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Review of The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the "American Century"

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Michael J. Hogan, ed. *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S Foreign Relations in the "American Century"*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999. xiii + 534 pp. \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-77977-7.

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Diverse Approaches and Perspectives in United States Foreign Relations

Michael J. Hogan has pulled together a masterful collection of essays that to varying degrees play off of Henry Luce's famous 1940 article from *Time* magazine, "The American Century." Luce argued that the vision of the United States "as a world power includes a passionate devotion to great American ideals ... a love of freedom, a feeling for the equality of opportunity, a tradition of self-reliance and independence and also of cooperation" (p. 28). In this volume, sixteen esteemed historians and political scientists provide their assessments of whether the United States fulfilled Luce's vision. As Hogan's title indicates, these scholars offer widely different perspectives on the most important issues and policies in American foreign policy in the twentieth century and the effectiveness of policy makers in achieving their goals.

Tony Smith's "Making the World Safe for Democracy in the American Century" presents the view that Wilsonian liberalism has prevailed over other political systems. While he does not discount that the United States at times abused its predominant position in the world, he stresses that generally the world has benefited from American hegemony. Furthermore, most countries have come to accept the very values that the United States represents. He concludes "in many ways, the history of American foreign policy has confirmed his [Woodrow Wilson's] essential genius (and the convictions of Henry Luce as well) – his understanding that the expansion of American power worldwide might indeed be of benefit not only to this country but to the cause of humanity in general so long as it was dedicated to the promotion of democratic government worldwide" (pp. 50-1).

Geir Lundestad builds on some of his early arguments in "Empire by Invitation' in the American Century." He argues that "Rarely does the United States conquer; it rules in more indirect, more Amer-

ican ways, so indirect, in fact that frequently, but far from always, it is still invited to play the preeminent role it does toward the end of the (first?) American Century" (p. 91). In response to critics who argue that the United States would have acted the way it did regardless of whether it was invited or not, Lundestad contends that what is important is how frequently U.S. objectives fit European goals and desires. He concludes that because most countries want to be tied to the United States, they obviously have a generally positive view towards its policies.

Robert Jervis takes a positive view of U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century in his essay, "America and the Twentieth Century: Continuity and Change." He emphasizes that one of the key points to recognize in international affairs is the unprecedented peace that exists between the major powers today. He argues while the nuclear revolution and the Cold War did at times hamper democracy, the United States has been able to keep the peace while spreading its democratic and political ideals. He believes that the United States should be given credit for this, concluding that "the American security position resembles what it was at the start of the century [few security threats] while the world has become more compatible with American values" (p. 92).

In "The Idea of the National Interest," H. W. Brands asserts that "Since 1898 Americans had agreed that the national interest encompassed prosperity, democracy, and security; but which of the three counted most in the national interest depended on who was counting and when" (pp. 150-1). He points to the American pursuit of empire at the beginning of the century as representative of the ascendancy of prosperity as the main theme of American foreign policy between 1900 and 1920. He concludes that Woodrow Wilson's emphasis on democracy led to the rise of that idea as the dominant theme through

World War II. Finally, he argues that America's total focus on maintaining security in the Cold War marked the rise to prominence of the third theme. At all times, the other themes remained present but in subservient roles. Brands stresses, though, that regardless of which theme was dominant, none produced the results that the United States desired.

Walter LaFeber argues in "The Tension between Democracy and Capitalism during the American Century" that the United States pursuit of capitalism, not democracy, has dominated the twentieth century. To support his arguments, he points to American efforts to rebuild the Japanese and Western European economies after World War II, the CIA-inspired coup in Guatemala, and the Vietnam War. He claims that American policy makers did not oppose democratic governments but were more much more concerned with whether a country fit within its economic system. The result was that "The American push for expanding liberal democracy has thus been an on-and-mostly off policy during the American Century. It has been mostly off because of racism, exceptionalism, a fear at times of results from truly democratic elections, a dislike if not hatred for the kind of participatory democracy spawned by the events of the 1960s, and, of particular importance, the consistent demonstration in actual policy that the expansion of capitalist systems is more important than the expansion of liberal democratic systems" (p. 154).

In "The American Century: From Sarajevo to Sarajevo," Joan Hoff concludes that "the American score card on democracy is long on rhetoric and short on results, primarily because the practice of independent internationalism has more often than not sacrificed democracy on the twin alters of self-determination and capitalism" (p. 198). She argues that instead of trying to lead the world for the betterment of all, the United States has focused on its own self-interest. In doing so, while it has equated capitalism with democracy, in reality it was subverting democracy for the sake of capitalism.

Michael H. Hunt's "East Asia in Henry Luce's 'American Century'" presents a critical assessment of both Luce's vision and U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century. Hunt argues that American consumer products have had much more influence in Asia than U.S. political ideas. He stresses that Asians took American ideas and products and transformed them to fit their unique visions of the world. Unfortunately, according to Hunt, American policy makers

never realized this critical point. Instead, "Within a region struggling to recover from the privations of international conflict and civil war, assertive Americans spawned fresh devastation, often prolonged or created instability, and in the final analysis may have done more to obstruct and delay than to advance the cause of freedom that Luce so prized" (p. 271).

In "The American Century and the Third World," Bruce Cumings argues that the last half of the twentieth century was indeed America's century. However, he also asserts that U.S. leadership has deliberately limited the development of the Third World, arguing that "The Third World moves not up the developmental ladder, but from statehood to catastrophe" (p. 298). Cumings claims that the United States and other leading countries dominate the Third World today in ways never seen before, and in this dominance will be found "the primary source of war, instability, and class conflict" (p. 297). Accordingly, Cumings raises the question as to whether the American century has truly produced the positive results that some have claimed.

