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The Hegemon is Dead, Long Live the Hegemon: America's Rise to and Endurance as Global Power

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**The Hegemon is Dead, Long Live the Hegemon:
America's Rise to and Endurance as Global Power**

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Introduction

“The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas.”

Karl Marx

It was July 1944, the war was still furiously raging in Europe and in the Pacific, but the tide was about to turn in favor of the Allied Powers. Surrounded by the White Mountain National Forest, 730 delegates from forty-four Allied Nations met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, for the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, more commonly known as the Bretton Woods Conference. The representatives came both from Europe and from territories not yet recognized as independent nations, as the case of India, still a British colony at the time. The sitting order at the discussion table was alphabetical, to underscore the supposed egalitarian nature of the conference. For more than three weeks, the delegates discussed and deliberated on the future of world trade and economy. The symposium was not a novel concept, in 1927 the first World Economic Conference took place in Geneva and later, in 1933, it convened again in London. However, these antecedents did not yield any significant results due to the fact that, as John M. Keynes prophetically observed, an agreement could have been reached only under the guidance of a single power leading like-minded nations towards a mutually beneficial goal.¹

Keynes' remarks on the necessity of a dominant state that would lead other nations is crucial to understand why, unlike the previous conferences, Bretton Woods was a success, and they highlight the crucial role the United States

¹ Harold James, “The multiple contexts of Bretton Woods”, *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 28, No. 3 (2012): 411-430.

was called to play.² The chief objective of the U.S. delegation was to recast capitalism as the only viable economic solution to the problems that had led to the Great Depression and both World Wars. The overall goal was to frame liberalism and liberal democracy as the only system able to guarantee world order and stability.³

By reading the 1944 conference under this light, scholars have come to consider it as the pivotal moment in U.S. history, the starting point of a full-fledged American hegemony.⁴ At Bretton Woods, the United States officially took up the baton from the British Empire and set the stage for the exertion of a leadership role in the world's economic and financial affairs. Some historians, like Stephen Wertheim, prefer to contextualize the outcomes of Bretton Woods within a broader historical framework. To Wertheim, the U.S. government began to lay the foundations for global dominance a few years before, when Franklin D. Roosevelt announced that the United States would become the “arsenal of democracy” and convinced Congress to adopt the Lend-Lease Act.⁵ Most of the contemporary historiography, however, agrees on the fact that America's post-1945 ascendancy was rooted in the transformations brought about by the New Deal and in the global projection of its democratic liberalism.⁶

² Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony. Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

³ Giles Scott-Smith and J. Simon Rofe (eds.), *Global Perspectives on the Bretton Woods Conference and the Post-War World Order* (New York: Palgrave, 2017).

⁴ Eric Helleiner, *Forgotten Foundations of Bretton Woods: International Development and the Making of the Postwar Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁵ Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2022). Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security – From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2012). See also House of Representative, “1776 A Bill Further to Promote the Defense of the United States and For Other Purposes.” (Lend-Lease Bill), January 10, 1941, Records of the US House of Representatives, HR 77A-D13; Record Group 233; National Archives. Accessed at <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/lend-lease-act>.

⁶ Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Klaus Kiran Patel, *The New Deal: A Global*

These interpretations are compelling yet narrow. Their principal limit rests on the fact that they emphasize either the geopolitical, strategic, or economic power of the United States as the main cipher for the consolidation of America’s global dominance. As historian Justin Hart has proven with his book “Empire of Ideas,” this thesis tries to demonstrate how, although material capabilities have been important tools for U.S. power projection, they are not *the* decisive factor.⁷ Much of America’s rise to its primacy position, in fact, lays in the ability to generate consensus – a cultural understanding of hegemony interpreted through the lenses of Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of the concept. This work, in other words, aims to provide an alternative perspective on the rise of the United States as a world power by focusing on the notion and the working of hegemony in order to a) expand the chronological arch within which America’s ascendancy is usually located and challenge those traditional interpretations that usually associate such a phenomenon with either WWII or the Cold War; and b) highlight the continuities and efficacy of hegemony as an instrument of the U.S. empire, a fully working imperial practice through which the U.S. has constantly wielded – and still wields – global dominance, so as to further problematize views of crisis and decline of America’s supremacy.⁸

In so doing, this thesis draws on a peculiar and specific notion of hegemony. The word hegemony has been used to signify the preponderant dominance of a State exercised upon others. But what is precisely “hegemony”? The first theorization of hegemony dates back to Ancient

History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); Michael H. Hunt, *The American Ascendancy: How the United States Gained and Wielded Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

⁷ Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁸ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005); Andrew Bacevich, *The Twilight of the American Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).

Greece, when Athenian historian Thucydides, in his work *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, coined the term *hegemonia* (ἡγεμονία) to describe a type of political, military, and economic leadership exercised by consent, not coercion, through the deployment of both hard and soft power.⁹ The concept of hegemony has been revived in the XIX century by political scholars to describe the modern phenomenon of the European realms and their power projection in the world. However, in this context hegemony is used by referring to one of the theorizations that throughout the twentieth century gained major traction and theoretical significance, that is the one expressed by Antonio Gramsci in his work “Prison Notebooks”.¹⁰

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony has been regularly adopted in International Relations scholarship, albeit remaining somewhat elusive to a single fixed characterization and shapeshifting across the different IR theories.¹¹ The classical schools of thought in IR, however, all concur in attributing to the hegemon a massive degree of dominance and influence exercised upon other less powerful states (*subaltern states*). If Realists agree on characterizing the hegemon as the actor wielding the most power, which is understood as the coercive sway of hard power capabilities such as military and economic might, Liberals and Neoliberals put more emphasis on the indirect power of the hegemonic country, whose intangible assets and soft power abilities can persuade subaltern nations eliciting consent through a calculated deployment of influence which in most instances is related to the economy or the access to free trade.¹² Therefore, the surface difference amongst IR

⁹ Tucidide, *La Guerra del Peloponneso*, trans. Franco Ferrari (Milan: BUR Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2009).

¹⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere: Edizione critica dell’Istituto Gramsci* (Turin: ET, 2014).

¹¹ Alison J. Ayers (ed.), *Gramsci, Political Economy, and International Relations Theory: Modern Princes and Naked Emperors* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹² The term “soft power” was popularized in 1990 by Prof. Joseph S. Nye Jr. For an in-depth analysis of the concept see, Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of*

conceptualizations of hegemony could be simplified as follows: Realists and Neorealists concentrate more on military capabilities and coercion, meanwhile Liberals and Neoliberals focus on the economic sway and consent gathering of the hegemon.

While IR theories are correct in spotlighting the importance of the implementation of hard and soft power capabilities to achieve the desirable outcomes for the hegemon, they do not focus on the most compelling aspect of its might: the capacity to attract and persuade the subaltern states that what is favorable for the hegemon is equally, if not more, advantageous for the subaltern states. Such is the theoretical consideration of hegemony presented by the Gramscian and to a certain extent by the Neo-Gramscian IR school, which presents hegemony as a way of influencing others through the promotion of ideas, values, ways of life, and economic and political models that are presented as universally beneficial.¹³ The core of Gramscian hegemony is thus, exercising a combination of concealed coercion and irrefutable consent. Hence, while Realists conceptualize hegemony as *structural*, Gramscian and neo-Gramscian scholars believe hegemony is *cultural*.¹⁴

In his *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci argues that hegemony *is* first and foremost a *cultural projection* and exercise of power, used by the bourgeoisie and the capitalists to subjugate the working class by way of controlling culture itself. Building on Lenin's explanation of the term, for whom hegemony was confined to the political realm and culture was ancillary to it, the Italian philosopher argues that it is culture that is essential to the

American Power (London: Basic Books, 1990) and Joseph S. Nye Jr. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (London: Hachette, 2009).

¹³ Chris Brown & Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations* (London: Red Globe Press, 2019, Fifth Edition).

¹⁴ Margaret Ledwith, "Antonio Gramsci and Feminism: The Elusive Nature of Power", *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 46, No. 6 (2009): 684-697.

establishment of a hegemony and that it is the ruling class that enforces and dictates what culture is with the fabrication of norms and values that permeate society and are accepted by the working class, leading the proletariat to believe that their own good is identifiable with the good of the bourgeoisie.

By applying Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony to the trajectory of America's twentieth century history, it becomes possible to argue that the United States (the political equivalent of *bourgeoisie*) has exercised its dominance by creating and exporting a culturally charged "American Way of life" that has been normalized and (self-)propagated across the subaltern states (*proletariat*) through movies, music, trends, social and political movements, scientific advancements, language, and the promulgation of free trade and democratic institutions. The exercise of what Joseph Nye has famously dubbed as soft power has proven to be *the* key requirement for the success of American hegemony.¹⁵

The degree of the acceptance of America's cultural preponderance has been variedly debated. To some scholars, the (western) world has been "invited" to join America's rule, a narrative that has interpreted U.S. actions as the ones of a "benevolent empire".¹⁶ Such an acceptance, however, has been all but uncontested, passive, or automatic. It has required active action and investment on behalf of Washington's policymakers and a subtle degree of coercion to convince people to endorse America's design. As Leon Skerritt writes, Americans "rather than convincing other that their way is the best way, have replaced culture and education with their own, so that their way is our way."¹⁷ This manufactured overlap of interests eventually spread from

¹⁵ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power*.

¹⁶ Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe from 1945-1952", *Diplomatic History*, 23, No. 2 (April 1999): 189-217; Robert Kagan, "The Benevolent Empire", *Foreign Policy*, No. 111 (Summer, 1998): 24-35.

¹⁷ Leon Skerritt, "Reconceptualizing Hegemony in a Global American Century", *Journal of Global Frontlines*, 6, No. 2 (2019): 159.

culture to politics and economics, de facto influencing the most important governmental decisions.

In order to explore and assess the historical origins and consolidation of U.S. hegemony, this thesis will adopt a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from the fields of International Relations, political and diplomatic history, as well as the history of ideas. The main theoretical framework from which it draws is Antonio Gramsci's analysis of hegemony as well as the expansion on his conceptualization provided by the Neo-Gramscian school. But the tools that this work will employ in investigating American exercise of hegemonic power and influence are fully embedded in historical research, as this thesis will chronologically reconstruct the most important watershed that have led to the stratification of America's hegemony throughout most of the twentieth century. Due to such methodological choice, that is, the decision to focus on an analysis of the historical origins of America's hegemony throughout the twentieth century, and due to space constraints too, the thesis does not engage with the ongoing debate over the crisis of America's international leadership.

With the end of the so-called *Pax Americana* and the descent into a more complex, fragmented, polycentric and multipolar world, indeed, and given the rising regional powers challenging the supremacy of the U.S. in the last couple of decades, scholars and pundits alike have challenged the enduring value of America's hegemony. Analysts like Roger C. Altman, Richard H. Naas, and Adam Quinn argue that America's hegemony has entered an inexorable decline, tracing back the origin of such a demise to the ill-advised events that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the long-term consequences of the late 2000s financial crisis.¹⁸ Other scholars, namely Robert Keohane

¹⁸ Roger C. Altman and Richard N. Haass, "American Profligacy and American Power. The Consequences of Fiscal Irresponsibility", *The World Ahead, Foreign Affairs*, 89, No. 6, (November/December 2010): 25-34; Adam Quinn, "The Art of Declining Politely: Obama's

and Paul Kennedy, suggest that U.S. hegemony is following a common trajectory, insofar as relative or absolute decline is inevitable for any great power.¹⁹

However, these analyses seem to underestimate the role that cultural hegemony has played historically in the shaping and execution of American power. Once again, by flattening the discourse of hegemony on hard power, these analyses tend to overlook the *cultural* side of the hegemonic exercise of dominance and its relevance to execute influence and create forms of (imperial) dependency, which a long-term historical overview, like the one that this thesis is proposing, is best equipped to highlight.

The thesis will provide such a reconstruction of the historical manifestation of America's hegemony through four distinct chapters. The first one will be a theoretical chapter and it will examine the general concept of hegemony, from a historical standpoint drawing upon the definition given by Greek historian Thucydides. Thereupon, it will conduct an analysis of the notion of hegemony. The work is designed around the *comparative method*, focusing on three main IR schools of thought: Realism, Liberalism, and Neo-Gramscianism. The choice of restricting the sample upon which the thesis is constructed, is based on the higher accuracy and legitimacy provided by such a small number of cases. As pointed out by David Collier, a greater number of samples leads to a higher number of variables, therefore it diminishes the accuracy and quality of the study.²⁰

Prudent Presidency and the Waning of American Power”, *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), 87, No. 4 (July 2011): 803-824.

¹⁹ Keohane *After Hegemony*; Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman Limited, January 1989).

²⁰ David Collier, “The Comparative Method”, *Political Science: The State of The Discipline II*, 1993, Washington, American Political Association. Accessed at <https://polisci.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/people/u3827/APSA-TheComparativeMethod.pdf>

From the second chapter onward, the thesis will then explore the evolution of hegemony strictly defined in American terms through a reconstruction of America's rise as a global power through the twentieth century. The origins of America's hegemony will be located in the period stretching from the Spanish War of 1898 to 1941; it will proceed to analyze the codification and consolidation of the hegemon in the years ranging from 1945 to 1991, through the perils of the Cold War.

Taken together, the chapters will trace the origins, development and continuous adaptation and transformation of American hegemony. In so doing, the thesis will try to offer new insights into the interpretation of American hegemony: in fact, it will try to prove that cultural dominance has been a necessary tool for the resilience of American global power and its imperialistic expansion, a process, however, that rather than being static has been constantly dynamic, allowing a degree of flexibility that has bent without fully breaking the hegemonic grasp of the United States. The goal is to provide a critical take on those analyses declaring the irreversible decline of America.

Chapter 1

HEGEMONY, *WHAT'S IN A NAME?*

The concept of hegemony made its first appearance in fifth century B.C. Greece, and, in its classical framework, it denotes the exercise of a superior power exerted upon subservient groups or states organized in a hierarchical manner, based upon the material and cultural prestige of the hegemon. It was initially theorized by Thucydides in his *magnus opus* *The History of the Peloponnesian War*.²¹ The Athenian historian had a nuanced understanding of the concept of hegemony, distinguishing three different kinds of dominance: *hêgemonía* *hegemonia* (ἡγεμονία), *arkhe* (ἀρχή), and *despoteia* (δεσποτεία). Although the three terms roughly describe the same type of might, they differ in how the power is obtained, maintained, and used.

Hêgemonía is legitimated leadership, associated with *tîmê* (τιμή) - the gift of honour.²² *Tîmê* was achieved not by force or coercion, it was bestowed informally on a city-state (or a nation) as a reward for principled achievements and honorable contributions to a common cause and it was maintained by consent. For instance, during the Peloponnesian War, Athens was given the title of hegemon given her consequential military contribution in the Peloponnesian war as well as her intellectual, artistic, and athletic accomplishments that had previously earned her the title of “School of Hellas.”²³ Upholding a hegemonic status requires good behavior by the powerful state for it to sustain and increase its influence. Nonetheless, hegemony can be lost much more easily than it is gained. Should the ruling

²¹ Tucidade, *La Guerra del Peloponneso*, trans. Franco Ferrari (Milano: BUR Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 2009).

²² Shallon Perlman, “Hegemony and Arkhe in Greece: Fourth Century Views”, in Richard Lebow and Barry Staruss (eds.), *Hegemonic Rivalry from Thucydides to the Nuclear Age* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991): 269-88.

²³ Russel Meiggs, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

power prioritize its self-interests and gains (ὠφέλειᾶ), then its decline becomes inevitable. Bad leadership may lead to military defeats, economic crises, unilateral decisions that border the despotic and produce contempt (καταφρόνηση) leading to the loss of support and loyalty, destroying the hegemon and generating instability. Furthermore, in some instances, the hegemon may opt for a retrenchment, a voluntary forsworn of its status.

Therefore, according to its classical conceptualization, *hegemonia* is more than mere material capabilities, it requires a degree of compliance by allies and sub-states who must see the submission as conducive to national or communal interests, such as economic advantages or military protection. By making the allies loyal partners, hegemony can endure even after its military and economic might has weakened. As stated, in addition to acquiescence, to survive the hegemon must provide both tangible rewards and must wield its powers prudently, foregoing national short-term gains in favor of the long-term stability and prosperity of the alliance.²⁴ According to Thucydides, hegemony can be acquired either by war or by establishing friendly governments. Behaving in a way consistent with its timé and values is the only way this dominant position can be preserved without descending into arkhé or despoteia. In its classical framework, hegemony was subjected to constant challenges and to be maintained it often required wars. Nonetheless, diplomacy remained the first option.²⁵

On the other hand, arkhé connotated something akin to direct, formal political control and it relied more on material capabilities rather than

²⁴ Richard Ned Lebow and Robert Kelly, *Goodbye Hegemony! Power and Influence in The Global System* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, March 2014). A chapter of the book was first published as a journal article: Richard Ned Lebow and Robert Kelly “Thucydides and Hegemony: Athens and The United States”, *Review of International Studies*, 27 (2001): 593-609.

²⁵ David Wilkinson, “Hêgemonía: Hegemony, Classical and Modern”, *Journal of World-Systems*, 14, No. 2 (2008):119-141.

ideology and values. It denoted a type of rule imposed by force and it implied a stronger, less voluntary form of subjugation. The difference between *arkhé* and *hegemonia* is subtle and, as I will discuss briefly, the classical conceptualization of hegemony is very similar to what Gramsci theorized in his Prison Notebooks.

