How Foreign Policy Shapes American National Identity

PAUL T. McCARTNEY

ON 22 OCTOBER 2018, PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP ignited controversy when he proclaimed at a rally in Texas, "You know, they have a word —it's sort of became old-fashioned—it's called a 'nationalist.' … You know what I am? I'm a nationalist, okay? I'm a nationalist. Nationalist. Nothing wrong. Use that word."[1] President Trump's provocation aimed explicitly to draw a contrast with "globalism," a contrived foreign policy posture that echoes liberal internationalism.[2] By using the word "nationalist" to implicitly reject liberal internationalism, which itself expresses deep currents in American national identity, Trump turned a discussion about America's relationship with the world into a vehicle by which to defend his vision for and understanding of the United States, one that prioritizes sharp boundaries between "Americans" and others, deemphasizes consensus building and institutionalism, and disdains foreign aid, which is often conceived as a proxy for welfare spending. Trump's invocation of nationalism, in other words, was

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[1]Aaron Blake, "Trump's Embrace of a Fraught Term—'Nationalist'—Could Cement a Dangerous Racial Divide," *Washington Post,* 23 October 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2018/10/23/ trumps-embrace-fraught-term-nationalist-could-cement-dangeroU.S.-racial-divide/?utm_term = . 8951de0a0822, accessed 20 September 2019.

[2]In Trump's words, "A globalist is a person that wants the globe to do well, frankly, not caring about our country so much" (Blake, "Trump's Embrace"). There is obviously no approach to U.S. foreign policy that prioritizes others' interests over America's; this sentence immediately preceded the one opening this article.

PAUL T. McCARTNEY is Professor of Political Science at Towson University. He has published *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* and numerous articles on U.S. foreign policy, American nationalism, and related topics.

used to convey his sense of American moral priorities, as expressed through its interactions with other states. In this way, a reference to foreign policy became one about American national identity. Trump is not the first to draw this connection. Presidents regularly blend visions of American nationalism with foreign policy rhetoric, and international affairs in general exert a much more significant influence on Americans' understanding of themselves than is commonly acknowledged—and on more than just a rhetorical level.

Yet studies of the nature and sources of American national identity neglect or underappreciate the degree to which it has been shaped by world politics. As Jasper M. Trautsch notes in his comprehensive survey of the literature on the sources of American nationalism, for example, the contribution of foreign policy to American nationalism is "a process yet to be systematically investigated" and "a topic still awaiting comprehensive examination."[3] The inattention to national identity as a *product* of international or foreign policy variables is surprising given its broadly recognized role in *shaping* U.S. foreign affairs, most commonly through America's self-proclaimed mission to transform the world in its own image.[4] To some degree, of course, all national identities inform foreign policy; this is one of the core assumptions of the international relations theory known as constructivism.[5] Still, the case of the United States is somewhat distinctive in the degree to which

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[3]Jasper M. Trautsch, "The Origin and Nature of American Nationalism," *National Identities* 18 (Fall 2016): 289–312, at 304.

[4]A small but representative list of sources either arguing or premised on the argument that American national identity figures significantly into U.S. foreign policymaking includes George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Walter L. Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy: National Identity and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World since 1776* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); and, in a different way, Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy,* expanded ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). Additional titles are selectively referenced throughout the article, but the theme of American values, ideology, or identity contributing to the formulation of U.S. foreign policy is so pervasive as to be a staple of the foreign policy literature.

[5]See, for example, Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Roxanna Sjostedt, "The Discursive Origins of a Doctrine: Norms, Identity, and Securitization under Harry S Truman and George W. Bush," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 3 (July 2007): 233–254; and Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). A similar approach that adopts a more instrumentalist understanding of the role of ideas in foreign policymaking than constructivists' discursive approach rooted in culture, norms, and identities is Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane, eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

Americans demand normative justifications for their major foreign policy choices.[6]

This article investigates the ways that foreign policy functions as a source of American national identity. It does so in three ways: First, it shows how widely accepted constituents of American identity, such as freedom or equality, acquire meaning through the actions and choices made in their name and how world politics can provide an important arena in which policies invoking American identity are implemented. For example, America's power on the world stage has frequently been used as a measuring stick to validate notions of "destiny," "greatness," or "exceptionalism"—all central concepts in America's nationalist lexicon.[7] Second, Americans have consistently invoked foreign "others" to construct their own sense of "self" while also using foreign policy to entrench and clarify existing social boundaries.[8] Boundaries are constitutive of identities; as David Campbell puts it, "identity is constituted in relation to difference."[9] This aspect of identity is especially germane to world politics, and Americans have been assiduous in capitalizing on boundary-drawing opportunities. In addition to these two broad dynamics, American identity can be said to evolve along with the governing construction of "freedom," as defined in U.S. Supreme Court rulings. Foreign policy has played an overlooked role in shaping the meaning of American freedom in this context.