Gerald Horne explores the importance of race to American foreign policy in his essay, "Race from Power: U.S. Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of 'White Supremacy.'" He argues that from the beginning of the century, which he dates as 1898, there has been a struggle between two contradictory themes in the United States: white supremacy and the fight against it. He notes that race played pivotal roles in how the United States reacted to Japan in the years leading up to and through World War II and shaped its colonial policies after the war. He concludes "U.S. foreign policy will continue to be shaped by racial considerations" (p. 336).

In "Immigrants and Frontiersmen: Two Traditions in American Foreign Policy," Godfrey Hodgson asserts that "The tradition of the frontier, which has impelled Americans toward expansion, still clashes with the memory of immigration, restraining them from involvement in a world that, if not always wicked, is at least entangling, frustrating, and potentially a damaging distraction from the essential American enterprise, which has been the realization of individual dreams of freedom and prosperity" (p. 346). The continuing conflict has prevented the United States from offering the leadership that the world needs. Hodgson concludes that the United States should recognize the world's growing interdependence and devise policies to share leadership roles

as widely as possible.

Michael J. Hogan's "Partisan Politics and Foreign Policy in the American Century" stresses that the twentieth century has been marked by struggles between isolationism and internationalism that have often been associated with domestic partisan politics. Hogan focuses on the years immediately after World War II and questions whether the United States could have developed policies early in the Cold War that could have produced the same or better results "at less than the price paid for them" (p. 377). He adopts Walter Lippmann's arguments that the United States should have developed a policy reflecting a more limited strategy of containment where attempts to stop communism had to be carefully planned and limited. He concludes that the United States achieved success in the Cold War but could have done so without the high costs if it had developed a more thoughtful policy.

In "Philanthropy and Diplomacy in the American Century," Volker R. Berghahn argues that American foreign policy makers and the directors of philanthropic organizations in the 1950s and 1960s shared common views of the Soviet Union and communism. They believed the spread of American culture was essential in winning the Cold War. Berghahn contends that "The activities of the Ford Foundation in the 1950s and 1960s ... were not just part of the Cold War battles against Soviet communism but also of a larger attempt by the U.S. elites to convince their European counterparts that their impressions of America as lacking a high culture were false" (p. 413). The result, according to Berghahn, is that Europeans generally no longer fear American culture.

Akira Iriye offers an interesting assessment of the defining issues of the twentieth century in "A Century of NGOs." He argues that the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union was simply a redefinition of the international geopolitical system after World War II, while what made the last half of the century America's "was the efforts of the numerous individuals and organizations in the United States and elsewhere to develop an international community of interdependence, freedom, communication, and reciprocity" (p. 425). He argues that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proliferated over the past fifty years and have sought to foster cooperation across borders. He concludes that the efforts of NGOs fit with Luce's arguments because most of the NGOs reflected American core

values—"this century has been an 'American' Century because a uniquely American experience in social organization has spread worldwide ... in the twentieth century, U.S. history and world history have been joined together through the phenomenal growth of interlocking INGOs (international non-governmental organizations)" (p. 420).

Emily S. Rosenberg argues in her essay, "Consuming Women: Images of Americanization in the 'American Century,'" that Luce's vision for the United States implied specific gender orders centering around the theme of modernization. She presents the equation, America = modernity = consumption = freedom = modern women, as descriptive of the relationship between American culture, women, and foreign relations. To support her argument, she uses examples ranging from Ford Motor Company advertisements to the 1959 Nixon/Khrushchev kitchen debate. For the latter, she claims that these two leaders "engaged in an our-women-are-better-off-than-your-women-no-they-aren't-yes-they-are kind of masculine display" (p. 448).

In "The Empire of the Fun, or Talkin' Soviet Union Blues: The Sound of Freedom and U.S. Cultural Hegemony in Europe," Reinhold Wagnleitner argues that "however important the military power and political promise of the United States were for setting the foundation for American successes in Cold War Europe, it was the American economic and cultural attraction that really won over the hearts and minds of the majorities of young people for Western democracy" (p. 473). He believes that American culture, especially as depicted by Hollywood, has come to represent to most Europeans the meaning of freedom. He stresses that the key to understanding the transfer of American culture is to realize that non-Americans alter its initial meaning to fit their own definitions of freedom.

In "American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: A View from the Receiving End," Rob Kroes argues that if the twentieth century was indeed America's century, then it was because of the spread of its culture around the world. However, he disagrees with those who assert that this process was unwelcome or driven solely by American goals and desires. Instead, he emphasizes American culture has been actively sought by non-Americans who have molded that culture to fit their own needs. He concludes "American culture washes across the globe. It does so mostly in disentangled bits and pieces, for other to recog-

nize, pick up, and rearrange into a setting expressive of their own individual identities, or identities they share with peer groups” (p. 504).

What do all of these essays mean for students of American foreign policy and others in general? Anyone who reads these essays should realize the well-known criticism of American diplomatic history – that scholars who study American foreign policy are unimaginative and shun new approaches – does not hold water. In fact, none of these essays would fall into the traditional category of studies of “dead white men”. Rather they show the full range of approaches that many leading scholars in the field are addressing. For those diplomatic historians who have colleagues who do not see the relevance of studying diplomatic history, please give them this book. If they cannot see the diversity in the study of American foreign policy after reading these essays, nothing will convince them.

This collection of essays has more to offer than simply showing the range of perspectives and approaches of scholars of American foreign policy. It should challenge everyone to examine different ways of studying and interpreting the history they study. There is no way anyone will agree with all of the arguments presented in these essays. In fact, many of them will challenge basic perceptions of how to study history; others will make readers angry; and some might even provoke laughter. Professors, especially those working with graduate students, should see this book and Luce’s assertions as opportunities to stimulate thought and discussion.

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