Lastly, Thucydides described a third type of exercise of power: *despoteia* which corresponds to what scholars would later call despotism or tyranny. It is a power based only on brute force, imposed without consent and against the will of the dominated people, much like the Nazi's occupation of Europe in the 1940s's, the Soviet Union of the late 1980's in Eastern Europe, or today's North Korea.²⁶ In his History of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides warned that empires based only on force (what contemporary IR scholars call *hard power*) cannot endure and will eventually fall.

In ancient Rome, the terms *arkhé* and *hegemonia* both fell under the term *imperium* (command) from which today's word empire derives. Thus, from then on, empire and hegemony have become somewhat synonyms, so much that modern IR schools of thought conflate *hegemonia* and *arkhé* into the same expression of power.

In the following centuries, the term was seldomly used and it resurfaced in the XVIII century to describe the power relations between Hellenic city-states in the classical period.²⁷ It came to denote the leadership role both Piedmont and Prussia took on in relation with their regional counterparts in the process of national unification of Italy and Germany.²⁸ Thereafter, the term was adopted by Vincenzo Gioberti in his *Rinnovamento Civile d'Italia*, referring to the supremacy status of command that in ancient Greek and Rome

²⁶ Lebow and Kelly "Thucydides and Hegemony", 595.

²⁷ Giuseppe Cospito, "Egemonia/ egemonico nei 'Quaderni del carcere' (e prima)", *International Gramsci Journal*, 2, No. 1, (2016): 49-88.

²⁸ *Ibid* p. 50.

was attributed on ethical and moral grounds hence not legal or juridical prominence.²⁹

1.1 Hegemony and Ideology

The concept of hegemony has been a debated topic in the late XIX century, especially among Marxists. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx never directly mentioned the term “hegemony”, opting for the locution the *Herrschende Klasse* (the ruling class), always related to political and economic terms and contextualized in the class struggle of the proletariat. He did, however, acknowledge that “The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the idea of its ruling class.”³⁰ Afterwards, the concept became central during the Second International of 1889-1916, remaining still rigidly confined in a socio-economic rhetoric.

Apart from a fleeting suggestion by Engels, the Italian philosopher Antonio Labriola was the first to identify the nexus between dominance and consensus in every type of power dynamic, be it among people or nations.³¹ In the Bolshevik debate, the term *gegemoniya* (гегемония) was first discussed by Georgij Plechanov affirming the necessity of an “elite leadership”, a “proletarian vanguard” as Lenin would later frame it, in order to guide the illiterate masses in their revolution against the bourgeoisie, in the context of backward cultural situations (i.e., the Russian empire of the XIX century).³²

In Lenin, the word hegemony makes its first explicit appearance in 1911, in relation to the duty of the proletariat to assume a leading role in the

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Thomas R. Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony”, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36, No. 2 (April-June 1975): 351-366.

³¹ Ibid p. 52.

³² Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony”, 352 and Cospito, “Egemonia/ egemonico nei ‘Quaderni del carcere’ (e prima)”, 52.

revolution and in opposition to the Mensheviks who advocated for a liberal leadership and in contrast to Trotsky who, at that time, was developing his “permanent revolution” theory.³³ In his following works, Lenin referred to the concept of hegemony indirectly by adopting words such as “leadership” and “management”.³⁴ Furthermore, Lenin limited his understanding of it to economic and political grounds. In keeping the Marxist distinction of base and superstructure, he considered culture as ancillary to hegemonic dominance, thus developing his own theory of imperialism as “the highest stage of capitalism” as a response to the alienation of the masses and their apathy towards a revolutionary consciousness.³⁵ In the prelude and immediate aftermath of the October Revolution of 1917, the term was shelved by the Bolshevik Congress, preoccupied with the instauration of the Soviet dictatorship. In the X Congress of 1920, it reappeared as a strategic tool in the stipulation of the “common front”, the alliance between workers and farmers.³⁶

1.2 Gramsci and the Rise of Modern Hegemony

The first time the term hegemony appears in Gramsci’s works is in the article *Contro il federalismo*, of August 19th, 1916, re-emerging in other writings in 1917, albeit confined to the Marxist conceptualization thus, limited to the economic domain. In 1919, in his *L’Italia, le Alleanze e le Colonie*, hegemony comes to assume a broader meaning referring also to the political and military authority of the Anglo-Saxon bloc, given the economic and political alliance

³³ Cospito, “Egemonia/ egemonico nei ‘Quaderni del carcere’ (e prima)”, 53.

³⁴ Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony”, 352.

³⁵ Vladimir I. Lenin, “Imperialism the Highest Stage of Capitalism”, in *Essential Works of Lenin*, Henry M. Christman ed. (New York: Bantam, 1966): 177-270.

³⁶ Cospito, “Egemonia/ egemonico nei ‘Quaderni del carcere’ (e prima)”, 54.

amongst the United States, the United Kingdom, and France after WWI.³⁷ After his Muscovite and Viennese stay in 1923-1924, there comes the first explicit reference to hegemony as the economic and political dominance of the ruling class over the subservient one. In his Prison Notebooks (*Quaderni del Carcere*), the concept of hegemony is the *fil rouge* of the collection appearing from the very first Notebook §43, 44.³⁸

In his work, Gramsci elaborates a new ‘theory of hegemony’ which is based on the key role given to the control of culture and built on the “philosophy of praxis”. The philosophy of praxis, central to Gramsci’s ideology, was a re-interpretation of ‘historical materialism’ that differed from the one elaborated by Marx and it predicated the idea of hegemony on “historical-political” grounds in disagreement with the “mechanistic and fatalistic concepts of economism” articulated by Marx.³⁹

Therefore, similarly to Thucydides, Gramsci distinguished between mere ‘domination’, which rested upon the dominant group’s coercion of the subordinate one, and ‘hegemony’ which makes use of both ‘domination’ and, most importantly, ‘consensus building’. Thus, for Gramsci, the very essence of the concept of hegemony lays on the idea of the subordinates’ *willful acquiescence* to the existent social order. According to Marx, culture (hence hegemony) belonged to the ‘superstructure’ and was an ideological by-product of the ‘base/substructure’ (that is the socioeconomic organization of a society) which determines the processes of the superstructure, consequently a complete breakdown of the existing societal order was necessary for the reshaping of power. Whereas, Gramsci expanded the idea both of culture

³⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *L’Ordine Nuovo. 1919.1920*, V. Gerratana and A.A. Santucci (eds.) (Turin: Einaudi, 1987): 11.

³⁸ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del Carcere*, ed. V. Gerratana (Turin, Einaudi, 1975) and *Prison Notebooks, Volume 1*, ed. Joseph. A. Buttigieg, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992): 148.

³⁹ Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony”, 352.

(hence the exercise of hegemony) and superstructure dividing it into two main “floors”: civil society and political society. Civil society is composed of “private organisms” (churches, institutions, schools, foundations,...) which directly contribute to the formation of political and social consciousness.⁴⁰ Political society is identified with the state, namely all the public institutions (government, police, army, tribunals ...) which wield “direct dominion”.⁴¹ The ruling class moves on both these “floors” but in different fashion: civil society is the marketplace of ideas, where intellectuals fabricate, promote, and sell culture and values to the subservient class. According to Gramsci, the intellectuals are always at the service of the ruling power, going so far as to affirm that “an independent class of intellectuals does not exist”. Their main role is to create hegemony of the ruling class by convincing the subordinates to accept the world view of the dominants and to believe that what benefits the ruler is also beneficial to them.⁴² Were civil society to fail at extending consensus, there political society intervenes: the State’s coercive apparatus is set in motion to discipline those who ‘rebel’ to the status quo and to establishes dominance by force. For Gramsci, consent and coercion always coexist but, in contemporary capitalist societies, hegemony is wielded mostly through the former not the latter. The ability of the hegemon lays in the capacity to persuade the subservient groups into believing it has moral, political, ethical, and material authority thus convincing them to bestow onto it legitimacy and creating the perception that the power ‘came from below’,

⁴⁰ In modern times, the concept of “civil society” was first analyzed by English Economists and philosophers like John Lock, in regard to the relation between the state and the private. Later, it was examined by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right* (1821), who redefined civil society as a “realm of chaos and corruption”, in opposition with the state, symbol of order and universal values. In the late XIX century, Marx adopted Hegel’s idea of state attributing to it a negative connotation arguing that the state does not represent universal values, and it cannot transcend private interests.

⁴¹ Antonio Gramsci, *Gli Intellettuali e l’Organizzazione della Cultura* (Turin: Einaudi, 1966): 9.

⁴² Bates, “Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony”, 353.

that it was given by autonomous choice. The subordinates are manipulated into believing that what is best for the hegemon is best for them, so much that this belief becomes *forma mentis*, “common sense”. However, as Jackson Lears and Stuart Hall will later theorize, this common sense is a “paradox” and a “false consciousness”, for their belief was not independently created.⁴³ Furthermore, in his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci theorizes that the process of hegemonic consolidation also involves the creation of a “historical bloc”, meaning an alliance of different classes or states under the dominant’s configuration of institutions, ideologies, and material productions which in turn drive collective action. The Italian philosopher provides the example of the French Revolution of 1789, during which the bourgeoisie and the popular masses combined forces under the guide of the Jacobins with a shared goal and under the mutually accepted ideals of “equality, fraternity, and liberty”.

It seems clear that hegemony, as described so far, is an effective and formidable means of exercising power, flying under the radar without ever being acknowledged. The real power of the hegemon stems from the ability to influence and modify the desires and beliefs of the subjugated groups in ways that are way more subtle than usually thought. Lastly, much like Thucydides theorized in the fifth century B.C., for Gramsci hegemony is “a historical process which needs to be continually renewed, recreated, and defended”.⁴⁴

The reformulation of hegemonic power as control of culture and the formative means through which it is created and propagated constituted a watershed between nineteenth and twentieth century Marxism.

⁴³ T. J. Jackson Lears, “The concept of Cultural Hegemony: problems and possibilities”, *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985): 567-593 and Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees”, *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10 (1986): 28 - 44.

⁴⁴ Sujeong Kim, “Hegemony and Cultural Resistance”, *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 10 (2001): 743.

1.3 Gramsci's Long-Lasting Influence and Criticism

In Gramscian scholarship, hegemony is presented as the ability to implement, through persuasion and public manipulation, ideas which are sold as “common sense” and as mutually beneficial for both the ruling group and the subjugated ones, even when, in reality, they are not.⁴⁵

Gramsci's ideas were later expanded by the Neo-Gramscian school. Neo-Gramscianism extends Gramsci's philosophy to the world stage, identifying the Marxist idea of ‘ruling class’ with the dominant state and the Marxist ‘working class’ with the subjugated states. What differentiates the Neo-Gramscian school from other IR schools is the theorization of hegemony as built not only on sheer material power but on both dominance *and* consent, bestowed on the basis of political and ideological leadership.⁴⁶ Therefore, the broader application of Gramsci's critical theory of class struggle to the relations between states and their power dynamics is what differentiates Gramscianism from Neo-Gramscianism. Moreover, as this chapter will later explain, in contrast with Realism and Neoliberalism, Neo-Gramscianism asks not only *why* but also *how* world order is established and the status quo maintained.

One of the leading scholars of the Neo Gramscian school is Robert Cox. In 1981, Cox theorized that “hegemony is based on a coherent conjunction or fit between a configuration of material power, the prevalent collective image of world order and a set of institutions (the three forces model) that administer the order with a certain semblance of universality”.⁴⁷ Thus in Neo-Gramscianism, the main actor is the state, but contrarily to Realism and Liberalism, the idea of state is extended to include the two Gramscian ‘floors’

⁴⁵ Chris Brown and Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*.

⁴⁶ Giovanni Arrighi, “The Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism,” *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center), 13, No. 3 (Summer, 1990): 365-408.

⁴⁷ Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory”, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 10, No. 2 (June 1981): 139.

of political and civil society. Furthermore, in 1996, Robert Cox argued that his three forces model could be applied to the international order and could be effectively translated into “social forces, forms of state, and world orders” that are strictly interdependent and thus a shift in one would trigger “a change in the structure itself”.⁴⁸ For Cox (and NeoGramscianism), hegemony exists when the dominant state is able to mold the world according to its interests building consent through ideologies, institutions, and economic incentives that work not only in favor of the functioning and continuation of its hegemonic status but also offer a prospect of satisfaction and apparent benefits for the subjugated states.⁴⁹ Cox goes on to argue that there are three necessary conditions for hegemony to exist: (1) a global dominant mode of production, (2) a dominant state/coalition of states, (3) an international institution which sets a normative rule of conduct for the states, shaped according to the interest of the hegemon.⁵⁰ These institutions are created and structured by the dominant state, they are inspired by its values and ideologies percolating into the international economic structure and they help the hegemon to retain its status. Moreover, Cox describes five criteria that identify international organizations as the expression of the hegemon:

- (1) they embody the rules which facilitate the expansion of hegemonic world orders;
- (2) they are themselves the product of the hegemonic world order;
- (3) they ideologically legitimate the norms of the world

⁴⁸ Robert W. Cox, “Part II Theory”, in *Approaches to world order*, in Robert W. Cox and T.J. Sinclair (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996):41-190.

⁴⁹ Robert W. Cox, *Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987):7.

⁵⁰ Robert W. Cox, “Production and Hegemony: Toward a Political Economy of World Order”, in *The Emerging International Economic Order: Dynamic Processes, Constraints, and Opportunities*, Harold K. Jacobson and Susan Sidjanski (eds.), (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982): 45.

order; (4) they co-opt the elites from the peripheral countries; and (5) they absorb counter-hegemonic ideas.⁵¹

The Neo-Gramscian school sees international institutions as pawns in the hands of the hegemon, their main objective is to legitimize the status of the dominant state in the eyes of the other subaltern actors. By co-opting elites and intellectuals and by dominating international organizations, the hegemonic power is able to win hearts and minds – consent– and vastly reduces the need for force. The hegemon’s ideas percolate into the mainstream and they become *forma mentis*, following what I would call “trickledown ideology”.⁵² Consequently, American hegemony can be perfectly explained and understood through the lenses of Gramsci’s analysis as well as Neo-Gramscianism.

Hence, the American historical bloc and its legitimating ideologies of liberal democracy and liberalism/capitalism perpetuated, promulgated, and strengthened by the international institutions created by the United States, ensure its survival shielding it from challengers and shepherding it through systemic changes. Furthermore, drawing from Gramsci’s theory and example of the class alliance of the French Revolution, it is possible to extend the concept of historical bloc and “group collaboration under the lead of a dominant actor” to the wider international sphere of states and various military and economic partnerships (i.e.; NATO, IMF, UN, and WTO) which operate under the guidance of said leader (the United States) in accordance with shared values of liberal democracy and capitalism. Additionally, cooperation and integration are seen as default outcomes of such an order.

⁵¹ Robert W. Cox, “Production and Hegemony: Toward a Political Economy of World Order”, 172.

⁵² The idiom “trickledown ideology” is a wordplay on the economic theory “trickledown economics”, with a cultural twist.

1.4 Gramsci's Legacies on IR Theories

Since the formulation of Neo-Gramscian theories, hegemony has remained a highly debatable concept; its fluid definition changes depending on the interpretation of the nature of power, the way it is acquired and retained. To identify the most significant difference between conflicting notions of hegemony, it is essential to understand the core distinction between direct and indirect powers and the way they are wielded.

Direct power refers to the use of tangible assets, it encompasses military and economic capabilities and coercion. *Indirect power*, on the other hand, cannot be measured given that it is constituted of intangible assets, like the ability of persuasion. For Realists direct power (hard power) is the determining factor in the attribution of a dominant status, meanwhile for (Neo)Liberals, indirect power (soft and smart power) and its application in the international arena is what awards the hegemonic status to a contender.

Realism is a set of IR theories that place the state as the central actor in all international relations and is considered to be the dominant school of thought. Notable scholars like Robert Gilpin and Steven E. Miller argue that realism is more than the theorization of world dynamics, it is a “philosophical disposition and set of assumptions about the world rather than as in any strict sense a ‘scientific theory’.”⁵³ It comprises of three main branches: classical and neo-Realism (also known as structural Realism), offensive and defensive Realism, and, lastly, Neo-classical Realism. They share seven fundamental beliefs: (1) states are the main actors, (2) states’ behavior is influenced both by internal dynamics and external circumstances, (3) the international system is fundamentally anarchic, (4) states’ main goal is survival, their behavior is

⁵³ Robert G. Gilpin, “The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism”, *International Organization*, 38, No. 2, (Spring 1984): 289-290.

tailored accordingly, thus the struggle for power is inevitable, (6) following the assumption of a zero-sum game, states will use force to maximize and retain power, to the benefit of the strongest states and at the expense of the lesser states, lastly (7) states are assumed to be rational actors, hence operate in a rather predictable way.⁵⁴ The key difference lays in the motives behind the *why* states go to war. At its core, Realism assumes that material capabilities are essential for the establishment of hegemony. Under the umbrella of material capabilities, fall economic and military might, size of population, political stability, and strength.⁵⁵ Given that Realists theorize the inevitability of conflict for power acquisition and retention, the most valuable asset is a strong military, which lays the foundation of world dominance. Therefore, as Barry Posen argues, the United States is perfectly positioned to be the hegemon due to its command of the sea, air, land, and space.⁵⁶ Moreover, Mearsheimer states “no other state has the military wherewithal to put up a serious fight against the U.S.” adding that hegemony means “domination of the system, which is usually interpreted to be the entire world”.⁵⁷ Additionally, the United States can count on the strongest military alliance (NATO) and more than 800 bases worldwide.⁵⁸ Moreover, for realists as noted by Gilpin, hegemony is a recurrent phenomenon, it is a political shift that re-proposes whenever a “single state dominates over

⁵⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2001):29-55.