Taking these general features of identity construction into account allows us to recognize that through our actions as well as our ideals, we make ourselves who we are. When a policy is formulated and then promulgated with explicit appeal to core values, especially when the effects of that policy include creating or emphasizing distinctions between individuals, the policy can be said to have contributed to the evolution of

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[6]On Americans' demands for normative justifications, see Ole R. Holsti, *Making American Foreign Policy* (New York: Routledge, 2006), as well as realist authors, who reliably object to this tendency.

[7]As Woodrow Wilson wrote of the Spanish-American War, "We have seen the transformation of America completed. No war has ever transformed us quite as the war with Spain transformed us. We have witnessed a new revolution. We have seen the transformation of America completed." Woodrow Wilson, "The Ideals of America," *Atlantic Monthly,* December 1902, quoted in Smith, *America's Mission,* 38.

[8]As discussed later, this article draws specifically on social identity for insight into this process. For social identity theory applied in the context of this analysis, see Kevin Coe and Rico Neumann, "International Identity in Theory and Practice: The Case of the Modern Presidency," *Communication Monographs* 78 (June 2011): 139–161; Elizabeth Theiss-Moore, *Who Counts as American? The Boundaries of National Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Paul G. Davies, Claude M. Steele, and Hazel Rose Markus, "A Nation Challenged: The Impact of Foreign Threat on America's Tolerance for Diversity," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 95 (Summer 2008): 308–318; and Philip Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (November 1984): 339–361.

[9]David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity,* revised ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 9.

the national identity to the extent that its effects are durable. American national identity, as interpreted here, is the official manifestation of Americans' collective moral aspirations as expressed through both the rhetoric and policies of representative political actors. Understood as such, it becomes possible to discern how emergent phenomena, such as America's changing role on the world stage, generate both new norms and new constructions of existing concepts and social boundaries that collectively constitute the practical as well as aspirational identity of the American nation.

To develop this claim, this article proceeds as follows: First, it summarizes certain core insights of second-image-reversed scholarship and critical theory that have shaped the argument presented here. Second, it draws from the literature on nationalist theory to depict national identities as contested, constructed, emotionally rooted, politically oriented, and defined externally by boundaries and internally by culturally derived conceptions of community; this model is then applied to American national identity. Third, it explains in more depth the contribution of U.S. foreign policy to the nation-building processes of contestation and boundary setting, using as illustrations two short case studies, nineteenth-century expansionism and the symbolic politics of the 1970s Panama Canal Treaty debates, as well as other historical examples. Fourth, this article presents a brief overview of Supreme Court civil liberties cases that emerged from foreign policy. The Spanish-American War provides a final case study linking all of these themes.

THE SECOND IMAGE REVERSED AND CRITICAL THEORY

This article fits within an underappreciated literature in the field of American political development, which can be called the "second image reversed" school. Second-image-reversed scholars examine how foreign policy and international events shape domestic variables such as partisanship, state building, civil rights, and civic associations.[10] The standard independent variables in this literature are war and trade, and the dependent variable, most commonly, has been some aspect of the state, often its size or institutional structure.[11] Peter A. Gourevitch offers an overview of this field:

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[10] Major works in the field include Ira Katznelson and Martin Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade: International Influence on American Political Development* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Robert J. Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *From the Outside In: World War II and the American State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[11] Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison State: America's Anti-statism and Its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

> From the colonial period to the present, American institutions and policies have been strongly influenced by interactions with forces outside U.S. borders. International factors have had an important bearing on American security needs, economic policies, political institutions, partisan political cleavages, culture, and through immigration, the very composition of the nation's population, and membership in the American polity. The international arena shapes definitions of American identity, of American interests, and of the identity and interests of component pieces of the American polity.[12]

In this passage, Gourevitch summarizes the main contours of the second-image-reversed school, but it bears mentioning that of the variables that he lists as having been influenced by external factors, "definitions of American identity" has received the least attention.

Second-image-reversed scholars have presented compelling evidence demonstrating that the formal and informal structures of American governance have been profoundly shaped by international considerations. For example, security imperatives on a North American continent still pregnant with dangers to the early republic led to the strengthening of its central institutions[13]; the empowerment of the executive branch (a recurrent theme)[14]; the construction of roads and forts, which anchored and connected communities across the continent and spread in step with America's expanding borders[15]; and enhancement of the state's revenue-generating capacity, since a major portion of the federal budget was dedicated to defense until the Progressive Era.[16]

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[12]Peter A. Gourevitch, "Reinventing the American State: Political Dynamics in the Post-Cold War Era," in Katznelson and Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade,* 301–330, at 301. Gourevitch can reasonably be regarded as the founder of this field. His seminal article, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization* 32 (Autumn 1978): 881–912, played on Kenneth Waltz's characterization of state-level variables (what he calls the "second image") as "dropping out" from a usefully parsimonious theory of international relations. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

[13]Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898.*

[14]The concept of the "imperial presidency" is a clear example of second-image-reversed logic, even if it is not typically presented as a part of the field per se. Of particular note is its insight that while the powers of the presidency expanded through foreign policymaking, they spilled over into other policy arenas as well. See Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Imperial Presidency* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *War and the American Presidency* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004); Louis Fisher, *Presidential War Power* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); and James P. Pfiffner, *The Modern Presidency,* 6th ed. (Boston: Cengage Wadsworth, 2011).

