (also first-hand): *op. cit.*, p. 102. Also, on Nixon in particular, Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-8.

⁵ Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 237. And see, e.g., S. Hoffmann, 'Vietnam and American Foreign Policy' in R. Falk (ed.), *The Vietnam War and International Law*, ii (Princeton, 1969).

involving individuals or groups on specific occasions.¹ At bottom, the impermeability of American assumptions and aspirations regarding foreign affairs in this period reflected what Daniel Boorstin has described as the 'givenness' of the values and convictions that lie at the heart of the political culture—even if, as noted above, the degree of consensus concerning those values has been exaggerated in the popular imagination, as by Boorstin and others in their commentaries.² The political culture demanded that policy be simplistically packaged (for example, in the form of 'doctrines') and presented to the sovereign 'people' on the wings of hyperbole; but the thought processes involved among the public at large did not stop short at the private doors of the more sophisticated élites who thus fed that public's illusions. At the same time, the growing conviction after the late 1940s, and above all during the Kennedy years, that the United States could and must act swiftly to change the course of events in various parts of Asia—not least by the application of modern technology—reflected in part a national 'can-do' style which Turner himself, and de Tocqueville before that, had commented upon; in part, also, an 'illusion of omnipotence', as Denis Brogan called it,³ which again had been long in the making but which had been greatly strengthened by the course of the Second World War. As McGeorge Bundy subsequently expressed the conviction that was becoming widespread even before the end of that conflict: the United States was now 'the locomotive of mankind, and the rest of the world the caboose'.⁴

Charles Burton Marshall, late of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, employed the same metaphor in the mid-1950s, but on this occasion in warning: against what he saw as a prevailing belief that 'other nations are . . . boxcars to be shunted around

¹ On some of the psychological and social-psychological dimensions involved see, e.g., R. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, 1976), and I. L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink. A Psychological Study of Foreign Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston, 1972). Also, e.g., E. R. May, *Lessons of the Past* (London, 1975).

² D. J. Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago, 1953); cf., e.g., McClosky, *op. cit.*; Hartz, *op. cit.*, p. 58; S. P. Huntington, *American Politics: the Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), ch. 2; and for a critique of 'the consensus historians' themselves, Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 508 ff.

³ D. W. Brogan, 'The Illusion of American Omnipotence' in his *American Aspects* (London, 1964); originally published in *Harper's Magazine* (Dec. 1952).

⁴ Quoted in G. C. Herring, *America's Longest War. The United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 1979), p. 74; and see, e.g., Barnett, *op. cit.* (Not much ambivalence *here* about power, one might say.)

by the American locomotive'.¹ He wrote from experience, for during the first decade after the war, not only was it assumed in official circles that the People's Republic of China could be 'disciplined' and with American help eventually returned to non-communist hands, but, as was noted in passing above, new roles were planned for Japan and India as counterbalances to China, new tasks and military aid bestowed upon Pakistan (thus exacerbating domestic conditions that were to break that country apart in 1971), and new links designed that would bind South-east Asia and South Korea to Japan, whether they would or no. (Japan herself, of course, was to be given a sudden 'shunt' in the early 1970s, when US policies on China and international economic relations were abruptly changed without consultation or fore-warning.)²

The insistence which accompanied this 'international engineering', that all not under communist domination should take up their allotted places in the American camp, is associated above all with Dulles (who denounced neutralism as 'an immoral and shortsighted conception' in the aftermath of the Bandung Conference and in the context of the crusading 'dynamism' that was his watchword).³ But just as the assumptions involved were in place before Dulles became Secretary of State (unstable and 'defeatist neutralism' was being singled out for condemnation in an NSC survey in September 1952, for example),⁴ so they continued to make themselves felt after 1961, Kennedy's public assurances notwithstanding. It was 'high time' that non-aligned states 'decided which side of the Cold War they [were] on', argued Rusk in private as Secretary of State.⁵ And in South Asia, where the 1965 war between India and Pakistan had represented a considerable set-back for American policy, the criticisms made by prominent Indians of US policies in Vietnam prompted Johnson repeatedly to withhold urgently needed supplies of grain from their country between 1965 and 1967. (In his private journal,

¹ C. B. Marshall, *The Limits of Foreign Policy* (New York, 1954).

² See, e.g., the works of Blum, Schaller, Borden, Harrison, and Barnds cited above, and, on the 'shunting' operations planned *vis-à-vis* Indonesia, McMahon, *op. cit.*, chs. 9, 10.

³ Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles*, p. 317, and Dulles, 'A Policy of Boldness', *Life* (19 May 1952). For Senator Knowland's similar approach to Cambodia, for example, see Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 143-4.

⁴ NSC 135/3, 'Reappraisal of United States Objectives and Strategy for National Security', 25 Sept. 1952.

⁵ Bowles, *Promises to Keep*, p. 359; cf. Rusk public interview of Feb. 1964 recorded in *Pentagon Papers*, iii. 712.

Bowles, as Ambassador in New Delhi, wrote in 1966: 'It is a cruel performance. The Indians must conform; they must be made to fawn; their pride must be cracked.'¹

The Manichaeism underlying this insistence that, as Kennedy put it in regard to Latin America, there could be 'no middle ground', a feature of the political culture since the seventeenth century, has frequently been remarked upon, and need only be underlined in passing. ('The American mind', as Hofstadter for one has observed, 'was shaped in the mold of early modern Protestantism.')2 Nor is it necessary here to set forth detailed examples, in terms of policies fashioned in Washington and pursued on the ground, of a related approach and set of assumptions: that is, those surrounding attempts to conduct 'engineering', not simply *among* Asian countries, but *within* them: attempts which, it could be argued, met with a measure of success in the (atypical) context of post-war Japan,³ but which culminated in the vain endeavour to 'build a nation', as the phrase had it, within the externally created and sustained state of South Vietnam.⁴

For here, again, it is the longer-term aspects of the political culture which are our particular concern: the fact that behind a preoccupation with the transplanting of institutions and American-style management lay two centuries or more of the

¹ Bowles, *Promises*, p. 534. By 1967, even so, as much as one-quarter of the American wheat crop was going to India: Barnds, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

² R. Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963), p. 55. See also, e.g., M. Howard, *War and The Liberal Conscience* (London, 1978), ch. vi, and F. Fitzgerald, 'The American Millennium', in Ungar, *op. cit.* As Henry Wallace expressed it in 1940: 'The American ideal is as religious as the ideal of any church.' Quoted in Burns, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

³ That is, it could be argued that the United States not only contributed greatly to the reconstruction of a defeated and devastated Japan but succeeded in transplanting to that country a significant measure of its own political culture. Yet there are those students who stress, rather, the extent to which existing Japanese élites succeeded none the less in retaining a large measure of political and economic control and in neutralizing the effect of American-sponsored reform; and stress, too, the extent to which (partly in consequence) Japan, however changed from the pre-1945 years, has maintained its own distinctive culture and political culture. See, e.g., the works of Schaller, Harrison, Emerson, and Borden cited above; also C. Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (Stanford, 1982), and (by a distinguished American Ambassador to Japan) E. O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978). On the particular subject of American-directed land-reform in post-war Japan see below, p. 43, n. 3.