⁵⁵ Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979): 131.

⁵⁶ Barry R. Posen, “Command of the Commons: The Military Foundation of US Hegemony”, *International Security*, 28, No. 1 (2003): 5-46.

⁵⁷ Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 41.

⁵⁸ David Vine, Patterson Deppen, and Leah Bolger “Drawdown: Improving US and Global Security Through Military Base Closures Abroad”, *Quincy Institute for Responsible Craftmanship*, September 2021. Accessed at <file:///Users/cristinapessina/Downloads/QUINCY-BRIEF-NO.-16-SEPT-2021-VINE-1.pdf>); see also US Department of Defense, “Base Structure Report—Fiscal Year 2018 Baseline: A Summary of the Real Property Inventory Data” *Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment*, 2018. https://www.acq.osd.mil/eie/BSI/BEI_Library.html.

others”.⁵⁹ According to Christopher Layne, hegemony alters the anarchic structure of the state based system creating a hierarchical order.⁶⁰ Realists consider hegemony as part of an imperial type of structure, which conflates it with unipolarity. By definition, a unipolar systems structurally revolves around a pole, that is the predominant state, which rules unchallenged over the others. The more powerful a state is, the more it goes unchallenged, and the very existence of a hegemon testifies the failure of counterbalancing dynamics between states, which paradoxically repudiates the balance of power theory, one of the most known classical realist concepts.⁶¹

Nonetheless, some Realists like Cornelia Beyer, propose that in today’s world a more nuanced definition of hegemony is needed. In a way comparable with Thucydides and Gramsci, Beyer argues that although material capabilities (hard power) are paramount, hegemony requires more. Additional variables are the willingness and capacity to lead as well as the exercise of soft power. This realist conceptualization puts emphasis on the ideological sway of the hegemon, in a similar fashion to Neo-Gramscianism. However, Neo-Realists and Neo-Gramscianists disagree on the decisive factor for hegemony: the former still value material capabilities as the decisive asset, the latter consider ideology the essential weapon to establish world dominance, given that influencing lesser states to change and adapt their belief system to match that of the hegemon is more sustainable and profitable in the long run.

⁵⁹ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 29.

⁶⁰ Christopher Layne, “The Unipolar Illusion: why new great power will rise”, *International Security*, 17, No. 4 (Spring 1983): 5-51 and *The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006): 4.

⁶¹ William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World”, *International Security*, 24, No. 1 (1999): 9.

Lastly, the Liberal and Neo-Liberal schools of thought share some ideas both with Realists and Neo-Gramscianists. Similarly, to Realists, Liberals do not disregard the importance of material capabilities however, they contend that hard power alone is not sufficient to secure the hegemonic status. Much like Neo-Gramscianists, Liberals (and Neo-Liberals) attribute a predominant role to *how* leadership is exercised and the willingness of the dominant state to establish and maintain its hegemonic status. Moreover, they stress the importance of consent which leads to a more stable and enduring form of hegemony. Furthermore, as theorized by Robert Keohane, hegemony is more closely related to consensus than brute force, “it is related in complex ways to cooperation and to institutions such as international regimes [...] the hegemon plays a distinctive role providing partners with leadership in return for deference”.⁶² He differentiates an imperial power from a hegemonic one, given that the latter cannot “enforce rules without a certain degree of consent for other states”.⁶³

For Liberals and Neo-Liberals, hegemony is directly correlated to the economy, so much that , building on Charles Kindleberger theory for whom the lack of a hegemon in the interwar period led to political and economic instability,⁶⁴ Keohane argues that not only hegemony and international stability are linked but “the decline of hegemonic structures of power can be expected to presage a decline in strength of corresponding international economic regimes”.⁶⁵ Given that capitalism is the current predominant economic model, the liberal school of thought concords with the Gramscian and Neo-Gramscian ones who argue that “any ‘crisis of hegemony’ will necessarily be at the same time—and more fundamentally—a crisis of

⁶² Keohane, *After Hegemony*, 46.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression: 1929-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013, 40th edition).

⁶⁵ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, 132.

capitalism”.⁶⁶ Ikenberry goes on to state that “Liberal hegemonic order relies on shared interests and the rule of law” thus, it is not built on sheer force and coercion but persuasion and good leadership. The main difference between Liberals and Gramscianist/Neo-Gramscianists lays in the perception of what is beneficial for all parties. The first group contends that there are legitimate shared advantages between states, the second argues that such belief is misleading and that the international order is influenced and manipulated into believing that there are common interests, when in reality the hegemon dictates what is best for it and the subordinates are persuaded into accepting the status quo.⁶⁷ In 1990, John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan formulated the theory of “exercise of power through socialization”. They argued that hegemony can be wielded in three ways: (1) directly through complete imperial domination, (2) indirectly through manipulation of material incentives by gaining acquiescence through consent, and (3) by altering the substantive beliefs of leaders in other nations. This last point, de facto overlaps with Neo-Gramscianism, seeing that the authors explain how “foreign elites buy into the hegemon’s vision of international order [...] they internalize the norms and values of the hegemon [...] and accept its normative claims about the nature of the international system”.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Keohane, *After Hegemony*, 42 and for an in-depth analysis of the nexus capitalism-hegemony see, Giovanni Arrighi, “Hegemony Unravelling, Part I”, *New Lefty Review*, 32 (March/April 2005): 23-81 and “Hegemony Unravelling, Part II”, *New Left Review*, 33 (May/June 2005): 83-116.

⁶⁷ John G. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Orde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011): 55, 61-71, 74.

⁶⁸ John G. Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, “Socialization and Hegemonic Power”, *International Organization*, 44, No.3 (Summer 1990): 285, 289.

Chapter 2

THE BIRTH OF A GLOBAL EMPIRE

When Ancient Rome transitioned from Republic to Empire, Augustus Caesar commissioned the renowned poet Virgil to write an epic poem, the Aeneid, about the mythical founding of Rome. Every newborn nation has the compelling need to create a narrative about its origins, one that renders it unique and exceptional. Nowhere in recent modern history is this more apparent than in the United States, where, since 1776, the ideas of “Manifest Destiny”, “American Exceptionalism”, and “national uniqueness” have been the ideological ground for global expansion and imperial endeavors have been declined in messianic terms, upholding the belief that colonization was a moral obligation, the goal was spreading the Anglo Saxon culture believed to be the highest expression of human civilization.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For an analysis of the origins of the Anglo-American identity between 1776-1850 see Eric Kaufmann, “American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Anglo Saxon Ethnogenesis in the ‘Universal’ Nation”, *Journal of American Studies*, 33, No. 3, Part.1, Women in America (Dec. 1999):437-457. The divine mission to civilize the world is entrenched in the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) idea of racial superiority engrained in American (and British) history. Its declination has been with America since the early days of the colonies in the mission to subdue, civilize or exterminate Native Americans, to the imperial moment of 1898, the WASP movement of the 1910s-1920s with the rise of the Klux Klux Klan and anti-immigrant sentiments. See, Kenton J. Clymer, *Protestant Missionaries in the Philippines, 1898-1916: An Inquiry into the American Colonial Mentality* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Kenneth Pomeranz “Empire and ‘civilizing’ mission, Past and Present”, *Daedalus*, 134, No. 2, (spring 2005):34-45; Stuart Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895-1904* (Rutherford, N.J.: UNKNO, 1981): 62-72, 174-178; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, U.S.: Harvard University Press, 1981): 1-6, 298-303. On the intellectual roots and the propagation of the myth of US exceptionalism, see Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Serge Ricard, "The Exceptionalist Syndrome in US Continental and Overseas Expansion," in *Reflections on American Exceptionalism*, David K. Adams and Cornelis A. van Minnen (eds.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994): 73-82. For an overview of the ancestral belief of “empire of Liberty” see Richard Immerman, *Empire for Liberty: A History of American Imperialism from Benjamin Franklin to Paul Wolfowitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). For an investigation into the connection between Britain and the US, the idea of race, and the messianic duty to uplift the Global

The self-perceived idea of a quasi-divine mission has been with America since the beginning. The first settlers who landed on American shores and established the first colonies believed they had been entrusted by God with a special task, to provide a model for the other nations of the Earth, as John Winthrop would famously declared, the New World colonies were believed to be a “shining city upon a hill”.⁷⁰ The idea of ‘American exceptionalism’ is closely tied to the formation of the nation’s identity and dates back to the Revolution, when the Founding Fathers imagined a new nation, separate, independent, and radically different from its European counterparts.⁷¹ The espoused intention was to create a new Republic, that rid itself from the sins of the Old World and was immune from the colonial and imperialist impulses that had characterized it. America itself was the product of a revolutionary and anti-colonial war fought to gain independence from the greatest power of the time, the British Empire. The new nation prided itself of being different and destined to rebuke the ways of the European powers and prosper under the principles of the Enlightenment and values such as freedom of worship, liberty, and free trade, upon which it was established.⁷² This anti-imperialist

South during the overseas imperial stage see Paul A. Kramer, “Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880-1910”, *The Journal of American History*, 88, No. 4, (Mar. 2002): 1315-1353.

⁷⁰ The expression “a shining city upon a hill” was coined by John Winthrop, an English Puritan lawyer, before he and his fellow colonists embarked on the ship *Arbella* to settle Boston, in 1630. The soon to be first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, believed the new settlement represented a beacon of hope for the world. Although the phrase was supposed to describe the New England colony, from the XIX century onwards, it came to represent the American Republic as a whole. It has become synonym with ‘American exceptionalism’ and has gained fortune and popularity during the Cold War years, becoming from then on almost omnipresent in political speeches from John F. Kennedy to Reagan, from Bush to Obama.

⁷¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective* (New York: Norton and Company, 1963, 1st edition); see also James W. Ceaser, “The Origins and Character of American Exceptionalism”, *American Political Thought*, 1, No. 1 (2012): 3–28 and Peter S. Onuf, “American Exceptionalism and National Identity”, *American Political Thought*, 1, No. 1 (Spring 2012):77-100.

⁷² Thomas McCormick, “From Old Empire to New. The changing dynamics and tactics of American Empire”, in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American*

narrative was enshrined into the Declaration of Independence “Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the *consent of the governed*” and in the Constitution, putting great emphasis on the right to self-determination and on a state built on the consent of its citizens.

The contradiction between the espoused principles of the New Republic and the colonial aspiration quickly became evident, the tension between imperial ambitions and the belief in liberty and self-determination clashed with the reality of continental expansion. The idealistic view of an “Empire of liberty” promoted by Jefferson was in stark contrast with the mistreatment of Native Americans and the colonial attitude towards the mainland, believed to be an empty unkept territory destined to be occupied.⁷³

2.1 A Republic with Imperial Aspirations

Imperialist ambitions arose as soon as autonomy was achieved, when talks of continental expansion were brought up by some of the Founding Fathers, namely Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine, who welcomed the idea that America could establish an empire “benevolent in nature,” in opposition to the British one, who they condemned for their violent colonial policies.⁷⁴ An isolationist tendency coexisted with the expansionist one, yet it was not anti-imperialist per se. In 1796, in his leave take address “Letters to Friends and Citizens”, George Washington warned against the threats of political factionalism and interference by European powers in the nation's domestic affairs, cautioned against the diversion of public funds toward foreign wars, which endangered the stability of the Republic, urging Americans to

State, Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (eds.), (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009): 63

⁷³David Reynold, *America, Empire of liberty*, (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

⁷⁴ ‘The Benevolent empire’ is a concept that developed in the 1790s, inspired by the revival of the Second Great Awakening. The term was used to describe a network of Protestant societies dedicated to the spread of Christianity and advocated for social reform.

subordinate sectional jealousies to common national interests.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, as the years progressed the settlers' continental colonialism did not stop.⁷⁶

By the end of the XIX century, the number of states and territories under US rule increased, spanning from coast to coast. Thus, one question arises: was the continental conquest not a de facto imperial endeavor? If one were to define an empire as "territories organized under the rule and dominion of one political power", it follows that, from its very inception, the United States was indeed *born* as an empire and its earliest actions reflected this origin story.⁷⁷ Today, many scholars subscribe to the interpretation of the U.S. continental expansion and consolidation as an inherently imperial endeavor. Therefore, building on the preface that the United States is an empire, the goal becomes to identify the ways in which such an empire was built, rather than arguing over its very existence. Drawing from Thomas McCormick analysis, it is possible to establish not one, but three imperial stages in U.S. history, 1) the Continental Empire, 2) the Overseas Empire, and 3) Informal Empire.⁷⁸

During the first phase, the Continental moment, the main objective was to conquer land to secure future prosperity and commercial freedom. The innate

⁷⁵ George Washington, *George Washington Papers, Series 2, Letterbooks -1799: Letterbook 24, April 3, 1793 - March 3, 1797*. 1793. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Accessed at <https://www.loc.gov/item/mgw2.024/>

⁷⁶ Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: a History of the Greater United States*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019), and Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire. The Era of territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁷⁷ During the first imperial moment (continental empire), US expansionism took the form of 'settler colonialism', following the paradigm of European colonial blueprint. Settler colonialism is characterized by the eradication of indigenous people and their culture and the replacement with the settler society. Much has been written on early US settler colonialism and the impact it had on national identity building, see, for example, Marilyn Lake, *Progressive New World: How Settler Colonialism and Transpacific Exchange Shaped American Reform* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2019); Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire*.

For an analysis on the inter-articulation of settler colonialism and white identity see, Arghiri Emmanuel, "White-Settler Colonialism and the Myth of Investment Imperialism," *New Left Review*, 73, (May/June 1972): 35-57.

⁷⁸ McCormick, "From Old Empire to New", 63-79.

imperial attitude is what led the colonies to extend Westward and Southward during the XIX century, albeit, at times, such colonization took different forms if compared to the European models of expansion. In fact, part of the new territories was bought not conquered, as for the case of the Louisiana Purchase, in 1803, acquired from France for \$15 million, or the Florida Purchase of 1819, bought from Spain for \$5 million. However, most of the expansion was the result of wars and the extirpation and removal of Native Americans.

The XIX century continental expansionism ended when the Census Bureau declared the closure of the frontier in 1890. There was no remaining tract of nationally owned land without settlers and so, driven by the need to protect commercial activities and insulate the nation from the dangers of European Empires, the United States began to look overseas in search of new territories to acquire. At the turn of the century, the lingering preoccupation for further expansion drove the nation to turn its gaze towards the Pacific.

The second stage of American imperialism coincided with the closing of the frontier and the increased interest toward overseas territories. It was from the second half of the 19th century onward that the continental U.S. (the so-called “logo map”) changed to encompass overseas territories in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Latin America.⁷⁹ In 1856, well before the imperial moment of 1898-1899, the United States directed its attention to Asia and proclaimed ownership of a group of small islands dispersed in the Pacific. That same year, US Congress, successfully lobbied by American farmers, passed the “Guano Island Act”, effectively taking control of any of these enclaves as long as they did not belong to any other nation. These islands

⁷⁹ Brooke L. Blower, “Nation of outposts *Diplomatic History*, 41, No. 3, (June 2017):439–459.

were precious for their richness in guano, an important natural fertilizer until then under British monopoly.⁸⁰

As argued by Charles Maier, the U.S. was acting as an “empire among empires.”⁸¹ The British had repeatedly tried to limit the influence of their former colony by first trying to reconquer it in 1812, and then by hindering its expansion. The Spanish and the French had also been on America’s doorstep from the early days of the Republic and, seeing that the U.S. military preparedness and economic strength was meager if compared to the European counterparts, much of the early dealings happened through monetary exchange and land purchase.

As the years progressed, the rivalry with European powers did not fade, on the contrary, it grew and coexisted with the ambition, on U.S. part, of territorial conquest and increasing hostility towards the European presence in the Caribbean and Pacific, which the U.S. had come to regard as a *Mare Nostrum*, an American Lake.⁸² Already in 1808, Thomas Jefferson with its “Large Policy” had tried to restrain the dangerous menace, later the Monroe Doctrine (1823) emphasized and de facto finalized such partition. The objective was to push the European powers out of America’s orbit, an imperial rollback from the continent.⁸³ The Republic timidly flirted with the idea of becoming an overseas empire with the acquisitions of 1856.

⁸⁰ Ruth Oldenziel, “Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire”, in *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Techno politics in the Global Cold War*, ed. Gabrielle Hecht, (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2011):18.

⁸¹ Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires. American Ascendancy and its Predecessors*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁸² McCormick, “From Old Empire to New”, 63-79; see also A. Pillet, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 54, (July 1914): 131-133 and Mark T. Gilderhus, “The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications”, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 36, No. 1 (March 2006): 5-16; Herring, George C. (2008). *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations Since 1776*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁸³ The term ‘imperial rollback’ is used here to describe the process and policies put in place to push out European powers from the Western hemisphere. It is a reference to the “rollback strategy” of Communist regimes during the Cold War years.