[15]William D. Adler and Andrew J. Polsky, "Building the New American Nation: Economic Development, Public Goods, and the Early U.S. Army," *Political Science Quarterly* 125 (Spring 2010): 87–110.

[16]Ira Katznelson, "Flexible Capacity: The Military and Early American State Building," in Katznelson and Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade,* 82–110; Adler and Polsky, "Building the New American Nation"; and David C. Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003). Hendrickson's book, along with his subsequent *Union, Nation, or Empire: The American Debate over International Relations, 1789–1941* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009),

Over time, trade and military interests subsequently compelled the creation of a dense network of state institutions, including familiar ones such as the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense, as well as trade courts, new offices in the executive and legislative branches, and research institutes, among countless others that are not typically associated with foreign policy. They also led to government-led partnerships with private actors (including, most prominently, what Dwight D. Eisenhower dubbed the "military-industrial complex") and the creation of a host of policies regulating American life, from the Selective Service Act to hunting regulations for migratory birds.[17] Party ideologies and alignments have shifted and groups have seen their rights expand and contract as a consequence of wars.[18] In other words, many institutional and regulatory dimensions of American politics have been fundamentally shaped by foreign affairs.

A different perspective than the second-image-reversed school, critical theory, also offers insights into the focus of this study. In *The Myth of American Diplomacy,* for example, Walter Hixson argues that "foreign policy plays a profoundly significant role in the process of creating, affirming, and disciplining conceptions of national identity."[19] External aggression is central to the project of constructing America's identity, according to critical theorists, as it unites the national community "against a continuous succession of enemy-others" while marginalizing or silencing those "who might threaten the cultural hegemony of the Myth of America."[20] Hixson argues that the "Myth of America" serves the interests of elites who have fashioned the American empire while co-opting an ignorant, acquiescent, or complicit public that refuses to acknowledge the empire's sins and often does not recognize them as sins at all.[21]

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uses a structuralist approach to American nationalism based in federalism, rather than cultural analysis, to demonstrate how those debating foreign policy implicitly recognized that the stakes included American identity.

[17]Judith Goldstein, "International Forces and Domestic Politics: Trade Policy and Institution Building in the United States," in Katznelson and Shefter, eds., *Shaped by War and Trade,* 211–236; and Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898.*

[18]Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898.*

[19]Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy,* 8; see also Campbell, *Writing Security.*

[20]Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy,* 10–11. See also Paul Frymer, *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), though Frymer is not a critical theorist.

[21]R. Kroes, "The Paradox of American Global Power," *Sociology* 51 (2014): 492–502, develops this argument further, suggesting that the public's insistence on American power and innocence makes it difficult for leaders to alter the course of empire at this point in history.

Christian G. Appy, meanwhile, describes how the Vietnam War revealed deep fissures in Americans' sense of their place in the world and of themselves, but he argues that Hixson's hegemonic "Myth of America" ultimately prevailed as the dominant narrative defining both.[22] According to Appy, evidence demonstrating American "wrongdoing or failure is dismissed. It is not 'who we are.'"[23] This perspective echoes a familiar charge against Americans: that they insist on their own innocence, against any and all evidence to the contrary.[24]

This article draws on many of the insights of critical theory, including its sense that actions as well as ideas matter when ascertaining identities, but it resists two of the field's core assumptions. First, the argument that the American people are consistently motivated by a desire to oppress others is too categorical. Second, critical theory's insistence that oppression and hierarchy are *necessary* components of the discourses that construct identity might be true in some cases, but not as a universal claim. Instead, this analysis builds on an approach to national identity and policymaking that rhymes with critical theory but minimizes a priori assumptions about actors' motives and interests.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Several conflicting definitions of nations and nationalism populate a vast literature on the topic.[25] I highlight four characteristics of nations that recur in most examinations of the topic. In emphasizing these four, this article does not presume to supply a comprehensive theory of national identities as much as emphasize assumptions that are both commonly shared and germane to this analysis, specifically by having applicability to both civic and ethnic nationalisms. First, nations are delimited, with boundaries that require policing and maintenance. Second, nations are constructed by culturally situated actors. As such, they are essentially

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[22]Christian G. Appy, *American Reckoning: The Vietnam War and our National Identity* (New York: Viking, 2015), 255–274. Hixson's "Myth of America" holds that "[f]oreign policy flows from cultural hegemony affirming 'America' as a manly, racially superior, and providentially destined 'beacon of liberty,' a country which possesses a special right to exert power in the world" (Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy,* 1).

[23]Appy, *American Reckoning,* 334.