⁴ See, e.g., the *Pentagon Papers* volumes and the works of Gibbons, Herring, Spector, Halberstam, Ellsberg, Wills, Karnow, and Fitzgerald cited above. Also, e.g., G. Kolko, *Vietnam. Anatomy of a War, 1940-1975* (London, 1986).

conviction that one's own society was 'a city on a hill', 'a mold for the world', in Boorstin's phrase.¹ Behind what Emily Rosenberg, in her study of the period 1890 to 1945, *Spreading The American Dream*, terms 'the ideology of liberal developmentalism',² lay a belief in the universal relevance of the central assumptions of the domestic political culture: in the moral and spiritual, as well as economic and political, blessings bestowed by the marketplace; in 'the reality of atomistic social freedom', as Hartz summarizes it;³ in 'the myth', in Potter's words, '... that equality exists not merely as a potentiality in the nature of man but as a working reality in the operation of American society . . . and that every man is the architect of his own destiny'.⁴ Even when (as tended to become marked in the post-war years) it was the group, and not solely the individual, that figured in what was known as the 'pluralist model' of that society, the vision remained one whereby harmony and justice would emerge from the free interplay of equally advantaged units.⁵ (As Karl observes: 'Americans have always preferred to avoid the consequences of their commitment to individual choice by assuming that, somehow, the sum total of such choices will be compatible with larger historic goals.')⁶

The expectation that mankind as a whole might within the foreseeable future be shaped in such a mould had been growing as the country's presence on the international scene expanded from the 1890s onwards. And if that 'Americanization of the world' which was widely anticipated in the 1920s—by Europeans, as well as within the Republic itself—had tended to be associated in particular with the artefacts of mass production, the essence of the political culture was believed by Americans to

¹ D. J. Boorstin, *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (London, 1961), p. 244. And see, e.g., the works of Burns and Tuveson cited above.

² E. S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream. American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York, 1982).

³ Hartz, op. cit., p. 62.

⁴ Potter, op. cit., p. 97.

⁵ See the comments of P. Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives* (New York, 1979), pp. 32 ff.; also Polenberg, op. cit., pp. 103 ff. One notable contribution to the construction of such a paradigm before 1945 was represented by the work of Horace Kallen, who in a famous essay of 1915, for example, argued for the benefits of 'cultural pluralism' within the United States, as opposed to forced assimilation, and also that the harmony which could readily be achieved among 'spiritually autonomous' racial and ethnic groups within the Republic could presage the greater triumph, through the spread of 'American civilization', of 'an orchestration of mankind'. See Gleason, 'American Identity and Americanization', loc. cit.

⁶ Karl, op. cit., p. 238. And see Wills, op. cit.

be indivisible from the achievement of such material rewards.¹ With the shock of the depression now overcome by the achievement of greater and more dispersed prosperity than ever, and with new levels of international co-operation secured in the conquest of manifest evil, it was not to be wondered at that such assumptions came to the fore again during the Second World War. A lasting harmony could be achieved, suggested Henry Luce's *Life* magazine in 1943, not only with China but with the Soviet Union as well, since the Russians 'think like Americans'; 'America alone', asserted Luce himself, based as it was upon 'ideas which transcend class and caste and racial and occupational differences', could 'provide the pattern for the future'. The 'brotherhood of man' would be founded upon the 'the universally compelling tenets of American life'.²

Nor was there wanting scholarly endorsement for convictions and expectations of this kind, even when the Cold War had blotted out favourable images of the Soviet Union. 'We conceive of other peoples as seeing [the] light [of American civilization] and following it freely', wrote Margaret Mead in the mid-1950s, emphasizing, like Daniel Bell among others, that that civilization was unique in having built 'change and innovation into its culture'.³ And while Bell himself declared that, within the West as a whole, ideology—notably, the ideology of the left—had 'come to a dead end',⁴ others went further in anticipating a worldwide social convergence, stemming from a universal demand for the means and blessings of technological change. The consequence of this demand could be, wrote David Riesman, that 'the cast of national characters is finished'.⁵ American society, Dr Brzezinski was asserting in 1970, was 'prompting a far-reaching

¹ See, e.g., F., Costigliola, *Awkward Dominion. American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1919-1933* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1984).

² See Dallek, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 ff.; H. Luce, *The American Century* (New York, 1941). Luce added that it was America's 'duty and opportunity . . . to exert upon the world the full impact of our influence, for such purposes as we see fit and by such means as we see fit'. (Emphasis added.)

³ M. Mead, *New Lives for Old. Cultural Transformation: Manus, 1928-1953* (New York, 1961), p. 19; D. Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York, 1962), p. 98.

⁴ A thesis, of course, which ignored the ideological dimensions of American 'neoconservatism', as professed by Bell himself among others. See, e.g., Steinfels, *op. cit.*, p. 291, and *passim*.

⁵ D. Riesman, 'The Lonely Crowd: A Reconstruction in 1960' in S. M. Lipset and L. Lowenthal (eds.), *Culture and Social Character. The Work of David Riesman Reviewed* (New York, 1961), pp. 443-4. And see, e.g., Talcott Parsons, 'Order and Community in the International Social System' in J. N. Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York, 1961).

transformation in [the] outlook and mores' of 'all other societies', with the 'rest of the world' learning 'what is in store for it by observing what happens in the United States'.¹

The American role as mentor was seen as having particular relevance for the newly or would-be independent peoples of Asian and other 'southern' areas of the world, for whom Walt Rostow and others provided non-communist and essentially Western models for economic 'take-off' and development, to accompany models of political systems and political culture that were likewise being proffered as the means whereby 'modernization' could be achieved.² 'If one-tenth of the people of Asia had ever seen a Sears, Roebuck store', recorded the Chairman of the US Chamber of Commerce in 1957 after touring Vietnam, 'our task of promoting a free way of life as an alternative to communism would be immeasurably easier.'³ 'My general view', reported Lodge as Ambassador in Saigon in 1963, 'is that the U.S. is trying to bring this medieval country into the 20th Century',⁴ and indeed similar echoes of Mark Twain's Sir Boss were not infrequent around this time among a nation which, in the view of William Lederer for one, had become 'so dominated by its technologies and its wealth that it [had] lost touch with people'.⁵

The unique standing of the United States *vis-à-vis* the 'emerging nations' was believed to derive in particular from its own past achievement of what Bowles described to his Indian listeners as 'the first successful revolution against colonialism'.⁶ 'This nation', proclaimed Kennedy in 1961, 'was born of revolution', echoing Dulles (of all people) six years before: 'The United States [is]

¹ Z. Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages. America's Role in the Technetronic Era* (New York, 1970), pp. 24, 31, 196.