However, it is only after 1898 that the imperial machine had effectively been activated.⁸⁴ Being confined to a hemispheric power player was now insufficient, the new goal was to extend the dominant presence to the Pacific. The Spanish-American War greatly facilitated the transition. During most of the second half of the XIX century, America looked inward and was kept occupied with the fallout and reconstruction that followed the Civil War. Nonetheless, starting from 1880s, the winds began to shift and policies such as the “Big Brother Policy”, an extension of the Monroe Doctrine formulated by James G. Blaine, gave the United States the necessary thrust to enact its ambitions.⁸⁵

The 1890s ushered new changes that forever altered American foreign policy, creating the perfect combination for the enactment of the imperialist vision through the exercise of hegemonic leadership. An example of this newfound U.S. hegemonic vocation was the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, signed in 1901, which conferred to the United States exclusive rights to build a canal across the Isthmus of Panama.⁸⁶ In coincidence with this bold move, the U.S. government convinced Great Britain to formally accept the Monroe Doctrine (and its Roosevelt Corollary), de facto recognizing the right of the United States to act and intervene in the Americas. Another element of this new hegemonic stage was the expansion of the federal power at home, which served the purposes of the consolidation of U.S. power as it created a centralization necessary to execute hegemony both on a continental and on a world scale.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*.

⁸⁵ Sidney Lens, *The Forging of the American Empire. From the Revolution to Vietnam, a history of US Imperialism*, (London: Pluto Press, 2003): 464.

⁸⁶ McCormick, “From Old Empire to New”, 68

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

2.2 A Hegemon among Empires

The U.S. had graduated from a continental to an overseas power, acting as an empire amongst other empires. This stage of initial global projection of U.S. imperialism (1898-1910s) was characterized by a balance of military territorial occupation (formal imperial model) and a collaboration with local authorities, albeit maintaining a hierarchy with the subjugated colonies, exercising top-down leadership. Between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, U.S.'s international clout was slowly maturing into a global hegemony.

The prosperity that followed the Panic of 1893 and the recession of 1897 went hand in hand with the restructuring of the navy and the U.S. territorial expansion. Yet, the U.S. was not ready to *openly* challenge other imperial powers for global dominance, nor the prospect seemed particularly appealing at the time. The goal was to progressively gain and preserve hegemony over the western hemisphere. To that end, the United States struck an alliance with its former motherland to civilize the world, under the banner of “the white man’s burden”, positioning itself on the same ideological and cultural footing/standing as Great Britain.⁸⁸

The turn of the century paved the way for the restructuring of American economy, followed by a revolution in economic theory and, consequentially, a stronger consensus on the future expansion of the American Empire. The

⁸⁸ The term “White Man’s Burden”, is taken from a poem by the same title, written in 1899 by British poet Rudyard Kipling. It was an ode to the greatness of the WASP culture and the product of jingoistic rhetoric of white supremacy. It exhorted the United States to assume colonial control of the Philippines and its people. It advocated more than mere colonization, it called for the annexation of the island justifying the subjugation by cloaking it under the veil of the “mission to civilize”. This type of language was part of the mainstream discourse of the time, popularized also by imperialists, such as Albert J. Beveridge, Henry C. Lodge, and Theodore Roosevelt. See Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*. For an analysis of the role race and immigration played in the early stage of the empire, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) and

second industrial revolution led to a complete transformation of the economy, and the technological advancements of the late XIX century had made the prospect of colonial expansionism attainable. The innovation in the means of transportation combined with the industrialization of war turned the U.S. into a dominant production machine, capable of providing goods to other countries. The nation had finally emerged as a serious competitor to Great Britain.⁸⁹ The economy of the United States surpassed the British one in most exports, flooding European markets with U.S. goods.⁹⁰

The booming of its industrial production propelled American imperial ambitions. If not sold abroad, the domestic surplus risked sinking the economy. In the late 1890s, the conversation about expansionism captured the imagination of the American people. In the public and political arena, there were two main factions: anti-imperialists, who vehemently opposed the project, and imperialists who supported it. The so-called “Great Debate”, mostly revolved around the *ethics* of colonialism and what *form* an American empire would assume, would the flag follow free trade (informal empire) or was territorial occupation necessary to secure the success of the empire (formal empire)? Was there *a third way*, a hybrid between these models?

Anti-imperialists (expansionists) believed that, in the long run, colonies would constitute only a burden. In their ranks, among the most influential, there were President Grover Cleveland and Walter O. Gresham (his Secretary of State from 1893-1895). Five reasons were presented in opposition to the expansion. First, it was argued that imperialism was inherently dangerous for the stability of America, a self-destructive adventure that diverted money from domestic issues. They believed that colonies were bound to economically deplete the colonizer and would harm the nation’s profits by

Giovanni Arrighi, “Hegemony Unravelling- II” (May-June, 2005),103.

⁹⁰ Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century. Europe and America 1890-2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

generating unfair competition through underpaid labor (the example they presented was the relation between India and the British Empire).⁹¹ Second, they were concerned that holding on to the colonies would require the enlargement of the military and the navy, even in peacetime.⁹² Third, they argued that ideologically colonization was simply un-American, the Constitution itself proclaimed the right to self-determination. Fourth, in complete contradiction with this last point, given that the territories in question were located in what today is called the Global South, driven by a racist ideology they feared that the non-white people that inhabited those countries could be granted citizenship and immigration rights. Lastly, they were proponents of small government and a laissez-faire economy hence, they opposed the intromission of the state in market expansion abroad.⁹³ Declined in IR terms, anti-imperialists could be categorized as nationalists.

The Great Debate showed a clear fracture between anti-imperialists and the proponents of US hegemonic rise. The latter declined the overseas conquests mostly under commercial and ideological terms. Free-trade advocates saw an exigency to expand guided by the exponential growth and the necessity to find new markets. Furthermore, ideologically they believed in the duty to civilize, and they interpreted the expansive outthrust as a natural evolution of the “Manifest Destiny”. The westward colonization had now

⁹¹ McCormick, “From Old Empire to New”, 66-69.

⁹² From then on, this concept would occupy the public and political discourse. Given the growing closeness between the industrial sector, the military, and parts of the government, some observers raised the specter of the formation of a “garrison state”, in which defense spending would balloon even when the nation was not at war driven by the belief that military preparedness was indispensable. The mutual dependence between these sectors would be named “Military Industrial Complex”, a term later popularized by President D. Eisenhower in 1961, in his farewell address. For more information on the topic, see Alex Roland, “Defining the Complex”, in *Delta of Power. The Military Industrial Complex* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2021): 15-39.

⁹³ McCormick, “From Old Empire to New”, 70

moved its outpost to overseas conquests, guided by “the mission” to spread democracy and capitalism, this time globally.

Among the imperialists there were those in favor of a traditional form of colonialism, arguing that it was the duty of the civilized nation to bring political stability to underdeveloped territories, which in return would facilitate commercial expansion. This side included Albert Beveridge, Henry Cabot Lodge, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and Theodore Roosevelt. They supported the idea that free trade alone could not meet America’s needs, the competition between empires had led to the creation of “preferential trading systems”, and these closed markets threatened America’s prosperity.

The early proponents of U.S. hegemonic rule were pragmatic expansionists, who made the case for empire based on non-ideological grounds. President McKinley was among those policy makers who supported this stance. They approached the issue borrowing points from both factions. They concurred with expansionists that imperial extension would entail the threat and the possibility of deploying military force.⁹⁴ Sea power, for instance, would grant the U.S. the necessary geostrategic advantage and freedom in the global markets. At the same time, however, they recognized merits in the anti-imperialists’ position. They opposed the acquisition of formal colonies both from an economic perspective and from a public relation standpoint. They worried about the cost of holding down territorial possessions overseas considering that, factoring in the military expenses, the financial gains were usually lower than the profit made. Moreover, they argued that owning colonies would be detrimental to the image of the country and would tarnish the narrative of American exceptionalism by equating its

⁹⁴ US Navy Department, *Annual Report*, 1889 (Washington: US Government Print. Off., 1890): 3-37. and B. Franklin Cooling, “The Making of a Navalist: Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Franklin Tracy and Sea power”, *Naval War College Review*, (Sept-October 1972): 83-90.

expansion with the empire building practices of the European counterparts. This, however, was not an ideological belief, it was a perception problem, an image concern. If the occasion was right and favorable the territorial acquisition could be justifiable or, even better, it would be welcomed (i.e., in case of commercial rivalry or open threat to the interests of the United States).

By 1903 America had become a transoceanic power, claiming possessions both in the Pacific and the Atlantic, for a total of 94 islands. The “Greater United States” was born.⁹⁵ The territorial expansion of the United States in Central America and the Pacific had apparently proved that the imperialists had won. Soon, however, the necessity to maximize territorial gains in terms of commercial expansion and influence emerged, and the proponents of hegemony had another chance to influence the projection of American power worldwide.

One opportunity was given to them by the Chinese market that, long sought out as natural expansion for U.S. commercial needs, eventually became attainable. In 1899, the launch of the Open Door Policy represented one of the first embodiments of US hegemony. Secretary of State John Hay reached an agreement that, for the most part, satisfied all the parties involved. The Chinese nationalists were able to keep territorial unity, without being divided in spheres of influence. The Americans promised financial investments and the construction of railroads, mines, and infrastructure, securing a considerable amount of work and cash flow. Moreover, the United States enjoyed a better relationship with the Asian country considering the lucrative exports and the strategic role private American initiatives (i.e., missionaries, social reform associations, and the role played by academics)

⁹⁵ Jimmy M. Skaggs, *The Great Guano Rush: Entrepreneurs and American Overseas Expansion*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1994):199 and Daniel Immerwahr, “The Greater United States: Territory and Empire in US History”, *Diplomatic History*, 40, No. 3 (2016): 373-391.

had on the development of the region.⁹⁶ Therefore, U.S. cultural presence came to be well tolerated by Chinese elites. Europeans and Japanese empires were also assuaged, having secured access to a unified national market instead of smaller pockets of trading zones. Hay's Open Door Policy was a success in terms of hegemony, as it managed to satisfy all parties involved, proving to be a valid alternative to the power scramble to which Europeans were accustomed to. The hegemonic exercise of power started to take shape, but the time had not yet come for America to lead the world.⁹⁷

2.3 American Hegemony Revealed

The Great War and its outcomes, especially for what concerns the decline of European empires, fostered the rise of U.S. informal empire and with it a much more recurrent employment of hegemony as an instrument to exert influence and control. In 1914, the world was thrown into a major global conflict. In America, the echoes of the war translated into xenophobia and paranoia towards immigrants. The election of Woodrow Wilson, who had campaigned advocating neutrality, seemed to guarantee a *super partes* position for the country. The U.S. was weary of entering a fight that involved the old empires and their power struggles and believed it to be more advantageous to watch from the sidelines as European nations annihilated

⁹⁶ Thomas J. McCormick, *China Market: America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1914* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967): 95-127

⁹⁷ The idea that economic reasons were the driving force behind US expansionism in the 19th century and early 20th is the basis of the Wisconsin School of American Diplomatic History. It poses that the need for markets abroad was the engine of US foreign policies in this period, not security or moral reasons, or an attempt at balance of powers (the US was still a small fish in a big pond of empires). The 'founder' of the Wisconsin School was William A. Williams with his *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Norton, 2012, 50th Anniversary edition), see also Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Cornell University Press, 1963), and Thomas McCormick, *China Market and America's Quest for Informal Empire, 1893-1901* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books 1967).

each other. Nonetheless, soon the administration realized that taking part into the conflict was unavoidable, recognizing the chance of advancing U.S. hegemony, under the more appealing and less-threatening form of liberal internationalism⁹⁸

WWI played a crucial role in reshaping the power hierarchy amongst nation states, resulting in a great power reshuffle under which the Anglo-American relation changed from imperial *cooperation* to imperial (and, I argue, hegemonic, too) *dependence*.⁹⁹ During the conflict, Great Britain maintained its role as “bank of the coalition”, providing loans to its allies (Russia, Italy, and France). However, if compared to the wars of the eighteenth century, there was one consequential difference for Great Britain, the U.S. was now the principal suppliers of goods, providing billions of dollars in armaments and commodities for the civilian population. When the war exploded, America was in recession, yet, in the span of four years, an unprecedented economic boom ensued. Initially, its role was limited to being the production machine that equipped the Allied Powers. Later on, when in 1917 the nation joined the conflict, the industrial sector saw an even more substantial spike (to which defense spending contributed largely).¹⁰⁰

On an economic level, the war proved to be extremely profitable for the U.S., the total cost amounted to \$32billion (52% of GDP), however, the profits were worth the financial effort. The country went from being a net

⁹⁸ Erez Manela. *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century. US Foreign Policy since 1900*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999),

⁹⁹ Between the XV-XVI centuries, the power reversal from the Dutch to the British Empire followed the Seven Years War; In the XX century, the Britain-US reversal was greatly facilitated by WWI and WWII secured and solidified American hegemony. For an in-depth analysis see P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, “The Political Economy of British Expansion Overseas, 1750–1914”, *The Economic History Review* 33, No. 4 (February 2008): 471; and Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, 268.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Nolan, *Transatlantic Century*.

debtor in international capital markets to an investor and loaner, taking up the role traditionally held by the British empire.¹⁰¹ Due to the skyrocketing imports and the plummeting exports, the UK fell into a huge trade deficit with America, accelerating the overturning of British hegemony in favor of the American one. When WWI came to an end, Washington's ascendancy was completed.

Much like the Open-Door policy, Wilsonianism set the stage for U.S. ideological hegemony on a global scale. In the normative terms of this thesis, this moment corresponds to the germinal stage of a Neo-Gramscian hegemony, which represented one of the main tools of the American empire. Scholars have argued that the International Liberal Order (ILO) equates to U.S. imperialism, and that the League of Nations was the building rock of its cultural dominance, given that it proposed a solution to the fragility of the interstate system and its increasing interdependence.¹⁰² Moreover, the theory so dear to interventionists that guided America's XIX century colonialism and argued that economic expansion could not happen in the absence of political stability, loudly echoed in Wilson's "Fourteen Points".¹⁰³ Thus, in addition to the idealistic vision of an international order organized and united under the banner of shared principles, Wilsonianism advocated for a cooperation 'to make the world safe for capitalism', harboring confidence in

¹⁰¹ Hugh Rockoff, "Until It's Over, Over There: The US Economy in WWI", *National bureau of economic Research*, Working Paper 10580 (June 2004).

¹⁰² Kathryn C. Lavelle, "Early Movements toward Multilateralism", in *The Challenges of Multilateralism*, (London: Yale University Press, 2020): 18-19.

¹⁰³ In his "Fourteen Points" speech, in an effort to rebuild a postwar world, President Wilson urged "There shall be free trade between the countries who accept the peace", underscoring the codependent relation between US imperialism and capitalism. See also President Wilson's Message to Congress, "Fourteen Points" (January 8th, 1918) Records of the United States Senate; Record Group 46, National Archives, accessed at <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-woodrow-wilsons-14-points> And Tony Smith, "Know Thyself: what is 'Wilsonianism'?", in *Why Wilson Matters: The Origins of American Liberal Internationalism and its crisis today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017): 1-28.

the stabilizing force of industrialism. Wilsonianism, in other words, set the stage for the triumph and global spread of American liberalism, which the New Deal, WWII and the Cold War would then transform into an imperial credo offered to the rest of the world.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century*.

Chapter 3

THE MYTH OF ISOLATIONISM

The aftermath of WWI was an age of transition, during which the U.S. was exceptionally positioned to take up a leadership role on the world stage. The global arena had been forever changed, the end of the war witnessed the collapse of four of the old empires (Russian, Ottoman, Habsburg, and German) as well as the partial reduction in the influence wielded by the winning imperial powers. Unlike its European counterparts, the U.S. was the sole nation that had experienced an (unprecedented) economic boom.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, during the war, its insularity had become an asset, sheltering it from direct attacks on its soil.

At the deliberation table of the Paris Peace conference of 1919, the United States was in a position of absolute strength consequentially, President Wilson thought he had large room for maneuver to fulfil his vision for a new liberal world order. His ambition of creating an interstate system based on democratic principles, under the banner of free trade and self-determination seemed within reach, possibly marking the beginning of the end of Great Power imperialism and the start of U.S. global hegemony. Or so it seemed. The open integrated community of democratic nations he had envisioned came crushing down under the weight of an array of different agendas which in the end sabotaged the President's plan. What Wilson called the "old diplomacy" of secret intrigue and nationalistic interests prevailed, the winning empires kept their colonies and were 'entrusted' with the 'dutiful tutelage' of shepherding Germany's former colonies into 'civilization' and

¹⁰⁵Carlos Lozada, "The Economics of WWI", *National bureau of economic Research*, No.1, January 2005. <https://www.nber.org/digest/jan05/economics-world-war-i> ; Hugh Rockoff, "Until It's Over, Over There: The US Economy in WWI", *National bureau of economic Research*, Working Paper 10580, (June 2004) https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w10580/w10580.pdf

democracy, with the creation of mandates, betraying the promises of self-determination touted in the Fourteen Points. Moreover, article 231 of the Treaty, also known as the “War Guilt Clause”, forced Germany to shoulder full economic responsibility for the war requiring the nation to pay reparations to the victors and imposing a strict limitation in the size of its military and armaments. These conditions, born out of vengeance and eagerness to capitalize on the carcass of the German empire, inflicted severe humiliation on the defeated nation. Wilson was staunchly opposed to these drastic measures was not the only one who recognized the innate dangers behind the harsh outcome of the treaty, John Maynard Keynes called it a “Carthaginian peace”, warning of the dangerous consequences it entailed.¹⁰⁶ In spite of all these difficulties, the U.S. imperial design survived the turbulences of the postwar years and transformed itself through the consistent application of Gramscian hegemony, which will eventually redefine the US entanglements with the rest of world.