[24]On American innocence, see Michael H. Hunt, "In the Wake of September 11: The Clash of What?," *Journal of American History* 89 (September 2002): 416–425; and Simon Philpott and David Mutimer, "The United States of Amnesia: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Recurrence of Innocence," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 22 (June 2009): 301-317. Hunt calls it America's "impressive capacity to blank out an inconvenient past" (420).

[25]For an excellent overview of the tremendous diversity in approaches to and definitions of nationalism, see Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism,* revised and updated ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

normative enterprises. Third, nations embed political and territorial aspirations.[26] Fourth, nations inspire powerful emotional responses that reflect the co-identification of individuals' personal and national identities[27]; an attack on the nation is an attack on one's self, and nationalist discourses profit from gut feelings more than rationality. These four attributes are interrelated, and they feature prominently in the feedback cycle between national identity and foreign policy.

A nation is a self-identified political community based on a set of ideas about the essential nature of its members' relationship with themselves and others. According to Ernest Gellner, "nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones."[28] All nations, whether premised on ethnic, religious, ideological, or other grounds, have as their defining goal the preservation of that quality or essence that distinguishes it from other nations—hence the need for political expression, including, if necessary, sovereign autonomy. A primary feature of all nations, therefore, is the presence of boundaries around the community; these boundaries are both conceptual and physical. They need policing and maintenance.

Drawing on social identity theory, Elizabeth Thiess-Moore argues that the two most important features of national identity are "the level of commitment people feel toward the national group and the boundaries they set to determine who is fully in the group and who is not."[29] Social identity theory emphasizes the need for groups to maintain internal cohesion while distinguishing themselves from other groups, which are regarded unfavorably in relation to one's own group.[30] Thus, strong

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[26]On the territorial aspect of national identities, see Walker Connor's discussion of "homelands" in *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 78.
[27]In Liah Greenfeld's words, "nationalism locates the source of *individual identity* within a 'people,' which is seen as the bearer of sovereignty, the central object of loyalty, and the basis of collective solidarity." Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 3 (emphasis added).
[28]Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism,* 2nd ed., with introduction by John Breuilly (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 1. Gellner is among those theorists who emphasize ethnicity as a necessary feature of national identities, an assumption not shared here, yet his core feature is political legitimacy. For an alternative view, see Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).
[29]Theiss-Moore, *Who Counts as American?,* 4. She adds, "National identity is a group identity, a group made of fellow nationals, and consists of a cognitive, affective, and evaluative attachment to that group" (24). For her discussion of boundaries, see chap. 3.
[30]As Davies, Steele, and Markus put it, "Social identity theory postulates that individuals strive for a positive social identity, which requires that ingroups be favorably differentiated from outgroups" ("A Nation Challenged," 308).

group identifiers—in this context, strong nationalists—seek most vigilantly to protect boundaries, enforce conformity, and define the group's constitutive norms.

Conceptual boundaries, in turn, reflect the manner in which the nation has been constructed. A given national identity may or may not include a racial or ethnic component, but all national identities are rooted in a people's culture and constructed around core norms.[31] The policing of boundaries presumes that the national identity thus protected has its own substantive nature that gives purpose and passion to the group.[32] A nation's core norms, however, enjoy consensus in inverse proportion to their specificity: only at the most general level can they be said to command anything like universal assent. Historically situated actors seeking to defend the substance of their nation have at their disposal many competing precedents and cultural practices that can reasonably be justified as representing the essential core of the nation, so that acts of nationalist "remembering" become an exercise in creative pastiche work, selective forgetting, and self-legitimation. Moreover, the meaning of even mutually recognized events and circumstances become subject to contestation.[33]

Nations at some level require political and territorial expression, although this demand can vary considerably in intensity and goals. Because all national identities are intrinsically contested and evolving, they remain forever in the process of becoming. Identities morph as the agents bearing them grapple with constitutive questions that juxtapose transient, pressing interests against the sense of higher purpose that animates the group to regard itself as a community at all.[34] Through this

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[31]For an excellent discussion of the constructed nature of identities, including national identities, see Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 21–33. Huntington, however, argues that America's constructed identity has been rooted since the colonial era in an "Anglo-Protestant settler culture" that has changed little other than winnowing out a formal embrace of white supremacy (37–138). See also Connor, *Ethnonationalism,* 37–46; and Richard Mansbach and Edward Rhodes, "The National State and Identity Politics: State Institutionalisation and the 'Markers' of National Identity," *Geopolitics* 12 (2007): 426–458, which argues that "national identity was and is not some latent reality waiting to be discovered and, once discovered, an unchanging physical fact, but is rather a social construct, created or modified daily through internal cognitive processes and social praxis" (434).

[32]Anthony Marx, *Faith in Nation: Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 6. See also, Czeslaw Milosz, "On Nationalism," *Partisan Review* 59 (Winter 1992): 14–20, at 15.