² W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: a non-Communist Manifesto* (London, 1960); and see, e.g., Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 312.

³ Quoted in Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 319.

⁴ *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 790.

⁵ W. J. Lederer, *Our Own Worst Enemy* (New York, 1968), p. 27. And cf., e.g., Etheridge, as cited above, on the predominant characteristics of successful players of the American political game, and Michel Crozier (*op. cit.*, p. 133), on the American lack of 'a code, a culture in the domain that will always be closed to the computer, that of complex human relationships'. In regard to the redeeming mission, the Connecticut Yankee himself, it will be recalled, ultimately brought devastation to the Arthurian land he was seeking to Americanize.

⁶ Bowles, *Ambassador's Report*, p. 22. And see, e.g., S. M. Lipset, *The First New Nation* (New York, 1963).

itself a revolutionary government.¹ Such assertions, while not without a measure of validity in a certain narrow sense, could but deceive Americans themselves as to the likelihood that their own society's history had nurtured an understanding of what was now taking place in areas such as South-east Asia. The United States, in Shills's words, 'has never had a substantial revolutionary movement',² while in broad terms the very 'concept of social upheaval', as Hartz puts it, 'was alien to the American mind'.³ ('They love change', observed de Tocqueville, 'but they dread revolutions.')⁴ Within the Republic itself, as Samuel Huntington has recently observed with satisfaction, profound mental as well as material obstacles had ensured that even 'change and reform' could go 'only so far and no further'.⁵ In the realm of foreign affairs, too, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the country had repeatedly displayed its hostility towards radical social upheaval abroad⁶—a pattern of response that was all the less likely to be broken after the Second World War since, during that conflict, the political balance within America had tilted sharply to the right (in marked contrast to developments in most of the other societies involved), to the accompaniment of an 'accentuation of the ideological basis of American identity'.⁷

Even when the term 'revolution' was flourished by Kennedy and his aides during the 1960s in regard to the transformation

¹ *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 804; Williams *et al.*, *America in Vietnam*, p. 184. As McMahon observes (*op. cit.*, pp. 43-4): 'The notion that the United States has been a sincere and determined foe of colonialism throughout its history has become virtually a staple of standard American ideology . . . In actuality, American anticolonialism often blended idealism with a strong element of economic self-interest.'

² Shills, *op. cit.*, pp. 94 ff. And see, e.g., B. Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Modern World* (London, 1967), pp. 112-13.

³ Hartz, *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 295, 306. And see, e.g., Burns, *op. cit.*, pp. 143 ff., on the 'progressive deterioration' in American thought after the late eighteenth century of belief in the right to revolt; also Stillman and Pfaff, *op. cit.*, pp. 222 ff.

⁴ A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (trs. by H. Reeve, London, 1946), pp. 517-18.

⁵ Huntington, *American Politics. The Promise of Disharmony*, p. 107. And see, e.g., Karl, *op. cit.*, p. 14, and *passim*, and Wills, *op. cit.*, p. 537, and *passim*.

⁶ See, for example, in relation to Central America, LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions*, and, on the first quarter of the twentieth century, Gardner, *Safe for Democracy*.

⁷ Gleason, *op. cit.* And see C. Thorne, 'En Route to Estrangement. American Society and World War Two in the Global Setting' in *Border Crossings. Essays in International History* (forthcoming).

that the United States should help bring about in South-east Asia,¹ its meaning and implications were those spelled out by Rusk: what was needed, he explained in 1966, was 'the kind of revolution which is congenial to our own experience', the kind of change that lay within 'the great American revolutionary tradition'.² Or, as one senior official in the Bureau of the Budget had angrily minuted on his return from a disorderly Guatemala during the Eisenhower presidency (when the very term 'revolution' tended to be shunned): the time had come to 'indoctrinate those people with their own indigenous philosophy based on the dignity of the individual, private enterprise, and democracy'.³

The key to the post-war American approach to what became known as the 'underdeveloped' world lay not in the hope for or understanding of social revolution but in the fear of disorder—a projection abroad of that 'fear of a disintegrating consensus' which Michael Rogin has rightly described as 'endemic in American politics' themselves.⁴ Even before the Japanese surrender, this consideration was beginning to overshadow in Washington a concurrent sympathy for anti-colonial nationalisms,⁵ and by 1949 the State Department was arguing that in the interests of stability the countries of South-east Asia 'must for the foreseeable future be governed along authoritarian lines, whether benevolent or otherwise'.⁶ An 'absence of order', submitted the authors of

¹ See Kennedy's speech (as a Senator) to the American Friends of Vietnam in June 1956, as recorded in Gibbons, *op. cit.*, i. 303–5; and for the subsequent employment of the term, e.g. *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 548 ff., 580 ff., 804, 809.

² Williams *et al.*, *America in Vietnam*, p. 258.

³ Quoted in LaFeber, *op. cit.*, p. 135. On the awkwardness occasioned senior officials during the Eisenhower presidency by the notion of an American 'revolution', see *ibid.*, pp. 111, 154, 202; Ambrose, *op. cit.*, p. 38. Subsequently, the commission set up to plan the 1976 bicentennial celebrations in California was to feel obliged to issue a statement explaining that 'the American revolution was not a "revolution"'. Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Cf. Hugh Brogan (*op. cit.*, p. 58) on the 'social bigotry' of the Anglo-Americans of the seventeenth century: 'The obsession with private property which . . . made it impossible for the English to organise their original plantations on communist principles made it impossible for them or their descendants to respect, or even to comprehend, Indian communism, Indian clannishness, any more than they could respect or tolerate Indian polygamy or Indian religion.' For details see J. Axtell, *The Invasion Within. The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America* (New York, 1985), chs. 7 ff., and for a very broad perspective F. Turner, *Beyond Geography. The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness* (New York, 1980).

⁴ Rogin, *op. cit.*, p. 33. And see, e.g., Barnett, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁵ See, e.g., the OSS memo. of 2 Apr. 1945 quoted in Thorne, *Allies*, p. 600. Also, e.g., McMahan, *op. cit.*

⁶ 'United States Policy Towards Southeast Asia', 1 July 1949, NSC 51.