3.1 Pax Americana

In addition to the failure to of delivering a fair and forward-looking peace settlement, Wilson’s ambitious project of an intergovernmental organization aimed at the promotion of political and economic stability, the League of Nations, turned out to be an empty shell of what it was supposed to be, far removed from the Kantian model of perpetual peace that had guided its early

¹⁰⁶ John Maynard Keynes was chief representative of the British Treasury during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 but left before its closure in protest of the punitive measures the Anglo-French axis wished to impose onto Germany. He compiled his observations in a book titled *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, (London: Macmillan & Co., Limited, 1919), in which he warned about the perils a punitive settlement would bring. He predicted that the imposition of hefty reparations and harsh terms would lead Germany to financial failure that in turn would produce bitter sentiments of revenge and create political instability in the continent.

formulation.¹⁰⁷ The version ratified during the peacemaking process was a mutilated reformulation of Wilson's dream, trapped between the real and the ideal. The original concept was that of a partnership of democracies, who would forsake war as mean of dispute resolution in favor of a diplomatic approach. The efficacy of the League was hindered both by the constraints imposed by the winning countries and by the refusal of the United States to take part in it.

Was the League an epitome of a still acerbic U.S. hegemony or was it an example of its global influence? Very likely both. It was, however, the result of a deep-rooted culture whose ambitions of influence were indeed global. The concept of an organization aimed at settling international disputes and at forsaking war was not foreign to American ideological and political elites. In 1905, Andrew Carnegie introduced a proposal for an organ of this kind and in 1910 founded the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a nonpartisan institution devoted to the promotion of peace and the abolition of war. That same year, Theodore Roosevelt encouraged the creation of a "League of Peace", to settle international disputes.¹⁰⁸ An organ of this kind would promote stability abroad and, in turn, bolster U.S. commercial and economic interests. In addition, it would facilitate its ascendancy to the top of the hierarchical interstate system.

Thus, when in 1919, Wilson promoted the creation of a League of Nations it seemed only natural for the principal advocate and absolute winner of the war to take part in it. Whilst during the war years the patriotic rhetoric had

¹⁰⁷ Carl J. Friedrich, "The Ideology of the United Nations Charter and the Philosophy of Peace of Immanuel Kant 1795-1945", *The Journal of Politics*, 9, No.1, (Feb. 1947):10-30 and Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1795)

¹⁰⁸ Hamilton Holt, "The League to Enforce Peace," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*, 7, (1917): 258.

stimulated jingoistic sentiments and reinforced the idea of a 'divine mission' to bring peace and spread democracy, soon after the conflict ended, the public sentiment seemed to revert to the isolationist tendencies of the prewar period.

Both the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles and the proposal to join the League died on the Senate floor, sunk by the opposition led by Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. The main points of contention were the terms of the surrender for Germany and the constraints being part of the League would impose on the United States. The GOP and a small number of Democrats demanded an unconditional surrender of the German nation, which contrasted sharply with the idealist and forward-looking resolution envisioned by Wilson. Moreover, whilst both parties had supported the wartime proposal of an international tribunal to settle interstate disputes, they now rebuked their position and advocated for a retreat from European affairs, moved by the fear that joining the League would irremediably hinder their ability to conduct foreign policy.¹⁰⁹

Joining a community of powers was not what troubled American elites, their main reticence concerned what place the country would have at the table, how much influence they could wield, and how much it could undermine their interests abroad. The League was, in sum and for many, not hegemonic enough. Interestingly, for Gramsci, Wilson was acting hegemonically, as a representative of international capitalism rather than the champion of

¹⁰⁹ John Milton Cooper argues that at the basis of the political opposition was a partisan fight and a calculated strategy to undermine Woodrow Wilson's presidency. Cooper contends that the failure of joining the League was a "great tragedy", that eventually led to the instability of the interwar period. For an analysis of the political fight around the League of Nations debate, see John Milton Cooper, *Breaking the Heart of The World: Woodrow Wilson and the Fight for the League of Nations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Thomas J. Knock, *To End all Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the American Treaty Fight in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). For an analysis of the meaning and implications of Wilson's internationalism, and the consequential impact of Wilsonianism on the anti-colonial struggle, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

democracy. He argued that what took place in Paris was not a mere strife between nations, but rather a confrontation between two different ideas of bourgeoisie, one in support of free trade and the abolition of national monopolies, and another still entrenched behind an anachronistic and nationalistic iteration of capitalism.¹¹⁰

3.2 Setting the Stage for American Hegemony

In spite of a faulty institutionalization in the League, Wilsonianism, or Liberal Internationalism, aimed at exercising informal power through subtle alternatives.¹¹¹ In the immediate aftermath of the Great War, indeed, the United States attempted the implementation of ideological hegemony through the ‘export’ of democratic values and, above all, free trade.¹¹² In line with Gramsci’s theory, America’s hegemonic ambitions, to fully succeed, needed the creation of an attractive economy and the cooptation of (foreign) elites, intellectuals, and politicians who, could secure the favor of the dominated nations.

Economic supremacy was an essential ingredient for the success of the hegemonic recipe. One of the first manifestations of this came in 1921 with the U.S. intervention in the Reparation Commissions, which greatly alleviated the financial burden laid upon Germany’s shoulders. The United States approved a \$200 million loan to stabilize the country and, in so doing, averted the danger of a civil war, due to the internal turmoil for the strained economic conditions as well as a possible Franco-German or general

¹¹⁰ Ça va sans dire, as a Marxist, Gramsci did not favor either of the two brands of capitalism. For Gramsci’s analysis of the Paris Peace Conference, see Antonio Gramsci, *L’Ordine Nuovo*, 1919-1920 (Turin: Einaudi, 1955):214-216.

¹¹¹ Mark Mazower, *Governing the World. The History of an Idea* (London: Penguin Press, 2012).

¹¹² Melvyn P. Leffler, *Safeguarding Democratic Capitalism. U.S. Foreign Policy and National Security, 1920-2015* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

European war, considering the attrition between the two neighboring countries caused by economic reasons and postwar resentment.¹¹³ In addition to the new loan granted to Germany, the U.S. brokered the approval of the Dawes Plan which reduced the annual reparation payments imposed to the Weimar Republic stating that they would be gradually increased in alignment with the progressive improvement of its economy.¹¹⁴

The stabilization of the Franco-German crisis led to what at that time was considered to be a series of major diplomatic success. In 1928, the U.S. successfully advocated for the approval of the Kellogg- Briand Pact, an agreement that ‘outlawed’ the use of war as a foreign policy instrument. Early supporters of the Pact could be found both in the political arena (such as Senator William Borah of Idaho) and amongst private citizens (with the likes of Nicholas Murray Butler and James T. Shotwell, philanthropists affiliated with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace). The following years, the United States brokered the Young Plan (August 1929) and the London Treaty (1930).¹¹⁵ These international accomplishments and the informal engagement in the League make it clear that the U.S. did not revert to an inward looking (or isolationists) position, rather it had opted for a selective intervention supported by economic leverages and a growing cultural influence.

¹¹³ Peter Pulzer, *Germany 1870-1945. Politics State, Formation and War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹¹⁴ The Dawes Plan encountered vast opposition in Germany mounted by the DNVP. In 1924, the Plan finally passed after the intervention of US Ambassador Alanson B. Houghton who tied the possibility of future loans to the approval of the Plan. See Eberhard Kolb, *The Winter Weimar Republic* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988): 61 and Kenneth P. Jones, “Alanson B. Houghton and the Ruhr Crisis: the Diplomacy of Power and Mortality” in *US Diplomats in Europe, 1919-1941*, ed. Kenneth P. Jones (Santa Barbara: ABC. Clio, 1981): 36-37 and George A. Finch, “The London Conference on the Application of the Dawes Plan”, *The American Journal of International Law*, 18, No. 4. (Oct. 1924): 707-719.

¹¹⁵ Bear F. Braumoeller, “The Myth of American Isolationism” *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 6, No.4 (Oct. 2010): 349-371.

The other crucial ingredient for the success of America's hegemony was the mobilization of what Gramsci calls *civil society*. To Gramsci, *civil society* is composed of those institutions, like the church, intellectual elites, and influential private and interstate organizations, who rule and affect the common wisdom of a given society.¹¹⁶ For American cultural hegemony to work, it had to be expressed via the propagation of a set of rules, norms, and ideologies through civil society. The key for this to work was the co-option of subordinate (international) elites.

The aftermath of WWI, thus, ushered in a new method of power assertion that required books not tanks, values rather than bullets, and one of the most effective methods through which the United States established cultural hegemony was through the philanthropic work of foundations and religious missions. U.S. philanthropies fulfilled certain aspects of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, serving as a subtle indoctrination tool perpetuating American values and interests and equipping the hegemon with foreign educated elites that would in turn preserve and advocate (directly or indirectly) for its own dominant ideology.

U.S. society was accustomed to the creation of civic organizations aimed at the pursuit of the common good, a propensity that finds its roots in the earliest days of the Republic.¹¹⁷ In his *Reflections of democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote "Americans [...] constantly form associations [...] thus the most democratic country on the face of the earth [...] carried to perfection the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires" underscoring the importance "reciprocal influence of men upon one another"

¹¹⁶ This thesis uses 'cultural hegemony' and 'ideological hegemony' interchangeably.

¹¹⁷ From its infancy, freedom of association was an integral part of American Society. See, Johann N. Neem, "Freedom of Association in the Early Republic: The Republican Party, the Whiskey Rebellion, and the Philadelphia and New York Cordwainers' Cases", *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 127, No. 3 (July 2003): 259-290.

in the democratic process.¹¹⁸ However, it was only in the Progressive era that private citizens began to use their organizations as an expansionist tool broadening their horizons beyond the nation's borders, turning their gaze abroad with the objective of exporting what Emily Rosenberg has aptly called "liberal developmentalism", the tendency to assume that "other nations could and should replicate America's own developmental experience".¹¹⁹

This theme connects directly to the ideas of America's exceptionalism and that of Manifest Destiny and is the *fil rouge* that ties together different periods of U.S. history, from the Westward expansion, through the Progressive era, the New Deal to the Great Society and beyond. The belief that it was in the interest of other nations (and territories) to repeat U.S. political, cultural, and economic models pervaded American society. Starting from the early XX century, the "civilizing missions" of the XIX century began to be declined in more modern terms placing the racist "white men's burden" ideology into the economic, cultural, and humanitarian sphere of "free trade and democracy advocacy".¹²⁰

Starting from the 1910s, given the rising international profile and influence, the United States fully embraced foundations, businesses, philanthropic and religious missions as weapons for the establishment of ideological dominance. After 1919, the U.S. began to spread the fable of the "American dream" in Europe, Latin America, and Asia. From 1917 to 1945 the United States emerged as the preeminent world power and, contrary to the 'isolationism myth', U.S. civil society was deeply involved in the

¹¹⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

¹¹⁹ Emily S. Rosenberg, *Missionaries to the World: The Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹²⁰ See Rosenberg, *Missionaries to the World* and Frank Ninkovich, *Global Dawn: The Cultural Foundations of American Internationalism, 1865-1890* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

expansion of State influence abroad. In the years between 1919 and 1941, the country's vision for the world began to be increasingly articulated in ideological rather than militaristic terms, emphasizing the cultural aspect.

The promotion of U.S. interests abroad was hidden under the tailored veil of humanitarian help and the fictitious attempt to nurture the establishment of democracy. Despite presenting themselves as promoters of a grass roots approach to democracy and free-trade, foundations operated in a *top-down manner* essential to build and form local elites (the subordinate state's civil society) and informally extending the imperial tentacles amongst the population. Many of the largest philanthropic organizations that still operate today were founded before 1916, when state income taxation was still very low and a federal one was yet to be implemented. What follows is that, at the time, the principal reason behind the establishment of these entities was not tax-related, but rather they served as foreign policy advocate.

3.3 Tools of Hegemony: Philanthropy and Christianity

In the interwar period, philanthropic organizations were instrumental for the production and reproduction of cultural hegemony and, even if privately funded, they did advance the State's interests performing as informal representative of a State corporate capitalism. Foundations played a mediating role between political and civil society. As defined by Gramsci, cultural hegemony is the set of ideas and values of the ruling group disseminated among subordinates resulting in the production of consensus of the masses in perpetuation of the existing social order. Gramscian hegemony is a "rule of ideas" rather than "a rule of force", by controlling the intellectual sphere, the preeminent State is able to maintain the status quo and its ideas

and values are internalized by the subjugated states becoming *forma mentis*, “common sense”.¹²¹

As argued by Robert F. Arnove, foundations have “played the role of unofficial planning agencies for both a national American society and an increasingly interconnected world-system with the United States at its center”, they supported and promulgated both the economic ideology of their donors and the interests and values of the State, advancing U.S. foreign policies and commercial interests.¹²² Continuing his Gramscian critique of their functions, Arnove states that by enlisting the intelligentsia and “the most prominent minds in the United States and abroad” these organizations have co-opted intellectuals, the developers and promoters of culture and policies, and rendered them instruments of “cultural dominance as well as potential agents of revolutionary change”.¹²³ According to Gramsci, civil society is constituted by the “relations of productions” (the structural aspect of this floor) and the “social relations” (the essence of the superstructure). These social relations are the cultural and ideological forces that shape society and are embodied in international (and national) institutions hence they become a terrific tool for cultural dominance. They function as vessels of cultural hegemony and articulate the hegemon’s basic world view serving as an antidote to any revolutionary potential by the subordinate states. Institutions like the Carnegie and the Rockefeller foundations were devoted to the advancement of human rights and the general welfare of mankind, but they

¹²¹ For a detailed analysis of Base and Superstructure in Marxist philosophy see, Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”, *New Left Review*, 83, No.3 (Nov/Dec 1973): 3-16. For Gramsci’s distinction between Structure and Superstructure, refer to the section “State and Civil Society” in Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971):206-269.

¹²² Robert F. Arnove, *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism. The Foundations at Home and Abroad* (Boston, MA: G.K. Hall & Co., 1980):17.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 17-18. The potential for intellectuals to become “revolutionary agents” will become one of the winning tools used by the United States to “win” the Cold War.

simultaneously served as informal agents for the promotion of industrial capitalism, liberal democracy, and U.S. hegemonic ambitions.¹²⁴

The Rockefeller foundation was one of the most active in the field of education both domestically and abroad. Rockefeller himself was acutely aware of the capacity such organizations could have and subscribed to the idea of a trickledown ideology. They were the breeding ground for the development of the local intelligentsia who, in turn would then teach in universities preparing new generations of intellectuals and policymakers, successfully reshaping the political agenda of the subordinate states in favorable terms to the hegemon. Supremacy of a group manifests itself as both domination and intellectual and moral leadership. Hegemony, as declined by Gramsci, is a higher form of domination, a synthesis of coercion and consent. After the Great War, non-governmental organizations began to articulate the cultural, ideological, and intellectual ideas of the hegemon and served as sounding board for the hegemon's values.

The Rockefeller foundation (RF) was particularly active abroad especially in China, a strategic region for U.S. geopolitical and economic interests. The foundation's attempt to direct the modernization of the country in a liberal direction exemplifies the interdependence between state and private interests, where the political society could not operate, the civil society stepped in.¹²⁵ The RF activities were presented under civilizing terms encouraging collaborations between American Universities and local schools and arranging scholarships and funds for "the promotion of Christian ethics and

¹²⁴ Barry D. Karl and Stanley N. Katz, "Foundations and Ruling Class Elites", *Daedalus Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 116, No. 1 (Winter 1987): 1-40.

¹²⁵ In 1915, during a hearing of the Rockefeller foundation's desire to branch out in China by setting up a medical school, US minister to China, Pail Reinsch, lauded the plans stating that they were "in full accordance with the traditions of our past relations with China, where the activities of our people have been religious, cultural, and educational [...] more than commercial". See Frank Ninkovich "The Rockefeller Foundation, China, and Cultural Change", *The Journal of American History*, 70, No. 4 (March 1984): 799.

Western civilization”.¹²⁶ When in 1915, the RF set up a medical school in China, the rationale behind it was to export western ideals and with it western culture and models along with the intent of divulging scientific knowledge adhering to the belief that ideas were the key to unlock social change.¹²⁷ By the end of the 1920s, as a result of the growing Chinese nationalism and U.S. complete inaction during the illegal annexation of Manchuria, the hold the foundation had on Chinese civil society had irremediably weakened. When the 1930s rolled around, American control of the foundation’s activities had diminished, and the influence of Chinese nationalists risen.

When in 1931 Sleskar M. Gunn, the foundation vice president, visited China, he was displeased by the lack of a significant cultural impact the RF and its related institutions were having on the territory when compared to the previous years, writing “Western civilization is under fire in China”.¹²⁸ The RF promoted social sciences, socially applied research, and the modernization theory implemented to justify social engineering projects designed to mold foreign societies whose cultures and customs were seen as underdeveloped, and hopelessly backward-looking. Therefore, in the words of Gunn, China provided “the social sciences with something which has heretofore been lacking, namely, a ‘laboratory’ where experiments on societal development can be carried under controlled conditions” with the aim of exporting U.S. values and ideas.¹²⁹ However, the Chinese ‘experiment’ was short lived, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war (1937) contributed to the end of the RF program in the country.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. see also Socrates Litsios, “Selskar M. Gunn and China: The Rockefeller Foundation’s ‘Other’ Approach to Public Health”, *Bulletin of The History of Medicine*, 79, No. 2 (Summer 2005): 295-318.