[33]George Hays II, "Three Incarnations of The Quiet American: Applying Campbell's 'Foreign Policy' to Sub-elite Identifiers," *Perspectives* 20 (Spring 2012): 5–32, at 7; and John Higham, *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture,* ed. Carl J. Guarneri (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

[34]Hans J. Morgenthau, *The Purpose of American Politics,* with new introduction by Kenneth W. Thompson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982), 6; Irmina Matonyte and Vaidas

process of endless becoming, which is inherently political, nationalism is the method by which the collective moral aspirations of a people are transposed upon their state, with one interpretation among many emerging as dominant. Indeed, a nation's very ineffability renders its specific meaning always just beyond the reach of concrete historical actors, who nevertheless seek to yoke its power to their political agendas. Nationalist entrepreneurs such as Slobodan Milošević can be dangerous precisely because of their ability to frame almost any political program as necessary for national fulfillment.

The emotional power of nationalism adds fuel to any political program that successfully taps into it, as personal identities are intrinsically enmeshed within national identities, particularly for strong identifiers.[35] By their nature, identities are unamenable to compromise or rational negotiation. Political programs successfully framed according to nationalist logics therefore enjoy visceral, nonnegotiable support.[36] We see this invocation most commonly during wars, when chauvinism and jingoism are likeliest to appear. Likewise, incommensurate nationalist visions lined up on opposite sides of political disputes become utterly intractable, as Americans are learning during the age of polarization, and as their forbears understood in the antebellum years.[37] All of these qualities—boundaries, constructedness, politics, and emotion—make nationalism and foreign policy obvious partners.

International affairs can introduce dramatic new experiences to the body politic that implicate the nation's core values and self-understanding, sometimes to transformative effect. Wars in particular generate powerful experiences for both individuals and societies as a whole that have no domestic corollary. They catalyze the sense that members of a society have obligations to each other, and they ask—demand, even—that members be willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of the nation.[38] Domestic political programs rarely require this

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Morkevicius, "Threat Perception and European Identity Building: The Case of Elites in Belgium, Germany, Lithuania and Poland," *Europe-Asia Studies* 61 (August 2009): 967–985, at 983; and Mary E. Stuckey, *Defining Americans: The Presidency and National Identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 20.

[35]See Robert McKim, "National Identity and Respect among Nations," in Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan, eds., *The Morality of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 258–262.

[36]Marx, *Faith in Nation*; and Connor, *Ethnonationalism.*

[37]See Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), for an analysis of partisanship through the lens of social identity theory. Mason's findings regarding partisan discord bear a striking resemblance to nationalist scholars' conclusions about intergroup hostilities.

[38]See Chris Hedges, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002).

level of commitment to the nation. As cultures are constructed out of the raw material of experience, it is clear that wars and other significant foreign policies have sufficient motive force to catalyze national reflection and cultural evolution. We build memorials to wars, after all, not health care programs.

AMERICAN NATIONALISM

Although scholars recognize how the four dimensions of national identity reveal nations to be artificial constructs, they have hesitated to reach the natural conclusion that this insight inevitably suggests: that policy choices do not simply *reflect* but also help create the identities of nations. Deprived of this transformative capacity, it is unlikely that national identities would inspire the levels of passion and protest that surround, for example, culture war issues. While national identities evolve slowly, with changes being generally imperceptible until generations have passed, they do change. Both scholars and (especially) nationalists themselves, however, typically focus on national origins, even when they are murky.

American identity, for example, is commonly depicted in relatively static terms—the American people either act consistently or at variance with a normative identity fixed at the founding. Living generations might be measured by reference to this identity, but they are not seen as molding it through their own actions.[39] The two central narratives of American national identity emphasize its basis in either Creedal or ethnic sources. The first approach, which has been dominant for most of American history, regards as definitive the American commitment to liberty and equality (with varying emphases between the two) and variously invokes one or more of antistatism, exceptionalism, religious freedom, democracy, republicanism, or the British liberal heritage as defining attributes of the United States. The centrality of these norms, commitments, and inheritances to American national identity is unfailingly posited as having been codified during the founding. Typically, scholars adhering to this ideological or creed-based approach describe illiberal American practices such as slavery as "deviations" from American ideals or as imperfections that are shed in the teleological progress toward the Creed's fulfillment, thus leaving intact the core identity itself.[40]

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[39]Important exceptions include Michael Walzer, *What It Means to Be an American: Essays on the American Experience* (New York: Marsilio, 1992); and Higham, *Hanging Together.*

[40]See Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay* (New York: Collier Books, 1961); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America,* with new introduction by Tom Wicker (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1991 [1955]); Charles W. Dunn, ed., *American Exceptionalism: The Origins, History, and Future*

The other major approach to American nationalism characterizes it as defined by a commitment to white male Christian supremacy; the Creedal version of American nationalism, in this view, is at best a smoke screen allowing Americans to deny to themselves who they truly are and have always been. Here, too, the nation's controlling normative commitments were in place by the founding era and remain definitive of the national identity.[41] Critical theorists defend this interpretation, among others.