NSC 68, was 'becoming less and less tolerable', a priority which was continuing to find expression during the latter stages of our period in what Stanley Hoffmann has called Henry Kissinger's 'obsession with stability'; in an approach by the latter to international affairs that was 'particularly suited to diplomacy with dictators, ruling monarchs, or presidents untroubled by checks and balances', but that was particularly insensible to the societies and the humanity (Chilean, Greek, Portuguese) who were so cleverly to be manipulated.¹

As Huntington argued in his *Political Order in Changing Societies*, and as the Army's abortive 'Project Camelot' took as its point of departure, the need was to enable change to be 'accommodated . . . in an effective manner . . . by the established order'.² Such a priority had become the touchstone of American policy in occupied Japan, just as in the Philippines it had long ensured American support for a native élite which set its face against fundamental social and economic reform and which (without incurring the hostility of Washington or General MacArthur thereafter) had collaborated with the Japanese to that same end between 1942 and 1945.³ Even if that 'established order'—in the

¹ Hoffmann, *Primacy or World Order*, pp. 50, 70; and see Vogelgesang, *American Dream, Global Nightmare*, p. 83, on the damage to the United States' own national interest, viewed in the longer perspective, arising from Kissinger's 'relative disregard for human rights'; also J. Kwitny, *Endless Enemies. The Making of an Unfriendly World* (New York, 1984). On Richard Nixon's 'special respect for dictators' see Szulc, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

² S. P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, 1968); I. L. Horowitz (ed.), *The Rise and Fall of Project Camelot* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9, 224; Skolnikoff, *op. cit.*, pp. 57-8; H. Johnson and B. M. Gwertzman, *Fulbright the Dissenter* (London, 1969), pp. 180 ff.

³ See, e.g., D. J. Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration in World War II* (Ann Arbor, 1967); G. K. Goodman, 'The Japanese Occupation of the Philippines: Successful Collaboration of Invading and Indigenous Elites', *Journal of International Studies* (Institute of International Relations, Sophia University, Tokyo, Dec. 1982); B. J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion. A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines* (Berkeley, 1977); C. M. Petillo, *Douglas MacArthur: the Philippine Years* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1981); L. E. Bauzon *Philippine Agrarian Reform, 1880-1965: The Revolution That Never Was* (Singapore, 1975); C. E. Bohlen, *Witness to History* (London, 1973), pp. 452 ff. Possibly the greatest exception to the pattern of American resistance to radical socio-economic change in post-war Asia lay in the land-reform programme that was pushed through in Japan. See Schaller, *op. cit.*, p. 43, and Young, *American Frontier Activities*, p. 229. Here, too, however, in Schaller's words, the political effect was to 'create a class of small landowners loyal to the conservative parties who first opposed the reform'.

Philippines themselves, in Nationalist China, or South Korea, or South Vietnam—should warrant condemnation in private by American officials for its corruption, brutality, or indifference to the people's welfare,¹ it must be supported none the less as the only alternative to complete social upheaval and thus (it was believed) the extension of Moscow's empire. (President Eisenhower, acknowledges a recent and admiring biographer, was at one with his Secretary of State in 'seeing Communists wherever a social reform movement or a struggle for national liberation was under way'.)² There must be no elections in South Korea after the 1950–3 war; none in South Vietnam after the Geneva accords, until the people of that artificial state could be relied upon to see where their true interest lay. Subsequently, for all the rhetoric surrounding the 'Revolutionary Development' programme for the Vietnamese countryside that was proclaimed by the men of the New Frontier, on the ground itself the priorities of pacification did not change. A sign which the US Army's official historian tells us was to be seen 'everywhere' expressed the predominant view succinctly enough: 'Once we have them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow.'³

As frustration mounted over Vietnam after 1964, it was all too easy to attribute failure to the shortsightedness or inflexibility of the country's chief executive or some section of those who served him.⁴ The emphasis of the present essay, rather, is on the need to

¹ For examples of an awareness on the part of some Americans of the gulf between succeeding Saigon regimes and the South Vietnamese people (as between Chiang Kai-shek's 'spiritually insolvent' Nationalists, as George Marshall described them in 1947, and the Chinese people) see *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 95, 129–31; Williams *et al.*, *America in Vietnam*, pp. 193, 198, 240.

² Ambrose, *op. cit.*, p. 621.

³ Spector, *op. cit.*, p. x. And see Ellsberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 156 ff.; *Pentagon Papers*, ii. 515 ff., iv. 396; Lederer, *Our Own Worst Enemy*; Yarmolinsky, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁴ Many of those like Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. who became fierce critics of President Johnson's performance had themselves subscribed to the confident (and false) assumptions which had deepened the American commitment in South-east Asia during the Kennedy presidency. And the noted political scientist, Hans Morgenthau, for example, who in 1974 would be deploring what he saw as the fact that the United States, now 'the foremost . . . status quo power on earth', had with 'unfailing consistency . . . since the end of the Second World War intervened on behalf of conservative and fascist repression against revolution and radical reform' (*New York Times*, 10 Oct., 1974), had in the 1950s, like Schlesinger, been a member of the American Friends of Vietnam, a body which fostered support for the Diem regime (Gibbon, *op. cit.*, ii. 251.) On the influence exercised by 'Friends' see, e.g., Spector, *op. cit.*, p. 248. On Schlesinger as 'officer-professor' see Wills, *op. cit.*, pp. 521 ff, and

make connections between the observations of contemporaries or historians regarding the shortcomings of individuals and organizations involved in US dealings with Asia and reflections by political philosophers and others (mainly Americans themselves) concerning the nature of American society as a whole and its political culture. Thus, when, for example, the same historian of the US Army in Vietnam finds that among the commanders and planners dealing with the conflict in that country there existed a predominant view of its inhabitants 'which totally overlooked the political and social upheavals there since World War Two and the revolutionary nature of the Communist insurgency',¹ we need to look outwards from specific misperceptions of this kind to the gestation of what John Bennett describes as 'an American ideology which makes difficult a real openness to the experiences of nations whose historical situation is entirely different from our own'.² When we read Daniel Ellsberg's endorsement, based upon his own experience within the Pentagon, of I. F. Stone's contemporary description of officials in that organization writing on guerrilla warfare as being 'like men watching a dance from outside through heavy plate-glass windows [who] see the motions but . . . can't hear the music . . . , the injured racial feelings, the misery, the rankling slights, the hatred, the devotion, the inspiration and the desperation',³ we should recall, for example, the process whereby, as noted above, socialism had become well before 1917 'a national heresy'. ('I do not hesitate to say', wrote de Tocqueville, 'that most of the maxims commonly called democratic in France would be proscribed by the democracy of the United States.')⁴

The evidence is overwhelming that, throughout our period,

on Reinhold Niebuhr's enthusiastic support for 'the New Frontier' and his tolerance of right-wing dictatorships in the anti-communist cause, R. W. Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr. A Biography* (New York, 1985), pp. 252-3 and 272-5.

¹ Spector, *op. cit.*, p. 361. And see, e.g., Kattenburg, *op. cit.*, pp. 76 ff.