¹²⁹ Ninkovich, “The Rockefeller Foundation, China, and Cultural Change”, 810.

Philanthropic foundations were not the only non-governmental organization to operate abroad on behalf of the State, religious missions played a significant role in the spread of U.S. ideals worldwide. After the Great War, American political influence in Europe increased substantially and so did the power of Protestant evangelical organizations which overtook the place occupied by their European religious counterparts, financially devastated by the war. The role of these missions was not confined to the old continent it expanded into the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America brokering U.S. interests under the guise of Christianization. In the marketplace of ideas, religion is as important as culture and the form of Christianity promoted by U.S. missions was in line with the American ideals of freedom and democracy rather than the brand of Christianity to which most countries were accustomed to. Despite the effort to camouflage the practice as relief work, the real intent behind the expansion abroad was unambiguous to the attentive eye, both domestically and abroad, so much that a series of articles published in the New York Times in the 1920s denounced the duplicitous aspiration of these organizations as imperialist.

Andrea Silletta coined the term *multinacionales de la fe* underscoring the nexus between private interests, religion, and state's affairs seeing that these missions were funded by private citizens and, albeit in small part, by the state. Washington was supportive of their work given that it facilitated the spread of U.S. ideals.¹³⁰ Among the most preeminent advocates of this 'Christianization made in America' was John R. Mott, a Cornell graduate and president of the U.S. branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). He was an important figure among Washington circles for his political connections, like his friendship with Wilson, under whose

¹³⁰ Alfredo Silletta, *Multinacionales de la fe: Religión, sectas, e iglesia electrónica* (Buenos Aires: Contrapunto, 1988): 154.

administration he had accepted diplomatic roles in Mexico and Russia, and with President Hoover. Mott made no mystery of his understanding of his missionary work as a tool to expand American interest abroad, proving that the line between moral and political/economic interest was muddy. Staunch believer in the role of foundations to uplift and project American values in the rest of the world, in reference to his proselytism, he stated “[...] it would prove in the end of the greatest advantage to the interest of America”.¹³¹ Mott’s sentiment was in total opposition to the (relative) isolationism, he cautioned that a retreat from the world stage would damage the country’s geopolitical and economic interests.

The paternalistic tone of these ‘God’s will’ ambassadors did not go unnoticed in Europe where the utilitarian Christianity these missions championed was not welcome. It was perceived as promotion of American interests more than religious values and the fact that the funds came both from federal and private sources did not help the cause. One example is the Methodist “Collegio Monte Mario” in Rome, opened in the 1920s to “emancipate the Italian youth from a Church hostile to free thought”.¹³² Italian journalists saw right through the deceptive rhetoric and denounced the school as an imperialist ploy, a step in empire building, stating:

These Methodist institutions, no matter how carefully they seek to disguise themselves in the flags of the various nations among whom they spread their propaganda, are effective organs of Anglo-

¹³¹ R. Laurence Moore, “American Religion as Cultural Imperialism” in *The American Century in Europe*, R. Laurence Moore and Maurizio Vaudagna (eds.), (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018): 155.

¹³²Ibid. 157.

Saxon propaganda and penetration. It is a movement which must be closely watched, because it is against our interest¹³³

¹³³ Tacchi Venturi "The School on Monte Mario", *Christian Advocate*, 96 (July 7th, 1921):876.

Chapter 4

HEGEMONIC ASCENDANCY

The third decade of the XX century brought about drastic change and shattered the hopes for peace that had defined the 1920s. Autocratic powers were seizing control worldwide. During the interwar period, Fascism and Communism had taken roots in Europe where people fell prey to the false promises of economic prosperity and national vengeance those systems promised to deliver and, by 1940, much of the continent had capitulated to the advancing German army. Ideologically, both political philosophies were antithetical to the values promoted by the United States, namely individual freedom, free trade, and democratic political representativeness. The failure of the Wilsonian combined with two financial crises in the span of a decade resulted in a profound international instability – and in the first existential crisis that U.S. hegemony had to survive.¹³⁴

The challenge was accepted, more formally than ever, on January 6th, 1941, when, during his State of the Union address, FDR argued for the necessity of war in defense of freedom. The address, known to history as the “Four Freedoms Speech”, laid the ideological framework of the conflict as well as the foundations for a post-war world order led by the United States. Appealing to Americans’ most profound beliefs of freedom, Roosevelt articulated the vision of a transformed international order built upon free trade

¹³⁴ The financial crash of 1929 was followed by another economic crisis of 1937-1938. The protectionist policies set in place after the Great Depression pushed the world towards further instability. Nationalistic sentiments arose worldwide causing the disruption of the precarious equilibrium achieved in the interwar period. In the end, ill-advised economic measures, fatal political decisions, and the lack of global leadership were the catalyst that led to WWII. See Charles P Kindleberger, *The World in Depression*.

and “essential ‘human freedoms’ to be enjoyed everywhere in the world”.¹³⁵ His vision entailed spreading central ideological features of the U.S. Bill Of Rights and Constitution worldwide and, in so doing, it would internationalize American values.¹³⁶ By framing the support of the fight against Fascism under such ideological terms, the administration was able to gather public support for material assistance to the Allies to the point that, in November of that same year, Congress not only approved the renewal of the “cash and carry” clause but it also lifted the arms embargo. Roosevelt’s ideological fight, which was all the more important given the rise of fascism on American soil, paved the way for the final consolidation of America’s global hegemonic ascendancy. It was time for America to heed the call for global dominance and become chief arbiter of international affairs. Support towards “internationalism” grew considerably. Intellectuals, political leaders, commentators, the likes of Walter Lippman, rallied the country towards active participation.¹³⁷ One of the most famous calls to action is Henry Luce’s editorial published in *Life* in February 1941, titled “The American Century” which can be read as complimentary to the Four Freedoms Speech. The media

¹³⁵ Franklin D. Roosevelt Annual Message to Congress, January 6, 1941; Records of the United States Senate; SEN 77A-H1; Record Group 46; National Archive, online transcript accessed at <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/president-franklin-roosevelts-annual-message-to-congress>. For an analysis of the speech, its meaning, reception, and ramifications see, Jeffrey A. Engel, *The Four Freedoms. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Evolution of an American Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹³⁶ Roosevelt championed the internationalization of American values by promulgating abroad American Economic Rights and Social Welfare Rights (as enforced domestically by the New Deal and later by the Second Bill of Rights). This process of internationalization of rights worldwide, or more accurately of Americanization, would result in the creation of a shared understanding and acceptance of what these rights are and what they entail. Their meaning became so ingrained that it progressively assumed the form of “common sense”. Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World*.

¹³⁷ Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow the World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020): 5. In 1939, Walter Lippman wrote an article for *Life* titled “The American Destiny” helped shape Luce’s thinking. See, Walter Lippman, “The American Destiny”, *Life* (June 5th, 1939): 47-75.

magnate advocated in favor of America's responsibility to join the war and take up the mantle of world leadership.¹³⁸

4.1 The American Hegemonic Century

In 1944, the fighting was drawing to close, and the Allies began drafting the framework of the post-war world. In July 1944, forty-four nations met at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, to discuss the structure and rules for the postwar international economy. Wilsonianism greatly influenced the vision that guided the Conference and its outcome partly resembled the principles articulated in the Atlantic Charter.¹³⁹ The lesson of the interwar period informed the decisions taken by Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, who adhered to the Wilsonian belief that free trade would promote prosperity and facilitate world peace. As a matter of fact, they were defending the necessity of a global U.S. hegemony, declined as international cooperation and a free-market economy, which would encourage political and economic stability and contribute to world peace.

¹³⁸ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Short American Century: A Postmortem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013). The idea that, once presented with American ideals and economic system, other nations should and would follow its trajectory of development is a deeply held belief that has characterized US foreign policy starting from the Spanish-American war. This ideology, labeled "liberal developmentalism" by historian Emily Rosenberg, was shared not only by the political society (US political and military leaders), but also by the civil society (citizens, businesses, most of the media, philanthropic groups, labor unions, and academia). For an analysis of this cultural offensive, see Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, February 1982).

¹³⁹ More specifically the Fourth and the Fifth Point, which committed the United States and Great Britain to further the enjoyment by all States of free trade and raw materials as well as the commitment to guarantee the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the objective of securing prosperity and social stability. See Richard N. Gardner, *Sterling-Dollar Diplomacy: The Origins and The Prospects of Our International Economic Order* (New York, McGraw Hill, 1969) and Armand Van Dormael, *Bretton Woods: Birth of a Monetary System* (London: MacMillan 1979). For a summary of the differences between British and American understanding of the new economic world order see, Alfred E. Eckes Jr., *A Search Solvency: Bretton Woods and the international Monetary System, 1941-1971*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975).

Not only was liberal capitalism the economic ideology upon which the new world order was to be founded, but the Bretton Woods conference also established a new international monetary system, dependent on the U.S. dollar. It replaced the rigid gold standard with the U.S. dollar as global currency, in turn the dollar was pegged to the price of gold. In so doing, international markets became linked to a system of fixed exchange rates centered on the U.S. dollar-gold convertibility, a clean transition from the gold standard to a U.S. dollar standard.¹⁴⁰ The world was now dependent on America's currency too.

Bretton Woods – and the United Nations architecture – successfully internationalized central features of the U.S. constitution, Bill of Rights, and the New Deal.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, they institutionalized the ideals of the New Deal and the Four Freedoms, facilitated the adoption of liberal capitalism as the prevailing economic system, and established a new mechanism of world politics governed by international arbitrage and institutions that promised to deliver peaceful resolution of interstate conflicts through negotiation and compromise.¹⁴² America's ideals became the foundations of the post-war structure, widespread and indisputable, embedded in the lives of citizens worldwide to the point that they eventually morphed into “common sense”.

Common sense is to be intended as a non-discursive or pre-discursive to the understanding and articulation of the world and its state of affairs, so

¹⁴⁰ John Williamson, “The US dollar and US power”, *Adelphi Series*, 53 (December 2013): 75-86.

¹⁴¹ Jesse H. Rhodes, “The Evolution of Roosevelt’s Rhetorical Legacy: Presidential Rhetoric about Human Rights in Domestic and Foreign Affairs, 1993-2011”, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 43, No.3, (September 2013): 562-599. William Felice, *The Global New Deal: Economic and Social Human Rights in World Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

¹⁴² John G. Ikenberry, “Liberal Internationalism 3.0: Americas and the Dilemmas of the Liberal World Order”, *Perspectives on Politics*, 7, No.1 (March 2009):71-87; John G. Ikenberry “Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Persistence of American Postwar Order”, *International Security*, 23, No. 3 (winter 1998-1999):43-78; John G. Ikenberry, *The Liberal Leviathan*.

entrenched and woven into our daily lives that one does not pause to think whether or not it is the best way forward, it is assumed to be so. Therefore, common sense becomes a collection of unspoken norms, accepted not necessarily because we agree with them but because they are unchallenged. French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, revisiting Gramsci's concept of hegemony, referred to this category of deeply held beliefs as "doxa", instilled in us through implicit practice not through a dialectic discourse.¹⁴³

The architecture of the post-war world was modeled in the image of the United States. Ideas such as freedom, democracy, and economic liberalism have become so extensively accepted and interdependent that they practically overlap. For instance, it is commonly assumed that freedom and democracy have roughly the same meaning, and that democracy necessitates a free-market economy to function properly. From a philosophical standpoint, there is a difference between freedom and democracy and while freedom can exist without democracy, democracy cannot exist without freedom.¹⁴⁴ It is important to underscore that the type of freedom that the hegemon allows is conditional, it needs to prove beneficial for the dominant state for it to be

¹⁴³ Frank Ninkovich, "The Cultural Transformation of America's Civilizing Mission in the Twentieth Century", in *Civilizing Mission in the Twentieth Century*, Boris Barth and Rolf Hobson (eds.), (Boston: Brill, 2021): 38; see also Cécile Deer, "Doxa", in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, Michael Grenfell ed. (Slough, UK, Acumen Publishing, 2008): 119–30.

¹⁴⁴ The concept of freedom is an evergreen in philosophy, in this case Kant's analysis of the distinction between freedom and democracy is relevant. The German philosopher argued that freedom is not "autonomy" but rather "independence". In the political realm, freedom can translate into a republic "force, with freedom and law", or it can exist in the complete absence of government, in the form of anarchy "law and freedom without force". See Robert B. Loudon ed., *Kant: Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 235; Christian F. Rostbøll, "Freedom as Independence, and Democracy", *The Journal of Politics*, 78, No. 3 (July 2016): 792-805.

For an analysis on the connection between freedom, democracy, and human rights see, Brian Caterino and Phillip Hansen, "Towards a Critical Theory of Democracy: Participatory Democracy and Social Freedom", *Critical Theory, Democracy, and The Challenge of Neoliberalism* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2019); Havidán Rodríguez, "A 'Long walk to Freedom' and Democracy: Human Rights, Globalization, and Social Justice", *Social Forces*, 83, No. 1 (Sept. 2004): 391-412.

tolerated. The ideals of liberal internationalism have been engrained in society to the point that they have become *forma mentis*, the structure upon which modern society is founded.¹⁴⁵ This *forma mentis*, as Gramsci called “common sense”, was crafted by the United States and ever since 1945 has been produced and reproduced by nations as well as by civil society, both on a local and on a global level. For Gramsci, the dominant class (per extension the state, following a Neo-Gramscian analysis of international politics) acquires and maintains power by disseminating and instilling a mental structure that favors the dominant class (hegemon) but still benefits subaltern states.

The main tool through which such an hegemonic design was given body and shape, however, was the Economic Recovery Act, commonly known as the Marshall Plan.¹⁴⁶ Between 1948 and 1951, the Economic Recovery Plan (ERP) injected 13 billion dollars into Western Europe’s markets. The relief aid was also offered to Soviet Union; however, Stalin refused the help denouncing it as “American interference”, a conclusion that proved to be not entirely misguided. While the ERP provided economic assistance, the help was indeed conditional. The deal had two publicly stated provisions: capital and goods were to be supplied provided that free trade policies were implemented and there had to be a transparent distribution of the funds. In addition, the plan yielded implicit advantages for the United States: not only it granted the enforcement of capitalist policies, but it also encouraged the development of liberal-democratic systems, profited American companies,

¹⁴⁵ Joseph A. Buttigieg, “Gramsci on Civil Society”, *Boundary 2*, 22, No. 3 (Autumn 1995): 1-32; Lorenzo Salvagni, “A syn-aesthetic path: the Notion of Counterpoint from Antonio Gramsci to Edward Said”, *Romance Notes*, 53, No. 3 (2013):263-272.

¹⁴⁶ Federico Romero, *La Storia della Guerra Fredda. L’Ultimo Conflitto per l’Europa* (Turin, Einaudi, 2009): 55-57; For an analysis of the Atlantic partnership see Ernst Van Der Beugel, *From Marshall Atlantic Partnership: European Integration as a Concern of American Foreign Policy* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Publishing Co., 1966), 19.

and it served as an extraordinarily effective propaganda tool.¹⁴⁷ It is important to underscore that this partnership between private and government's foreign interests was never secretive, for instance President Truman established the Citizens' Committee to defend the Marshall Plan in 1947 which forged links among private individuals, business, trade unions, the financial world, and the government. Therefore, even at its inception America's cultural hegemony proved to embody the idea of State as described by Gramsci, meaning the sum of political and civil society.

Thanks to the America's democratic internationalism formula (substantiated by the Marshall Plan and – more cogently – by NATO), Western Europe was rebuilt under an order that has been called “embedded liberalism”.¹⁴⁸ Given the rising threat of Communism and the spread of affluency, the hegemonic leadership of the United States was elicited and welcomed by the West as it guaranteed security, capital, and goods.¹⁴⁹

There was, however, some reticence, both in Europe and elsewhere in the non-Communist world, regarding the military, economic, and ideological surrender to the United States.¹⁵⁰ The main tool through which the U.S.

¹⁴⁷ The Marshall Plan is celebrated as the policy that single handedly revitalized European postwar economy, see Charles P. Kindleberger, *Marshall Plan Days* (Boston, Allen & Unwin, 1987): 4-24; see also Michael Hogan, “European Integration and the Marshall Plan”, in Stanley Offman and Charles Maier (eds.), *The Marshall Plan: A Retrospective* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984).

¹⁴⁸ See John Gerard Ruggie, “International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,” in Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Robert Gilpin, *The Political Economy of International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987): 131–134, and Mark Blyth, *Great Transformations: Economic Ideas and Institutional Change in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁹ As explained by Ikenberry, direct power is intended as “formal and hierarchical” thus, what the United States ensured in the new world order was a hidden type of dominance, one that secured support without coercion but rather through persuasion. See, G. John Ikenberry, “Rethinking the origins of American hegemony”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 104, No.3 (Autumn 1989):375-400.