Bridging the Creedal and ethnic positions is Rogers M. Smith's "multiple traditions" thesis, which holds that "American political actors have always promoted civic ideologies that blend liberal, democratic republican, and inegalitarian ascriptive elements in various combinations."[42] A major contribution of the multiple traditions approach is that it acknowledges the full range of precedents available to American nationalists seeking to defend contemporary policy positions as being consistent with America's traditions and values. All three interpretations of American nationalism provide an account of the American experience that blends descriptive and normative elements. Thus, when Americans complain, with increasing frequency, "That's not who we are," their real message is, "That's not how we should act, and I am enlisting the authority of American nationalism to defend my position." But we are what we do as well as what we say, so claims of "That's not who we are" are usually wrong on their face. Moreover, both what we do and how we do it reveal an intentionality that ineluctably integrates prior normative commitments; policies are not made by accident in our complex constitutional system, particularly not foreign policies.

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of the Nation's Greatest Strength (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); Charles Murray, *American Exceptionalism: An Experiment in History* (Washington, DC: AEI Press, 2013); Greenfeld, *Nationalism*; Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); and Huntington, *Who Are We?* The literature is considerably richer, with more sophisticated and nuanced arguments than what I present here; Huntington's work in particular acknowledges the changeability of American identity, at least in theory. Still, these sources give a flavor of the general arguments.

[41]Some examples include Thomas R. Heitala, *Manifest Design: American Exceptionalism and Empire,* revised ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds., *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); and Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy.*

[42]Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 6. For other accounts that give great weight to both the liberal and illiberal aspects of American thought, practice, and identity, see Robert H. Weibe, *Who We Are: A History of Popular Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); John Meachem, *The Soul of America* (New York: Random House, 2018); Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1995); Thiess-Moore, *Who Counts as American?*; and Stuckey, *Defining Americans.*

HOW FOREIGN POLICY SHAPES U.S. NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE PROCESS

What follows is an outline of the general contours of the process by which foreign policy can shape American national identity, with a focus on three general dimensions. The first concerns the ways that foreign policy conjures debates about the constitutive norms of American identity. The second aspect emphasizes its role in boundary setting, a function that overlaps with the first. The third surveys how foreign policy has yielded meaningful alterations in Americans' conception of their personal liberty, as expressed through Supreme Court decisions that have reshaped constitutional rights in far-reaching ways.

Figure 1 presents the interplay of policy and identity, and thus of foreign policy's influence on American identity. The arrows linking American national identity to the foreign policy response are familiar to students of constructivism, which argues that a state's identity shapes its interpretation of international events and circumstances and thus determines the interests that the state believes to be at stake in a given situation. These perceived interests form the proximate cause of foreign policy decisions. What has been examined less frequently, however, is the remainder of the cycle.

As depicted in Figure 1, debates, including those about American identity, are possible in Boxes A through D. In Box A, Americans might

FIGURE 1
American National Identity–U.S. Foreign Policy Cycle

- A. International Events and Conditions
- B. Foreign Policy Response
- C. Consequences
- D. Further Policy Responses
- American National Identity
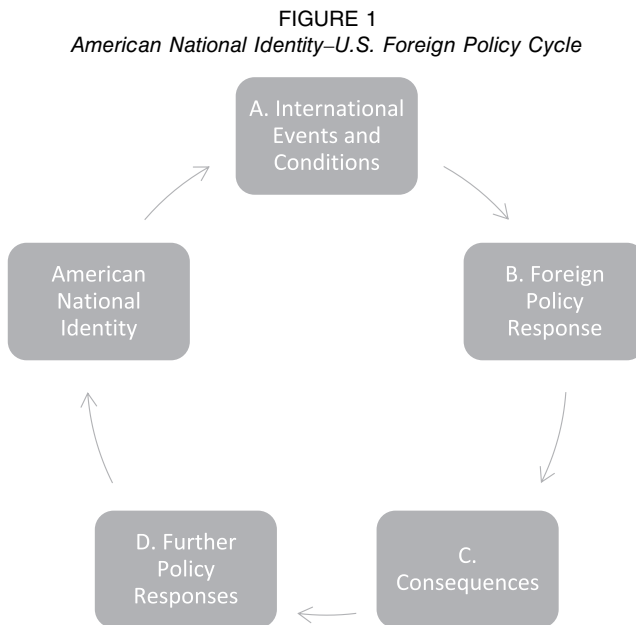
disagree about the nature or implications of a given set of international variables, for example, the spread of communism to Vietnam. Some Americans might find intervention necessary, given America's self-designated role (that is, identity) as the world's guarantor of "liberty"— defined in this case as being antithetical to communism—whereas others might see meddling in faraway states as either too costly or the hallmark of an imperial power (which might not accord with their sense of American identity), and hence to be resisted. In Box B, the government settles on a response to the spread of communism in Vietnam: escalation to war.[43] Most incremental policy decisions receive little attention, but occasionally a major debate will arise, such as around the time of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution or the Tet Offensive in 1968. During such instances, the president might initiate a public campaign to define the response, framing proposed policy initiatives with broad brush strokes designed to appeal to Americans' norms and trigger an emotion- as well as reason-based reaction.