² J. C. Bennett, 'Moral Tensions in International Affairs' in K. W. Thompson (ed.), *Moral Dimensions of American Foreign Policy* (New Brunswick, 1984), p. 189. Cf. Etheridge, *op. cit.*, p. 172, on, not simply the lack of local knowledge by policy-makers, but their tendency to 'choose to establish policy at a sufficiently "high" level of political "sophistication" at which there is no need—and little use—for detailed local knowledge'.

³ Ellsberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-60.

⁴ de Tocqueville, *op. cit.*, pp. 517-18. Cf., e.g., Manfred Halpern, 'The Morality and Politics of Intervention' in Thompson, *Moral Dimensions*: "We have scarcely begun to develop theories of social change that would allow us to understand the fundamental revolutions now in progress in the world."

there existed among the American people at large a widespread and profound ignorance about all regions of Asia—itsself merely one manifestation of a lack of awareness of matters foreign which no amount of educational reform has seemed able to reduce to any significant extent.¹ And the questions which arise in this respect are underlined when we observe the degree of ignorance concerning Asian societies and political cultures which existed among legislators and policy-makers also:² not simply a lack of knowledge in a quantitative sense, but a lack of understanding concerning processes—mental, social, and political. (Thus William Barnds notes, for example, that those in Washington who organized the 1954 arms deal with Pakistan had little or no awareness of the likely long-term socio-political repercussions within that country, while Wallace Thies has demonstrated in detail the failure in Washington between 1965 and 1968 to comprehend the considerations and interplay of factions that were involved in Hanoi's own decision-making during those years, a failure which reflected in part a long-standing tendency to visualize other nations as 'rational unitary actors'.)³

Was Niebuhr, then, correct when in 1952 he advanced the generalization that Americans 'can understand the neat logic of either economic reciprocity or the show of pure power, but . . .

¹ Sanford Ungar, for example (op. cit., p. 19), provides examples of recent surveys revealing that fewer than half those questioned knew whether it was the USA or the USSR that belonged to NATO and over 40 per cent of high-school seniors could not locate Egypt on a map. On ignorance and rapidly fluctuating stereotyping concerning Asia and Asians see, e.g., Isaacs, *Scratches On Our Minds*; Schaller, op. cit., pp. 22, 240; Tucker, op. cit., pp. 156 ff.; A. Iriye (ed.), *Mutual Images. Essays in Japanese-American Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975); W. I. Cohen, *America's Response to China* (New York, 1971). Awareness of the country's own past has often appeared little better. In national surveys conducted in 1944 and again in 1946, only one person in five could give a coherent explanation of the Bill of Rights; 59 per cent of those questioned in 1945 had either never heard of the supposedly controversial TVA or could not say correctly what it was. Susman, op. cit., p. 23; Devine, op. cit., pp. 37, 312.

² See, e.g., Schaller, op. cit., p. 240; Kattenburg, op. cit., pp. 119–20; Blum, op. cit., p. 5; Thies, op. cit., pp. 215 ff., 322, 334 ff.; Spector, op. cit., p. xi; Bowles, *Promises*, p. 477; Gibbons, op. cit., ii. 36, 85.

³ Barnds, op. cit., p. 104; Thies, op. cit., p. 220; M. D. Taylor, *Swords and Ploughshares* (New York, 1972), p. 401; Hoopes, *The Limits of Intervention*, p. 128; Szulc, op. cit., p. 140; May, *'Lessons' of the Past*, p. 119; G. T. Allison, *Essence of Decision. Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston, 1971). Likewise, Washington 'totally misread' developments in Indonesia in the period leading up to its ill-fated and covert intervention in that country's civil war in 1958: McMahan., op. cit., pp. 323–4.

are mystified by the endless complexities of human motives and the varied compounds of ethnic loyalties, cultural traditions, social hopes, envies and fears which enter into the policies of nations and which lie at the foundation of political cohesion'?¹ And is it relevant to such a question that an extensive sociological survey in the late 1970s and early 1980s reported, in terms of the domestic body itself, that 'the Americans with whom we talked had real difficulty in piecing together a picture of the whole society and how they related to it'?² When Gelb and Betts conclude, in their study of the Vietnam war, that the United States foreign-policy community had become 'a house without windows',³ should we not ask whether Stillman and Pfaff were justified, and if so, why, in asserting at the time that 'only infrequently do Americans really enter into the texture of a foreign society'?⁴

* * *

In their own reflections on this last paradox—a nation of immigrants apparently 'tone-deaf' to the foreign, so to speak—Stillman and Pfaff were surely correct when they suggested that one explanation could lie in 'the intensity of our national experience, the need we have to concentrate upon making ourselves a nation'.⁵ And like Senator Fulbright among others in the mid-to-late 1960s, they suspected, too, that zeal for the Cold War and for intervention abroad had developed in part because the challenges involved provided 'a kind of social cement—a national mission, nearly a messianism, which expressed an American need for world identity that will confirm our national identity . . . ; a disguise for our insecurity'.⁶

Yet even as this Hudson Institute survey was being completed, the 'social cement' that bound the country together appeared to be crumbling. Soon, accompanied by conflicting claims to the exclusive possession of righteousness and morality,⁷ and by the

¹ Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, pp. 35–6.

² R. N. Bellah *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart. Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 207. And see, e.g., Wills, *op. cit.*, p. 538.

³ Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, p. 292.

⁴ Stillman and Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183; and see Johnson and Gwertzman, *Fulbright the Dissenter*, pp. 284 ff.; Mills, 'The Social Role of the Intellectual' (1944), in Horowitz, *Power, Politics and People*; Barnet, *op. cit.*, ch. 9.

⁷ See, e.g., S. Vogelgesang, *The Long Dark Night of the Soul. The American Intellectual Left and the Vietnam War* (New York, 1974), who notes (p. 161) that

[Footnote 7 continued on page 386]

assertion in some quarters of a 'counter-culture' that exulted in the exploration of its own new frontiers,¹ an often-violent confrontation developed between established élites on the one hand and on the other those who denounced what many now saw as the interconnected evils of racist discrimination at home and an imperial war in Asia.² Indeed, the time came when even the bonds holding together the US Army appeared to be dangerously weakened.³

It was not simply that the problem of decaying inner cities, for example, thrust itself more violently to the fore, nor that the appearance of works such as Michael Harrington's *The Other America*⁴ challenged comfortable assumptions regarding the distribution of blessings within a pluralist, capitalist society. It was not merely that the nation's sacrifices in Vietnam began to seem futile, nor even that for a time, as Norman Mailer was apprehensively reflecting in 1968, society seemed about to 'disappear . . . in the nihilistic maw of a national disorder'.⁵ It was that, as the editor-in-chief of Time Inc. wrote early in the following year, 'for the first time in our lives' there apparently no longer existed 'a working consensus . . . as to what we think America means'.⁶

the tendency on the left to 'turn discussion points into non-negotiable demands' provided 'yet another reflection of *The Paranoid Style of American Politics*'. And see, e.g., Crozier, *op. cit.*, p. 36. For an example of those who now found the Good People, the City on a Hill that they sought, not in their own Republic but in North Vietnam itself see Kolko, *op. cit.* And see Hellmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 84 ff.