¹⁵⁰ Great Britain was willing to concede to America's request, recognizing that its own hegemonic power was extinguished. In 1949, Moscow launched the “Hate America” campaign to damage America's image abroad. Part of this strategy included feeding the

government addressed this fear of vassalage was what came to be known as the “Four Point Program”, which entailed a direct American participation in the advancement of underdeveloped countries. The U.S. would “embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.”¹⁵¹

The strategy was not the first of its kind, however, it was presented under a new angle. For the first time in American history, Truman made an ideological connection between foreign aid and freedom, declaring also that the U.S. would assist in the fight against “oppressors”, openly contraposing the values of communism to those of democracy. Furthermore, the president highlighted the distinction between American benevolent intervention and imperialism, on account of the nature of the assistance provided and the goal of the intervention.¹⁵² Exporting American expertise would lift those countries out of poverty and at the same time it represented a golden opportunity to advance U.S. ideals, its economic system, and the American way of life.

flames of anti-Americanism in the West. A popular example of this strategy is France where the Communist Party, worked hard to associate the US private businesses with government’s ambition. The first casualty of this Soviet-French anti-American effort was Coca Cola. The party coined the term “coca-colonization” and launched a campaign against the local factory of the drink. See, Nicholas J. Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 53 and John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁵¹ Harry S. Truman, “Second Inaugural Address”, Washington D.C., (January 10th, 1949, transcript of the speech at <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/19/inaugural-address>)

¹⁵² In his speech Truman stressed that the ultimate aim was to help the developing nations to build economic interdependence, not a colonial system of dependency. He emphasized the commitment the receiving countries made to fulfill the requirement of creating healthy conditions for American investment, stating that “the success of this program depends on the degree of confidence which the business community has in it.”, See Thomas G. Paterson “Foreign Aid under Wraps: The Point Four Program”, *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 56, No. 2 (Winter 1972-1973):119-126.

Like the ERP, the aid was conditional, the recipient nations had to employ the funds and the assistance “constructively” to raise the standard of living, create new sources of wealth, and increase productivity. The Plan was financed both by the State and by private businesses, which, on par with the government (if not more), were concerned with the expansion of communism in emerging markets for fear of nationalization and closed markets. Between 1950 and 1957, American private investment increased from \$11.8 to \$25.2 billion on a global scale, however the majority of the funds were destined to Western countries. Thanks to the collaboration of political and civil society, the Point Four Plan represents an attempt on part of the United States to enforce cultural hegemony. The aid helped to export American economic models but failed to export liberal democracy.

4.2 Nation branding and Americanization

After 1945, American exceptionalism and its “Manifest Destiny” had come back in full swing and the war against Nazi-fascism had bestowed a new sense of purpose on the U.S. There was a diffuse sentiment of a moral duty to lead the world and abroad (particularly in Western Europe) American presence was by and large well-received. This favorable disposition was the result of a harmonious synergy between the government’s public diplomacy (political society) and the support provided by private businesses, philanthropies, NGOs, and the media (civil society). While American military and economic might were an important factor, it was its cultural hegemony, with the establishment of a liberal democratic order and the spread of its pop culture, the element that secured a primacy position.

One of the priorities of the early Cold War years was nation branding.¹⁵³ The United States strived to cultivate the image of a country built on freedom and prosperity and, to carry out this objective, the government enlisted the help of the private sector. Government policies like the Marshall Plan and the Four Point program were accompanied by documentaries to promote the aid and a favorable perception of the United States.¹⁵⁴ The impact of their imagery was unconfutable and conducive to the fall of the Soviet Union, to the point that, in a post-Cold War conference in 1990, the Italian intellectual, Enzo Forcella, stated that “the American myths kept their promises and won through!”.¹⁵⁵

In the sphere of political society, America’s media propaganda machine was institutionalized through governmental agencies like the United States Information Agency (USIA).¹⁵⁶ Founded in 1953 during Eisenhower’s administration, it was organized in four divisions (two for media and broadcastings and two for educational efforts and cultural and scholarly exchanges), it was tasked with influencing foreign audiences and informing the public about the “American way of Life”.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Carolin Viktorin, Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht , Annika Estner and Marcel K. Will (eds.) *Nation Branding in Modern History* (New York: Berghahn Books, August 2018)

¹⁵⁴David W. Ellwood, “The Propaganda of the Marshall Plan in Italy in a Cold War Context”, in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945-1960*, Giles Scott-Smith and Hans Krabbendam eds. (London: Frank Cass, 2003):186-196.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Nicholas J. Cull, “Film as Public Diplomacy: The USIA’s Cold War at Twenty-Four Frames per Second” in *The United States and Public Diplomacy. New Directions in Cultural and International History*, Kenneth A. Osgood & Brian C. Etheridge (eds.), (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publisher, 2010): 257-284 and Richard T. Arndt, *The First Resort of Kings. American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2005): 264-287. For a complete history of the USIA in the Cold war see, Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*.

¹⁵⁷ The notion of the American Way of Life entails the adherence to a capitalist system. To thwart the Soviet propaganda against it, in 1955, the agency promoted the project “People’s capitalism”, a campaign created by Theodore Replier, president of the Advertising Council. The Advertising Council is an American non-profit organization (as such, from a Gramscian perspective, it is part of civil society, while USIA belongs to the political society apparatus).

The most successful documentary movies were stories of Communist oppression, like the documentary *My Latvia, Huk, and Kampong Sentosa*. Not only the agency created effective propaganda in favor of the United States, but it also denounced the horror perpetrated by Communist regimes and its propaganda techniques.¹⁵⁸ The documentaries were part of what Eisenhower called the “P-Factor”, psychological factor which he understood to be a strategic tool. Financed by Congress, the USIA helped spread America’s way of life and counteract the nation’s reputation for bigotry and racism.¹⁵⁹ In the first six months of 1956 USIA alone created more than 65 documentaries, films, and 100 newsreels.¹⁶⁰ The effectiveness of the agency (political society) was guaranteed by the help of Motion Pictures Companies (civil society) which distributed USIA’s productions abroad, popularizing titles such as *Atomic Power for Peace*, *Dance for Freedom*, *The Korea Story*, and *The Life of Eisenhower*.¹⁶¹

On its part, Hollywood played a significant role in portraying the image of the United States as a wealthy, just, and strong nation. Cooperation between production companies and the government dated back to war time effort, but during the Cold War the partnership intensified, and the ideological factor was ramped up. Its productions popularized the image of the average American citizen as a morally irreproachable, heroic, accomplished man “the archetypal hero of the post-war anticommunist crusade” and encouraged the

¹⁵⁸ See USIA’s documentary *The Hoaxsters* (1952) about the threat posed by Communism to the American Way of Life. The movie is also an example of the partnership between public and civil sphere, given that it was coproduced and distributed by MGM. See, Cull, *The United States and Public Diplomacy*, 59.

¹⁵⁹ Among the agency’s field staff there was a small number of black Americans, who were strategically deployed in the developing world. See, Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*, 98-99

¹⁶⁰ Cull, *The United States and Public Diplomacy*, 53.

¹⁶¹ Osgood and Etheridge, *The United States and Public Diplomacy*.

emulation of the consumer citizen model.¹⁶² Films proved to be a powerful weapon, disseminating American ideals and publicizing the nation's way of life.¹⁶³ Hollywood movies flooded European theaters and, although to a less degree, they reached Soviet audiences too.¹⁶⁴ The world was gradually familiarized with the portrait of prosperous country, the American dream was sold to the world and people bought into it.¹⁶⁵ The appeal of capitalism grew, and the free world adopted the U.S. mass production and mass consumption model. In the nations under America's sphere of influence, the 1950s and 1960s were decades marked by an economic boom. American made products found the market they were looking for, it was the "Golden Age of American capitalism.

Hollywood productions were not the only medium through which the picture of the American way of life was promoted in the West and kept alive in the East. Radio played a significant role in piercing the Iron Curtain. Particularly Voice of America (VOA) – operating under USIA's umbrella – Radio Free Europe (RFE), and Radio Liberty (RL) spread America's news,

¹⁶² Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998): 151-183.

¹⁶³ For an account on the effects of movies and television in the consolidation of American cultural hegemony, see Nicholas J. Cull, "Reading, Viewing, and Tuning in to the Cold War in The Cambridge History of the Cold War", Melvyn P. Leffler & Odd Arne Westad (eds.) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010):438-450. For the analysis of the influence leading men had on the image of Americans abroad, see Viktorya A. Sukovataya, "Spy and Counterspy as a 'Cultural Hero' in the Soviet Cinema of the Cold War", in *Diacronie. Studi di Storia Contemporanea*, 30 (February 2017):1-18.

¹⁶⁴ After a halt of about two decades, American movies were shown in Soviet cinemas following the ratification of the Lacy-Zarubin agreement (1958). The treaty allowed for cultural, educational, and scholarly exchanges. Among the first titles distributed there were *Oklahoma* and *The Apartment*. These movies profoundly impacted the people behind the Iron Curtain, presenting a different society, a prosperous one "where kitchens were always full of food". See, Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchanges and the Cold War. Raising the Iron Curtain*, (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2003): 128.

¹⁶⁵ Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible empire. America's Adventure through the Twentieth Century Europe* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 2006).

music, and values worldwide.¹⁶⁶ American music seemed to cast a spell on people, capturing the hearts and the imagination of a global audience, it proved to be instrumental in the Americanization of the world. Jazz and Rock came to symbolize America and freedom of expression (for instance, VOA's highest rating program was *Music USA. – Jazz Hour*, hosted by Willis Conover).¹⁶⁷

The last branch of USIA was comprised of libraries (reading rooms), exhibits, and press services. The International Press Service (IPS) produced news and background material that reached sixty-six countries, advancing U.S. hegemonic objectives. Cultural exchanges had been in place since the end of the war, when Senator J. W. Fulbright, understanding the importance of culture in the establishment and strengthening of foreign relations, introduced a bill that called for allocating funds for a program aimed at the promotion of “international good will”. This type of public diplomacy facilitated the permeation of American ideals worldwide. They helped in the recruitment and cooption of local elites and fostered mutual understanding. Therefore, by analyzing the exchanges in Gramscian terms, these mechanisms of reciprocal cultural transfers played a significant role in the formation of the dominant class of the subaltern states and in so doing, they secured ideological control of the subservient nations. By nature, this type of exchange proved to be strategic in breaking through the curtain. Between

¹⁶⁶ Voice of America was funded by Congress and was regulated by the Smith-Mundt Act. Its news information branch had to maintain a certain level of impartiality while still operating as a sounding board for liberal democratic principles and American interests. Meanwhile, as far as the public knew, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty were financed by private citizens and businesses through popular campaigns such as Eisenhower's “Crusade for Freedom”. In 1967, the magazine *Rampart* published an exposé denouncing the CIA covert funding of the radios. See Frances Stonor-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and The Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 2000).

¹⁶⁷ Airing for the first time in 1955, *Music USA. – Jazz Hour* was a disk jockey program aimed at Scandinavia but reaching the U.S.S.R. It was originally proposed by the U.S. embassy in Moscow. It broadcasted six nights a week and put a spell on its audience. See, Cull, *The United States and Public Diplomacy*, 107.

1958 and 1988, around fifty-five thousand Soviets visited the States, some never went back, others returned to their countries of origins and brought back traces of American culture.¹⁶⁸ Lastly, exhibits produced material proof of American economic superiority. An example is the American Exhibition held in Moscow in 1959. The expo was the result of a smooth collaboration of civil and political society, given that for the most part it was funded by U.S. private businesses. Moreover, it underscored the importance of market forces and consumerism in establishing U.S. hegemony abroad and increased the allure of the country. American goods proved to be incredibly effective weapons in the war for hearts and minds only because they were paired with strategic planning on the part of the government.¹⁶⁹

Cultural exchanges, music, and movies galvanized the Americanization of the world, U.S. ideals seeped into society and American goods flooded global markets. This permeation facilitated the creation a *forma mentis*, shaped in the image and bent to the will the interests of the United States.¹⁷⁰ Americanization is a phenomenon commonly characterized as the influence of American culture, goods, businesses on foreign countries and the internationalization of U.S. values on a global scale. If Americanization is intended as the process of reshaping world politics, societies, and economies through the creation of international and transnational institutions and the spread of U.S. values and goods, it can be argued that Americanization and

¹⁶⁸ Yale Richmond, "Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: How the West Won", *The Polish Review*, 50, No. 3 (2005): 355–60.

¹⁶⁹ For an account of the impact market forces had in facilitating the Americanization of the world see, Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: The Cultural Mission of the United States and Austria after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 200); Walter L. Hixson, *Partying the Curtain. Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War 1945-1961*, (London: Palgrave, 1988):151-183; Christine Varga-Harris, Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith, and Joes Segal (eds.) *Divided Dreamworlds? The Cultural Cold War in East and West* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press):133-153.

¹⁷⁰ Although to a lesser degree, they also managed to permeate the Soviet bloc. See for example, Bill Nichols, "How Rock 'n Roll Freed the World," *USA Today*, November 6, 2003.

globalization are to be considered two sides of the same coin. This cross-cultural contamination was facilitated by the United States position of dominance after WWII however, it was very rarely, if ever, imposed by force and most often willingly accepted by the subaltern nations.

When in 1961, JFK became President, America reached the zenith of its cultural allure during the Cold War era. Kennedy came from a political dynasty and was keenly aware of the power of media and good publicity. He revamped USIA by appointing Edward R. Murrow as director and pushed for the allocation of more funds for the agency. As a result of their charismatic and charming presence, JFK and his wife, Jaqueline Kennedy, quickly became two of the most prominent figures in the world, influencing politics and fashion. The First Lady herself energized the Americanization process during her official visits to Europe and during her “goodwill tour” of India and Pakistan.¹⁷¹

Jackie’s sophisticated style, inspired by her French roots, helped construct a cosmopolitan model of American feminism and portray the image of a cultured nation (in opposition to the stereotype of the ignorant, loud American). Moreover, she facilitated the strengthening of French American relations. Scholars tend to distinguish between formal, cultural, and personal diplomacy, but in the case of Jaqueline Kennedy, these aspects of international affairs merged into the same dimension. In the 1960s, the image of the Kennedys personified American aspirational values by embodying the fruits of capitalism, vigor, and freedom, boosting America’s appeal and its

¹⁷¹ Jaqueline Kennedy received a movie star welcome wherever she travelled. Her style in particular influenced fashion and set trends worldwide. The First Lady’s contributions included advocacy for the arts and humanities, she established the White House Historical Association, still active today. See Barbara A. Perry, *Jacqueline Kennedy: First Lady of the New Frontier* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004) and Whitney Walton, “Jacqueline Kennedy, Frenchness, and French-American Relations in the 1950s and Early 1960s” *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 31, No. 2 (2013): 34–57.

cultural hegemony. The Americanization of the world was expedited by pop cultural icons and American brands. From the 1950s onwards, US pop culture and goods maintained a firm grip on foreign audiences. Icons like Elvis Presley, Marylyn Monroe, James Dean, intellectuals and writers, such as Arthur Miller and William Faulkner, modernist artists like Andy Warhol, Jackson Pollock, and Edward Hopper, athletes, jazz and rock musicians, encouraged the spread of America's ideals and the consolidation of its cultural hegemony.

Although Kennedy's own image created an even more favorable disposition towards the United States, his policies sedimented America's material might on the world stage. From a political and cultural standpoint, he promoted U.S. technological and industrial achievement setting the pace for the space race.¹⁷² Moreover, like his democratic predecessor, he turned his eyes towards the "underdeveloped" world enacting policies of foreign financial aid. Responding to the Soviet threat in America's backyard, the 35th president instituted the Alliance for Progress. Much like Truman's Point Four Program, Kennedy's plan aimed to shepherd Latin America towards modernization and prosperity understood as the establishment of a liberal democratic system. It was a very ambitious and highly publicized project that combined responses to geopolitical, economic, ideological, and military threats.

The idea of development consolidated as a synonym of containment moreover, the export of technological and industrial expertise would secure subservience and dependency. Furthermore, Latin America became a new market and fresh hunting ground for American businesses, which enlarged

¹⁷² Just months after being elected, as part of his New Frontier agenda, JFK announced to the nation that, by the end of the decade, the United States would "put a man on the moon". For a detailed account of the "Moon race" see, Douglas Brinkley, *American Moonshot: John F. Kennedy and The Great Space Race* (New York: Harper Collins, 2019).

and fortified their presence in the region. In this intersection between scientific advancement, humanitarian aid, democracy promotion, and American identity laid the foundation of U.S. cultural hegemony in South America (and the world).¹⁷³ The program proved to be beneficial only for the local elites, which grew richer and strengthened their power. In turn the United States consolidated its hold on the region. As Walter LaFeber argued “The real alliance emerged between foreign institutions and local bourgeoisie”.¹⁷⁴ Thus, drawing from Gramsci’s interpretation of hegemony, by co-opting local elites and by enacting a policy of collaboration between political and civil society, the United States secured hegemonic dominance in the region.¹⁷⁵

4.3 Crises and Resilience of U.S. Hegemony

The Vietnam war was the central event of what scholars call the “signal crisis” of U.S. hegemony.¹⁷⁶ On par with other Cold War foreign entanglements, the conflict stemmed from the convergence of two concerns,

¹⁷³ Michael E. Latham, “Ideology, Social Science, and Destiny: Modernization and the Kennedy-Era Alliance for Progress.” *Diplomatic History*, 22, No. 2 (1998): 199–229. See also, Michael W. Weis, “The Twilight of Pan-Americanism: The Alliance for Progress, Neo-Colonialism, and Non-Alignment in Brazil, 1961-1964” *The International History Review*, 23, No. 2 (2001): 322–44; Christopher Darnton, “Asymmetry and Agenda-Setting in US–Latin American Relations: Rethinking the Origins of the Alliance for Progress” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 14, No. 4 (2012): 55–92, and Michael Dunne “Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress: Countering Revolution in Latin America: Part I: From the White House to the Charter of Punta Del Este” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, 89, No. 6 (2013): 1389–1409.