Americans, however, occupy different cultural communities, which are likely to align with their partisan affiliations, and their representatives in Congress will debate the policy proposals by formulating arguments that represent the ideological preferences of their constituents.[44] Much of the vocabulary in these debates is shared (such as "freedom," "security," or "power"), but the effective meaning of that vocabulary is likely to differ in a manner correlated with cultural antecedents, with the result that, in the course of debating what the United States should do, Americans also contest the normative subtexts of those policies. Other considerations (economic, geopolitical, etc.) always shape the policy response, of course, but framing rhetoric typically aims for "big picture" arguments meant to resonate with the deeper norms of the American people.[45] The policies themselves (that is, war versus diplomacy) also have normative, hence identity-laden, implications.

In Box C, the consequences of the policy choice(s) become a source of evaluation and contestation; some implications might only be apparent from a longer historical vantage. Thus, Americans were divided deeply over the Vietnam War, including its "lessons" and

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[43]The actual trajectory of the U.S. military escalation in Vietnam from Eisenhower to Johnson is obviously being oversimplified here, since the purpose of this example is only to provide a general sense of the process of the cycle.

[44]Peter Hays Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy: How Ideology Divides Liberals and Conservatives over Foreign Affairs* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).

[45]Stuckey, *Defining Americans.*

morality.[46] (Not all major policy cycles include a Box D, which represents follow-up policies, but most do.) Foreign policies generate new realities, and all policymaking begins by confronting the conditions created by previous policy choices. The Iraq that the United States addresses in 2019, for example, bears significant legacies of U.S. decisions made in 2003 and earlier; indeed, most of the territoriality of the United States is a product of past foreign policies. In the case of Vietnam, the meaning of its "loss" continues to shape not only perceptions about potential "quagmires," such as the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, but also conceptions of American responsibility for the "liberty" of other peoples.

During many significant foreign policy debates, Americans negotiate their constitutive norms as well as the proper boundaries of their community. They also engage in actions, such as creating institutions or invading countries, that themselves "define" the United States. The process outlined in this model is most clearly evident in the next discussion, which explains how Americans compete to realize their diverse moral visions and sense of identity through foreign policy, but it can also be seen in the two sections that follow it, which concern the influence of foreign policy on (social) boundary protection and constructions of American liberty and loyalty.

Contestation and Clarification

Divergent views of American identity reflect broader cultural and normative divisions over issues such as American innocence, hierarchical distributions of power and authority, and the meaning and significance of American exceptionalism. Major foreign policy debates manifest these disagreements by implicating competing understandings of the nation's proper relationship with the world.[47] They also help shape Americans' underlying conceptions of who they are as a people by providing a discursive medium through which the constitutive concepts and norms of that identity can be concretized, clarified, and reassessed.[48] Specifically, foreign policy, like domestic policy, offers an opportunity for Americans to engage in consequential debates about

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[46]Appy's summarization of the post-Vietnam debates over the meaning of Vietnam for American identity in *American Reckoning* is the best presentation of this dynamic.

[47]Holsti, *Making American Foreign Policy,* 256; Huntington, *Who Are We?,* 10; and Brian C. Rathbun, "Hierarchy and Community at Home and Abroad: Evidence of a Common Structure of Domestic and Foreign Policy Beliefs in American Elites," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 51 (June 2007): 379–407.

[48]Wander, "The Rhetoric of American Foreign Policy"; and Roberta L. Coles, "Manifest Destiny Adapted for 1990s' War Discourse: Mission and Destiny Intertwined," *Sociology of Religion* 63 (Winter 2002): 403–426.

the microfoundations of their identity. National identities are abstract, and abstractions become progressively more concrete as they are applied and given sharper boundaries and specific associations.[49]

Scholars recognize that American national identity shapes its foreign policy preferences, and several have associated changes in foreign policy preferences with the underlying contest of ideas at the root of those policies.[50] Mary Heiss, for example, links the imperial idea to American identity, noting how changes in Americans' self-understanding over time, coupled with situational exigencies, have led to corresponding changes in their posture toward imperialism as both a concept and a practice.[51] Other authors analyzing the relationship between American nationalism and foreign policy argue that the United States vacillates between merely serving as an example for others to emulate (that is, the proverbial city on a hill) and pursuing a crusading mission to spread its universal values abroad, although this particular distinction is one of tactics, not necessarily core values.[52] Expressing the evolving relationship between national identity and U.S. foreign policy more comprehensively, Henry R. Nau argues,

> America's self-image continues to change. Which elements of its self-image will prevail in the future—the ideological one associated with the American constitution and creed; the nativist one associated with history, language, and class; the religious one linked with the Puritan and Judeo-Christian heritage; or the ethnic one tied to race and multiculturalism? Which element dominates will make a difference for foreign policy... . [T]he foundations and future of America's identity [are] ... at least as important as American power in determining what kind of role America plays in the world in the twenty-first century.[53]