¹ See Hellmann, *op. cit.*, ch. 3; also, e.g., C. Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York, 1970), and C. Brookman, *American Culture and Society Since the 1930s* (London, 1984).

² An excellent survey of the interrelated issues is provided in Hodgson, *In Our Time*.

³ See, e.g., A. Yarmolinsky, 'The War and the American Military', in Lake, *op. cit.*, and for statistics and comments on drug-taking, assaults on superiors, and desertion, L. M. Baskir and W. A. Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance. The Draft, the War, and the Vietnam Generation* (New York, 1978). In 1971, McGeorge Bundy observed: 'Extrication from Vietnam is now the necessary precondition of the renewal of the U.S. Army as an institution.' Quoted in Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 354. The works of Herr and others, cited earlier, are of course also relevant.

⁴ New York, 1962.

⁵ N. Mailer, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* (London, 1969), p. 181. And see, e.g., Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁶ Quoted in Hodgson, *op. cit.*, p. 364. Only now, notes Ronald Steel, was Walter Lippmann brought to question, not simply this or that aspect of American policy but the country's underlying impulses and motives: *Walter Lippmann*, p. 487.

'Where earlier in the twentieth century', wrote John Fairbank, 'a new and vital United States offered its models to a worn-out Chinese society in need of regeneration, now a new China full of morale has righted the balance. Today it is the American society which seems worn and in need of regeneration.'¹ To some, even, these years had witnessed 'the end of the American future'.²

'We expect too much of the world', Daniel Boorstin had written at the beginning of the 1960s. 'We are ruled by extravagant expectations: of what the world holds . . . [and] of our power to shape the world.'³ The bitter frustrations subsequently encountered abroad, combined with turmoil within, helped shift the focus of American politics in the direction of domestic, rather than international, issues by the early 1970s.⁴ By then, too, the public's confidence in the nation's overseas mission and its readiness to become militarily involved in the defence of an ally's territory had been considerably eroded—not least in regard to Asia, where Japan in particular was now coming to be seen as a dangerous commercial rival in a world where the dollar and the American economy now seemed much more vulnerable than could have been imagined during the previous quarter-of-a-century.⁵ Yet the question remains, none the less: had the Vietnam experience brought about, as Ernest May, for one, believed at the time, 'the beginning of a transformation in American beliefs' about international affairs in general?⁶ And the wider question still: if American political culture had contributed to the shaping of policies on the 'Asian frontier', had the experiences

¹ Fairbank, *op. cit.*, p. xviii.

² Schrag, *The End of the American Future*.

³ Boorstin, *The Image*, pp. 3–5. And see, e.g., N. A. Graebner (ed.), *Ideas and Diplomacy. Readings in the Intellectual Tradition of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1964), p. 796.

⁴ Contrast, for example, the inaugural addresses of Presidents Kennedy in 1961 and Nixon in 1973. For the suggestion that long-term patterns can be discerned in such changes of attention and mood see, e.g., F. L. Klinberg, *Cyclical Trends in American Foreign Policy Moods. The Unfolding of America's World Role* (Latham, Md., 1983).

⁵ See, e.g., the evidence on foreign-affairs attitudes recorded in Lake, *op. cit.*, pp. 36, 286, and in Herring, *op. cit.*, p. 265. On the major changes in the financial and economic position of the United States see, e.g., L. C. Thurow, 'America Among Equals', in Ungar, *op. cit.* In 1971 not only was the dollar devalued, but the United States recorded its first trading deficit since 1893—the year of Turner's paper.

⁶ E. R. May, 'American Security Interests After Vietnam' in Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 278. And see, e.g., Hoopes, *Dulles*, p. xiii.

of that frontier, in their turn, helped bring about a change in the nature of the political culture itself?¹

When we survey the thirty years encompassed by the present essay, it is apparent, of course, that considerable changes were taking place in the *structure* of American society: in the sources and location of employment and wealth, for example; in the shift to the suburbs, the rising proportion of non-whites in the population, and the growth (alluded to above) of what Eisenhower termed in 1960 'the Military-Industrial Complex'.² At the same time, there were those observers—most notably, perhaps, David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd*—who argued that the 'American character', also, was changing in consequence.³ And while other sociologists responded in the late 1950s and early 1960s by insisting that 'new structural and situational conditions' had not brought about any drastic alteration in terms of 'social character or . . . principal values',⁴ in the light of the upheavals that followed, longer-term developments (such as attitudes towards sexuality) which Edward Shils summarized as 'a new type of individualism' appeared to take on a greater significance.⁵ Certainly, some of the main institutions and processes of American politics were undergoing change by the end of our period. Indeed, such was the decline of the party system, for example (and not merely the disintegration of the Democrats in particular, hard-hit by Vietnam), the fall in the level of participation in major elections, and yet the marked increase in 'issue politics' and participation at the local level, that students in this field such as

¹ Cf., e.g., Gelb and Betts, *op. cit.*, p. 348: 'The more the United States did to preserve an independent Vietnam, the more America's own identity changed.'

² See, e.g., Polenberg, *op. cit.*, and W. Issel, *Social Change in the United States, 1945-1983* (London, 1985). Also, for a depiction of sub-units, each one having 'a distinct prism through which it views the world', J. Garreau, *The Nine Nations of North America* (Boston, 1981).

³ D. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven, 1950). Cf. Warren Susman's thesis (*Culture As History*, p. xx) that 'one of the fundamental conflicts of twentieth century America is between two cultures—an older culture, often loosely labelled Puritan-republican, producer-capitalist culture, and a newly emerging culture of abundance . . . The battle was between rival perceptions of the world, different visions of life.'