¹⁷⁴ Walter LaFeber, “The Alliances in Retrospect,” in *Bordering Trouble: Resources and Politics in Latin America*, Andrew Maguire and Janet Welsh Brown(eds.), (Bethesda, Adler&Adler, 1986):337-88, see also Simon G. Hanson, *Dollar Diplomacy Modern Style: Chapters in the Failure of the Alliance for Progress* (Washington, The Inter-American Affairs Press, 1970).

¹⁷⁵ Under the administration of Kennedy and Johnson foreign aid was weaponized to its limit, in addition to the Alliance for progress, Kennedy created the Peace Corps and USAID See, Gerard T. Rice, *The Bold Experiment. JFK’s Peace Corps* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985)

¹⁷⁶ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century. Money, Power, and the Origins of our Time* (New York: Verso Books, 2010).

the expansion of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and the threat of a potential loss of commercial markets.¹⁷⁷

Although the origins of the conflict began long before LBJ decided to put U.S. boots on the ground, the war in Vietnam was a self-inflicted wound. The conflict was a case of imperial overextension, where winning the anti-communist battle was all that mattered. The Johnson and the Nixon administration saw the conflict as a zero-sum game and abandoned the Gramscian implementation of hegemony (based on collaborative relations of power and built on consent) in favor of sheer domination. But why was that transition consequential for America's hegemonic ambitions?

After WWII, the United States had managed to gain a predominant position not only for its material might, but due to the consent generated among the subaltern states. As previously stated, according to Gramsci, hegemony is a form of power that is bestowed upon the dominant state not acquired through coercion and to be retained it needs legitimacy. The Vietnam war took away that undisputed legitimacy, called into question U.S. moral righteousness, and challenged its military superiority. The loss of virtue translated into growing doubts about U.S. capacity or right to lead the world. For the United States, image was currency and, starting from the late 1960s, that currency was declining significantly in value.

From a cultural standpoint, the war galvanized the ideals of the New Left both domestically and internationally. In a newly globalized world, images of the atrocities and news reports spread like wildfire. Anti-war protests in the United States echoed worldwide with demonstrations taking place in most Western countries. The ideas and slogan chanted in American cities were translated and repeated abroad. The United States was indeed setting the cultural agenda for the world but not in the way it had hoped. By 1969, the

¹⁷⁷ Thus damaging the US businesses.

Soviet Union and China were engaged in the conflict, actively assisting the Viet Minh. At home, support for the fighting had plummeted, it was a costly war on more than one front. Military spending was raising substantially, and the conflict was claiming an ever-increasing number of lives.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, the country's reputation was taking a toll and so was its hegemonic standing.¹⁷⁹

However, America's power managed to overcome the crisis presented by the Vietnam War by reinventing its hegemonic grasp. By 1968, the Republican candidate, Richard Nixon, had made the war in Vietnam one of the central issues of his campaign, promising to deliver an end to the hostilities.¹⁸⁰ Despite the hopes of "the silent majority" that had delivered him the victory, his election did not alter the social and political climate of the time, on the contrary, it was met with the same amount of discontent and wide-spread protests. 1968 was a year of seismic changes both in the U.S. and abroad. That year two assassinations had rocked the nation, that of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. There was a deep yearning for

¹⁷⁸ See for example, Ben Cosgrove, "Faces of the American Dead in Vietnam: One Week's Toll, June 1969", *Life Magazine* (June 27th, 1969). Accessed at <https://www.life.com/history/faces-of-the-american-dead-in-vietnam-one-weeks-toll-june-1969/>

¹⁷⁹ The role of the media during the conflict changed over the years, going from a blind support to a more even keened chronicle of the events. In the beginning, animated by Cold War patriotic sentiments, press reports were mostly favorable (partly due to a "Cold War time" trust in the government and partly due to a dependency on the military for the accreditation process). News anchors and television personalities advocated for America's stance towards South Vietnam, and example is Walter Cronkite who, in one of his news shows, following the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, proclaimed the American people's commitment "To stop Communist aggression wherever it raises its head".

The developments of the situation in Vietnam and the unearthing of America's atrocities modified the position of the press which began to describe the events in a less jingoistic fashion but still sometimes retaining implicit bias (parts of the media remained blindly loyal to the pro-America narrative). See Michael X. Delli Carpini, "Vietnam and the Press", in *Legacy of the Vietnam War in the American imagination*, D.M. Shafer Ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990): 125-156.

¹⁸⁰ Kent G. Sieg, "The 1968 Presidential Election and Peace in Vietnam." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 26, No. 4 (1996): 1062–80.

reform, protests characterized by a rebellion against state militaries and bureaucracies erupted and escalated worldwide. These global demonstrations posed a significant problem for the hegemon. Culture was changing and it seemed to be moving away from the order shaped the United States.

Nevertheless, drawing from Gramsci's thought, it is possible to give a different and opposite interpretation of the period, one that reads the global unrest as confirmation of U.S. cultural hegemony, not as a signal of its crisis. The United States was in fact at the same time target and co-author of the change. If it is true that, in the 1960s, social movements began to demand change and shape new ideals, it is also true that the most influential ones originated in the United States. In America, the civil rights movement was at its peak and so was the women's movement with the second wave of feminism.¹⁸¹ Additionally, new sensitivities were starting to form, and so the environmental movement was born, emerging from the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements. Although on the surface the crusade for change appeared to be anti-American and anti-establishment in nature, it was the product of America's own cultural elites (most of the movements' leaders came out of Ivy League colleges), it was vastly supported by U.S. philanthropies, and it was built upon the elites' values system.¹⁸²

Another challenge to the U.S. hegemony materialized with the energy crises of the 1970s. Much of the macroeconomics scholarship identifies the cause of the crisis with the OPEC's price increase of January 1974, used as political weapon to bend the Western economies, however, one would be remissive to limit the origin of the situation to that factor. The decision of the Arab countries came on the heels of the collapse of the Bretton Woods system. Starting from August 1971, Nixon's administration unilaterally

¹⁸¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).

¹⁸² It is worth noting that the repercussions of the 1960s protests were felt throughout the following decades. They brought changes that partly reshaped the world order.

withdrew from the fixed exchange rates model in favor of a flexible one, without consulting with IMF members.¹⁸³ Between 1971 and 1973 the currency market was in turmoil, the value of the dollar fell drastically and, given that oil contracts were stipulated in dollars, the decline of the U.S. dollar translated into diminished revenues for the OPEC countries.

America's decision to opt out of Bretton Woods was the result of the ballooning of the budget and the debt during the 1960s, a decade marked by an increase in public spending (necessary to finance the Great Society programs), the war in Vietnam, and the decision of the Federal Reserve to monetize the deficit. The conflation of these phenomena resulted in the accumulation of U.S. dollars worldwide and rising prices. The inflation at home had a domino effect globally and the value of gold, oil, and the dollar floated freely producing anxiety and instability in the international markets.

Ford's presidency was not able to curb inflation or stabilize global markets, nor was it successful in mending the gashes levied upon the standings of the United States. The image of the "benevolent empire" and that of the model of liberal democracy had been severely damaged by the shortsighted decisions of the previous decade, such as the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the unilateral withdrawal from the Bretton Woods system. The geopolitical gains of Nixinger's realpolitik were but a mere band aid to the reputational wound. Anti-Americanism abroad had grown substantially during the détente years and, domestically, Americans were unsatisfied with the direction the country was taking. There was a sense of uneasiness with the "State of the Union" and an unprecedented preoccupation about America's future. Was the "shining city upon a hill" dimming its light?

¹⁸³ The withdrawal from the Bretton Woods system was less abrupt than it is commonly believed, for an analysis of the planning behind the decision see, James Harold, *International Monetary Co-operation Since Bretton Woods*, (New York: IMF and Oxford University Press, 1996): 215-220.

The profound crisis of identity and the weakened hegemonic standing resulted in a course redirection personified by Jimmy Carter. The new president made it its mission to amend the errors of his predecessors that had led the nation astray. In this newly globalized world, U.S. primacy was facing an invisible threat, a crisis of credibility, that had been heightened after 1968. An America in crisis needed a new strategy to maintain its *primus inter pares* position. Carter's presidency tried to provide just that, a rebranding.

Carter embodied a new wave of Americanization of international values through his focus on human rights. He intercepted the global call for change and launched a new era in American foreign policy. After all, to survive the hegemon needed to polish its image thus, the new administration chose to rebrand itself by going back to the post-war advocacy role for human rights and ascribed to them a renewed and unprecedented importance. In the early idealistic days of the Carter's administration, human rights became the decision-making factor for the backing or revoking of support to other nations. To highlight the course redirection, the president established the post of Assistant secretary of State for Human Rights in 1976.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the President reduced or ended financial aid to those regimes that did not abide by the UN Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), including cutting ties and any sort of help even to those governments that were vigorously anti-Communist. Despite his efforts, Carter did not deliver the economic cure he had promised and, in 1980, his reelection chances appeared slim.

The crisis had no easy solution considering that the recession was far from the only issue at play. The economic malaise was only one of the many ailments afflicting the American people. A far more pernicious malady was ravaging the country, a profound dissatisfaction with America's standing on

¹⁸⁴ The position was assigned to James Morrison Wilson Jr. See, Hauke Hartmann. "US Human Rights Policy under Carter and Reagan, 1977-1981." *Human Rights Quarterly* 23, No. 2 (2001): 402–30.

the world stage. A new crisis, the “crisis of credibility,” had metastasized into a crisis of confidence in the hegemonic might of the nation, events like the Iran revolution and the consequent hostage crisis, the failure of the SALT II talks, and the generally negative economic trend led Americans to believe that the country had lost its luster. From the right of the political spectrum a confident voice started to grow stronger and capture the attention of many, that voice was Ronald Reagan.

The former California governor intercepted the call of the American people, who were yearning for a return to a time when the country was admired and strong, when America “was great”.¹⁸⁵ Carter’s leadership was judged as weak and incapable of returning the nation to its illustrious position of primacy. The displeasure was so ardent that, despite being the incumbent, he was defeated in the 1980 presidential election. Regan won by a landslide, carrying forty-four states, and securing 489 electoral votes.¹⁸⁶ With a new occupant of the Oval Office, the tide of history was about to turn, and, in the span of a decade, history would be changed forever.

If in the domestic and economic realm, the new president moved away from the line and practices of the previous administration, on foreign policy matters Reagan carried on Carter’s objective of safeguarding human rights. Whilst the former President had advocated and implemented a radical form

¹⁸⁵ Among Reagan’s campaign slogans, one of the most effective that breached people’s hearts and “guts”, not minds, was “Let’s Make America Great Again”. The phrase was used for the first time, in recorded political history, during the 1940 presidential election by Alexander Wiley and later it resurfaced in Barry Goldwater’s campaign in 1964. Nonetheless, it was under Reagan that the expression became a rallying cry. There were racial undertones in the slogan during his campaign and, although, mild, they cannot be ignored. One should ask oneself when exactly was America great, and when did it stop? The saying triggers nostalgia in people’s brains, it is easy to long for a past that one has never lived through not knowing if it ever really was as idyllic as portrayed. “Make America Great Again” reached pick popularity during the 2016 presidential election when Republican candidate, Donald J. Trump, made it the trademark of his run for the Oval (MAGA). In 2016, the phrase was not a mere dog whistle, rather a bullhorn to bring all the racists to the yard.

¹⁸⁶ Adam Clymer, “Signed, Sealed, Certified: Reagan Elected President”, *The New York Times* (December 16th, 1980):19.

moral diplomacy, even when in the short term it negatively impacted U.S. interests abroad – as in the revocation of financial and humanitarian aid to regimes that did not respect human rights – Reagan embraced a rather fluid interpretation of those same rights.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, during his presidential campaign, he had condemned both Carter’s “appeasement” of the Soviet Union and the détente strategy. His Cold War warrior attitude and his aggressive anticommunism distinguished him from his adversary and his predecessors, creating the perception of a resolute leader. The Iran hostage crisis was the nail in Carter’s political coffin and shun a light on U.S. hegemonic decline. Thus, Reagan utilized the event in the Middle East to present himself as the resolute commander in chief America needed, someone who would not “apologize, compromise, withdraw, and retreat”.¹⁸⁸ Once elected president, he kept true to his words and embarked on a crusade against the Soviet foe, ushering in a new era in American hegemony.

On par with the Carter administration, the Reagan team thought that the promotion of human rights and democracy abroad was an essential component of U.S. foreign policy, to achieve and consolidate a full-blown hegemonic status. Unlike Carter however, Reagan believed that the achievement of these goals was best attained through the instauration and development of strong governmental institutions and democratic political systems that in turn would enact neoliberal economic policies subscribing to the set of beliefs the United States was producing.

¹⁸⁷ Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing (October 27, 1964)," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California. Accessed at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/reagans/ronald-reagan/time-choosing-speech-october-27-1964>. Moreover, in multiple occasions, Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an “existential threat” to peace and the United States. See, Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990); interview with Walter Cronkite, March 3rd 1981, cited in Beth A. Fisher, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and The End of the Cold War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997).

¹⁸⁸ Krikon K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson (eds.), *Reagan, In His Own Hand* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001): 472, 477.

In the Eighties, such an enforced democratization fever spread to international institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. For many in the Global South the buzzword of the decade, democratization, was code for “regime change,” most of the times paired with de-regulation. Additionally, a U.S.-led version of “good governance” was spread through those institutions to encourage citizen participation and accountability, while simultaneously providing a fresh blanket to the implementation of a de-regulated free market system.

Reagan, thus, successfully combined *idealpolitik* with *realpolitik*. His anti-communist strategy was two-pronged. On the one hand there was the rhetorical aggressive aimed at exposing the superiority of American values and ideals and spotlighting the imperialistic evils perpetuated by the U.S.S.R. On the other hand, the administration believed that a military buildup would put a stop to Soviet expansionism and interventionism. During the first three years in office, policymakers wedded the ideological approach to a more realist strategy aimed at revitalizing U.S. military strength.¹⁸⁹ In doing so, however, Reagan rescued America’s hegemonic grasp and, while professing to “make America great again,” he indeed put the country on its way to reinvent its leadership.

¹⁸⁹ Beth A. Fischer, “Toening the Hardline? The Reagan Administration and the Ending of the Cold War”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 112, No.3 (Autumn 1997):477-496.

Conclusion

Starting from the 1970s, there was a growing number of scholars that provided compelling case and analysis of the decline of United States' hegemony. While those arguments were correct in highlighting the weakening of the hegemon, they missed the key point of U.S. hegemonic resiliency. Their analysis was based on realist and liberal understandings of the notion therefore, when material capabilities and/or global influence dwindled the prognosis of decline was swift to arrive.

This thesis has argued that U.S. hegemony is based neither on material capabilities nor on influence over the international system alone. Rather, it is a type of domination that mixes consent and coercion, and it is based primarily on the persuasion of the subaltern states to acquiesce to the will of the dominant state, in such a covert way that they do not even realize they are sometimes acting against their own interest.

Following a Gramscian understanding of the concept, thus, true hegemony is to be understood primarily in a cultural sense: hegemony is not simply "getting one way over the others", because the hegemon's way is the *only* way possible. The real hegemonic power lays in convincing people that there are no other possibilities, and that is precisely what America has been doing over the course of the twentieth century.

While providing an overview of the deep-rooted origins and most recent developments of the concept of hegemony, this thesis has taken a Neo-Gramscian approach to assess the contemporary evolution of American hegemony. It has explained how the United States has been able to retain power through systemic changes that have dismantled sociopolitical and economic orders and simultaneously consolidate its global ascendancy. Economic liberalism, democratic liberalism, Wilsonianism, the New Deal,

Cold War liberalism, human rights discourses, and neoliberalism have all been instruments in the hands of Washington policymakers to consolidate their cultural upper hands on a global stage. Through the execution of (Gramscian) hegemony rather than just military and political control, the U.S. started its rise to and supported its endurance as global power. Hegemony, in this process, was a product of the historical evolution of the US empire.

The dramatic changes of the 1990s and the early 2000s, the opening of what columnist Charles Krauthammer called “a unipolar moment” and the transformation of the world into a fully integrated one represented further challenges to the cogency of U.S. hegemony, which unfortunately go beyond the scope of this thesis in spite of their undisputed relevance.¹⁹⁰ U.S. hegemony is currently confronted by old and new foes, from terrorist organizations to regional powers like Russia and China. As history has shown, however, the United States has been able to maintain and reinvent its hegemonic leadership even in times of deep crises. The U.S. has succeeded, in Gramsci’s words, to spread its core values in a way that has become willfully accepted. To guarantee acquiescence, America has kept appealing to the masses so that its ideological underpinnings could be embraced and become *forma mentis*. At the moment, it seems as if the United States, with its renewed emphasis on democracy, is the only power that possesses both the structure and the embedded *forma mentis* to carry out a hegemonic plan. Historians of the future will tell.

¹⁹⁰ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment”, *Foreign Affairs*, 70, No. 1 (January 1st, 1990): 23-33.

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