⁴ See, e.g., T. Parsons and Winston White, 'The Link Between Character and Society', and S. M. Lipset, 'A Changing American Character?', in Lipset and Lowenthal, *op. cit.*

⁵ Shils, 'American Society and the War in Indochina', in Lake, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

Anthony King were led to conclude that there was now emerging a new and essentially 'atomised' political system altogether.¹

This 'high degree of atomisation' in the country's political processes described by King and his colleagues can perhaps be linked to the difficulties over conceptualizing their relationship to 'the whole society' which, as we noted above, were to be acknowledged by all those questioned during the preparation of a major survey in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Meanwhile, within our period itself, the evidence of opinion polls reinforced that of the streets and the media in suggesting that *at certain levels* the political culture had become severely shaken by the time Richard Nixon left the White House in disgrace. As many as four out of ten who responded to a Harris poll in 1972 said that they felt alienated from their government, while 61 per cent of those questioned in 1973 believed that their own views on politics 'didn't count much any more'. Whereas in 1964 64 per cent had agreed with the statement that government was run for the benefit of all the people, with only 29 per cent asserting that it was dominated, rather, by a few major interests for selfish purposes, ten years later these proportions were almost exactly reversed. Between 1966 and 1976, the proportion of those prepared to avow 'a great deal of confidence' in Congress had fallen from 42 per cent to 9, in the Supreme Court from 51 per cent to 22, in the military's leadership from 62 per cent to 23, and in the leaders of major companies from 55 per cent to 16. In 1974, a survey of the attitudes of young people generally suggested that, as the *New York Times* summarized it, 'the non-college youth today are just about where the college population was in 1969', a large majority believing that American society was 'democratic in name only'.²

¹ A. King (ed.), *The New American Political System* (Washington, DC, 1978). And see, e.g., W. D. Burnham, *The Current Crisis in American Politics* (New York, 1982); A. Ware, *The Breakdown of Democratic Party Organization, 1940-1980* (Oxford, 1985).

² See, e.g., Vogelgesang, *Long Dark Night of the Soul*, p. 3; Rosenbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 164; Huntington, *American Politics*, pp. 174 ff.; P. Osnos, 'The War and Riverdale', in Lake, *op. cit.*; Steinfels, *op. cit.*, p. 204; Schrag, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-6; and on the extensive resistance to being drafted for the war, Baskir and Strauss, *Chance and Circumstance*. (Of the 27 million men who were of draft age during the war years, 25 million did not become directly involved in the conflict. One survey concluded that, of those who avoided the war, 60 per cent had taken positive steps to that end, while well over half a million actually violated draft requirements. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds—white as well as black—were roughly twice as likely as their more affluent peers to serve in the military, to be sent out to Vietnam itself, and to see combat there.) Note also, however, the degree of cynicism which had existed within some

[Footnote 2 continued on page 390]

And yet at the same time the evidence also strongly suggests that, notwithstanding the turmoil and disillusionment that seized the country between the mid-1960s and early 1970s, at the level, not of immediate 'authority' issues, but of national identity, fundamental values, and major institutions, there remained strong and widespread adherence to the established political culture. It was not America's traditional values that had come into question, but rather their non-realization that had been condemned.¹ If those in the lower-income strata of society, for example, now displayed a significantly lesser degree of 'community trust' than others, their responses to polls showed up as remaining highly positive in terms of support for the 'national identity'. The same was true when the opinions of black Americans were singled out for investigation, even though there had been marked racial, as well as class, dimensions to dissent over Vietnam, while studies completed in the late 1960s suggested, in Rosenbaum's words, that 'most young Americans accepted the same political values and institutions as their elders'.² That small section on the left which argued that the precondition for change was the complete overthrow of the existing political system became isolated even within the anti-war movement.³ 'The liberal tradition', concluded Devine in the study of American political culture he published in 1972, 'is strongly supported by [all] politically relevant groups.'⁴

As for the majority of those in the country who eventually turned against the commitment in Vietnam, they were not, in Hodgson's words, 'even speaking the same language as those who organized the [Eugene McCarthy, Robert Kennedy, and George McGovern political] campaigns' between 1968 and 1972.⁵ For them, it was simply that the costs of the war were proving too high. The endeavour had been a mistake, not a moral outrage

sections of society even before 1965, as suggested by McClosky, 'Consensus and Ideology', loc. cit.

¹ It is worth noting that when David Riesman was invited in 1961 to reconsider the thesis he had advanced in *The Lonely Crowd*, he concluded: 'We gave far too little place to persistent American values and their impact on the social character.' Lipset and Lowenthal, op. cit., p. 422.

² Rosenbaum, op. cit., pp. 79, 160; Devine, op. cit., pp. 230, 259 ff.; Polenberg, op. cit., pp. 225 ff.

³ See Vogelgesang, *Long Dark Night of the Soul*, pp. 135-6, and *passim*.

⁴ Devine, op. cit., p. 284; and see Vogelgesang, *Long Dark Night*, p. 78, and *passim*, and S. H. Beer, 'In Search of a New Public Philosophy', in King, op. cit., p. 44.

⁵ Hodgson, op. cit., ch. 20.

that proved the Republic to be corrupt in nature, and if there was outrage now it was being committed by those who abused the flag. 'Unyoung, unpoor, and unblack', as Scammon and Wattenberg put it in their influential book of 1970, the 'real majority', reacting also against what they saw as the excesses and excessive consequences of Johnson's 'Great Society' reforms, moved to elect Richard Nixon in 1968 and 1972.¹ At the same time, greatly troubled by what Samuel Huntington described as 'problems of governance . . . stem[ming] from an excess of democracy',² emphasizing anew the communist threat and the need to meet it with the ideological vigour of an ordered society, 'neoconservatives' began to push to the fore among some sections of the clerisy.³

There were those, of course, who saw in this 'quest for an American conservatism' evidence of 'the failure and collapse of the buoyant liberal faith, the optimistic, expansive, and expansionist vision that has been called the American Dream . . .'. Many, however, understood the political developments that were epitomized by the election result of 1972 as a reassertion of that 'dream', rather, in more manageable, acceptable terms; a return to the true path of what had been liberalism before that creed had become encumbered with an undue federal encroachment upon the autonomy of individual or group, before the ethic of the market-place and the self-made man had been defiled. Richard Nixon, as an appalled yet understanding Garry Wills had already observed in the wake of the former's 1968 victory, was 'the authentic voice of surviving American liberalism'. 'If our way of life derives from America's "givenness"', he wrote, 'Nixon is what will be given us.'⁴ Again, in other words, there existed a basis for consensus: a consensus not derived from the confidence

¹ R. M. Scammon and B. J. Wattenberg, *The Real Majority* (New York, 1970), p. 21. And see Hamby, *Liberalism and its Challengers*, and Wills, op. cit., pp. 176, 286, and *passim*.

² M. Crozier, S. P. Huntington, and J. Watanuki, *The Crisis of Democracy* (New York, 1975), p. 113. Also, e.g., G. Peele, *Revival and Reaction: the Right in Contemporary America* (Oxford, 1984).

³ See Steinfels, op. cit., pp. 44 ff., and *passim*, and Rogin, op. cit. For a radical commentary on such developments and the main politico-economic features of the 1970s see B. Gross, *Friendly Fascism. The New Face of Power in America* (New York, 1980), and on the 'one-sided class struggle on behalf of the rich' embodied thereafter in 'the Reagan counterrevolution', Burnham, *The Current Crisis in American Politics*, p. 14, and *passim*.

⁴ Susman, op. cit., p. 58; Wills, op. cit., pp. 527-8. And see, e.g., Schrag, op. cit., pp. 58-9.

of an organic community, but accompanied, rather, by the ingrained, insistent insecurity, within and without, of a collectivity wherein competition and the image were central.

As for attitudes and assumptions regarding matters external, it is true that, ideological trumpeting notwithstanding, the signs still pointed towards what the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, in a report on opinion surveys for the years 1978–82, was to summarize as ‘a continuing erosion of the post-World War II public consensus that the national interest requires active participation by the United States in world affairs’.¹ Yet this very resurgence of ‘isolationist’ inclinations, within an international setting of greater interdependence than ever, was no more than the mirror image of the ‘globalism’ that had gone before: both representing ‘a rejection of the world’s complexity’; both signalling the pursuit of ‘an ideal and unattainable vision of a national freedom from the repetitive and harrowing crises of history’.² ‘An absolute national morality’, as Hartz observed in the mid-1950s, ‘is inspired either to withdraw from “alien” things or to transform them: it cannot live in comfort constantly by their side.’³

For Hartz himself, writing when the basis was being laid for a new degree of commitment on the Asian frontier, the crucial question was whether or not a greatly increased involvement with the rest of the world would ‘shatter American provincialism’. Would it ‘provide . . . that grain of relative insight that [the country’s] own history has denied it’, and thus bring about, not an ‘intensified Americanism’, but a new comprehension and acceptance of ‘social diversity and social conflict’?⁴ ‘The sooner we learn that there are many mansions in this house of nations’, wrote George Kennan at around the same time, ‘and many paths to the enrichment of human experience, the easier we will make it for other people to solve their problems and for ourselves to understand our own.’⁵ Other Americans—their nation unrivalled in its capacity for self-examination and self-criticism—were still

¹ Ungar, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

² Stillman and Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 15. For other suggestions that ‘what dominates American experience today is not reality’ see, e.g., Boorstin, *The Image*, C. Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York, 1978), N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (London, 1986), and R. W. Fox and T. J. J. Lears (eds.), *The Culture of Consumption. Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980* (New York, 1983).

³ Hartz, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–16, 287, 308–9.

⁵ *New York Times Magazine* (10 Mar. 1957), quoted in Thompson, *Political Realism*, p. 52.

making the same point late in our period, and beyond. 'The question is', asked Stillman and Pfaff in the mid-1960s, 'can America accept the world for what it is, for its dismaying and tragic reality—can it accept maturity?'¹ Must one conclude, mused George Ball at the beginning of the 1980s, as a new President led a growing insistence on the right that the only mistake over Vietnam had been the failure to drive on for total victory, that the essence of the country's response to that conflict lay in Eliot's line: 'We had the experience but missed the meaning'?²

At the time when Ball was writing this; when Michel Crozier, in his love for America, was urging that 'the new frontier' for the Republic was now 'the frontier of the mind', the challenge of accepting the fate 'of being just another land struggling with the turbulent present',³ Robert Bellah and his colleagues were drawing up their report, *Habits of the Heart*, on the attitudes they had encountered during several years' detailed study of (mainly white, middle-class) communities across the country. 'Americans, it would seem', they concluded,

feel most comfortable in thinking about politics in terms of a consensual community of autonomous, but essentially similar, individuals, and it is to such a conception that they turn for the cure of their present ills. For all the lip service given to respect for cultural differences, Americans seem to lack the resources to think about the relationships between groups that are culturally, socially, or economically quite different . . . The radical egalitarianism of an individualist society has its own problems. For such a society is really constituted only of autonomous

¹ Stillman and Pfaff, *op. cit.*, p. 59. On the particular and relevant influence of lawyers in government circles and their approach to policy see, e.g., Halpern, 'The Morality and Politics of Intervention' in Thompson, *Moral Dimensions*; G. F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950* (New York, 1951); Barnett, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-6

² Ball, *op. cit.*, p. 422. And see, e.g., Lake, *op. cit.*, pp. 66 ff.; Dallek, *op. cit.*, p. 266; and Arnold R. Isaacs: 'At the start of a new decade, the perception that American actions in Vietnam were a worthy effort, and that they failed not because they were misconceived but only because they were not carried out resolutely enough, seemed to respond to powerful needs in American life and institutions . . . And by placing Vietnam in the same framework of conventional patriotic values in which Americans viewed their other wars, it reassured a troubled people that they had not, after all, forfeited the special moral standing America claimed for itself among the world's nations': *Without Honor. Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia* (Baltimore, 1983), p. 488.

³ Crozier, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-5. Cf. Stanley Hoffmann: 'The idea of a world in which the United States would be merely one actor like any other, or even a great power like so many others in history, remains intolerable': *Dead Ends*, p. 83.

middle-class individuals. Those who for whatever reason do not meet the criteria for full membership are left outside in a way unknown in a hierarchical society.¹

The same report added that the group's investigations had strongly reinforced the suggestion that 'We have imagined ourselves a special creation, set apart from other humans'. And yet Bellah and his colleagues also tell us that they encounter, even so, 'a widespread feeling that the promise of the modern era is slipping away from us'.² If such foreboding and pessimism had indeed quietly become established beneath the brash reassertiveness of the Reagan years, then it could be said that one important element in the political culture, in 'the emotional and attitudinal environment in which the political system operates', had shifted. Certainly, the challenges and opportunities that had been seen to stand on the Asian frontier as American power approached its apogee had not, in the event, restored a 'past apotheosis', nor helped ensure 'perennial rebirth'. Rather, the experiences of that frontier, of that 'turnaround point', in Herr's phrase, had so shaken assumptions concerning the world's readiness to be made in the American image that in some minds the essential question now was: 'How can a viable balance between myth making and myth breaking be assured? How can a people know what to believe and how to act?'³

Not that doubt itself was new. One recalls that Whitman, too, 'facing West from California's shores' towards what he saw as having been the Asian point of departure for mankind's 'inquiring, tireless' wanderings; that he, too, though long convinced of the American people's special role in the forefront of human progress, had concluded with questions which troubled:

(But where is what I started for so long ago?
And why is it yet unfound?)

¹ Bellah, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 277, 294 ff. And see, e.g., Crozier, *op. cit.*, pp. xviii, 30; Wills, *op. cit.*, p. 535. Joel Krieger, who sees 'changes in the macroeconomy' and in the country's geopolitical situation as having 'transformed the United States' political culture', goes so far as to argue the 'above all else Reagan is the electoral expression of a culture of defeat': *Reagan, Thatcher, and the Politics of Decline* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 131-2.

³ W. H. McNeill, 'The Care and Repair of Public Myth', *Foreign Affairs* (October 1982). On relevant features of American fiction in this period see, e.g., M. Bradbury, *The Modern American Novel* (Oxford, 1984), p. 157, and Hellmann, *op. cit.*