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[49]On the contextual nature of national identities, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
[50]Legro, in *Rethinking the World*, argues this point most thoroughly and persuasively. See also Jack Citrin, Ernst B. Haas, Christopher Muste, and Beth Reingold, "Is American Nationalism Changing? Implications for Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly* 38 (March 1994): 1–31; Gries, *The Politics of American Foreign Policy*; and Holsti, *Making American Foreign Policy,* esp. chap. 7. A vast literature on public opinion and foreign policy includes numerous studies that arrive at this conclusion as well.
[51]Mary Ann Heiss, "The Evolution of the Imperial Idea and U.S. National Identity," *Diplomatic History* 26 (Fall 2002): 511–540.
[52]See, for example, H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Brian Klunk, *Consensus and the American Mission* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986); McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*; and Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny.*
[53]Henry Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 61.

Other, more critical studies of the relationship between national identity and foreign policy argue variously that Americans have a laudable identity but often act inconsistently with it[54]; or, in acting idealistically in misguided pursuit of its values, jeopardizes its interests[55]; or, finally, in acting as it does, especially toward weaker, nonwhite countries, demonstrates greater fidelity to what Nau called its "ethnic" identity than to its "ideological" one.[56]

However scholars have delineated the relationship between national identity and foreign policy, they consistently argue that dominant interpretations of the national identity sometimes change, which results in a foreign policy adjustment. These scholars do not, however, complete the cycle depicted in Figure 1 and consider whether new foreign policies likewise nudge the identity in different directions. The Panama Canal Treaties debate, which occurred during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, illustrates how foreign policy can carry a symbolic resonance that elicits responses rooted more in nationalist emotions than assessments of policy efficacy, contributing in this case to the ascendance of a conservative ideology that dominated the subsequent 30 years of American life.

The Panama Canal Treaties, 1978

One of the earliest expressions of America's newfound sense of greatness post-1898 was the Panama Canal Treaty, negotiated by Theodore Roosevelt.[57] Ceding to the United States control over a 10-mile-wide strip of territory surrounding what would become the canal in exchange for $10 million in annual rent, the treaty was the product of dubious circumstances in which the United States supported the secession of Panama from Colombia, which had been resistant to American overtures

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[54]See William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Delta Books, 1962), which launched an entire school of thought by building on Beardsian analysis to argue that elites' control of the economic and political levers of power has led to a foreign policy that reflects their interests but not American values.

[55]Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008). As a realist, Bacevich echoes the perspective of Hans J. Morgenthau, especially *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace, Brief Edition,* revised by Kenneth W. Thompson (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993); and *The Purpose of American Politics.* Walter A. McDougall presents a slightly different critique, rooted in his presentation of U.S. foreign policy as unduly shaped by civil-religious influences in *The Tragedy of U.S. Foreign Policy: How America's Civil Religion Betrayed the National Interest* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

[56]Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*; and Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).

[57]Hixson calls it "the ultimate symbol of U.S. hegemony over Central America and the Caribbean" (*The Myth of American Diplomacy,* 111). Natasha Zaretsky, meanwhile, observes that "Since its completion in 1914, many Americans had seen the canal as a testament of the global ascent of the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century," in "Restraint or Retreat? The Debate over the Panama Canal Treaties and U.S. Nationalism after Vietnam," *Diplomatic History* 35 (June 2011): 535–562, at 541.

regarding the canal's construction, to manufacture a more compliant negotiating partner. When President Carter proposed a pair of treaties in 1978 shifting control of the Canal Zone back to Panama and rendering the canal neutral territory, his goal was to counteract the imperial legacy that the original treaty represented, especially to Latin American states.[58] This was a relatively safe position to assume geopolitically, as the Canal Zone was no longer vital to U.S. trade and security yet still represented a sore point for Panama, which had long resented America's colonial control of the Canal Zone and was teetering on the brink of instability in the late 1970s.[59] Carter believed that the moment had come for the United States to adopt an approach to world politics that was more in keeping with the moral identity it had fashioned for itself as the exemplar of liberty and defender of human rights, and he sought to use the treaties as a symbolic vehicle to undo a blatant case of imperialist mischief without meaningful cost to the United States.

Conservatives, however, perceived the move as symbolic of the softening of the United States that had begun during Vietnam and saw in the treaty ratification debates an opportunity to mobilize opinion behind their foreign policy vision of strength and manliness. They lost the battle —both treaties were ratified—but won the war. In addition to serving as a central catalyst in launching the New Right as a potent organizational force in American politics, the treaty debates also provided conservatives with a major platform from which to articulate their vision for America's role in the world and the values they believed should define that role.[60] Thus, whereas Carter declared that the treaties "symbolize our determination to deal with the developing nations of the world ... on the basis of mutual respect and partnership,"[61] his opponents characterized them with terms such as a giveaway, surrender, appeasement, or capitulation.[62] Ultimately, the conservative framing of the issue resonated with a public tiring of stagflation and "malaise."

Carter's timing was poor. The American public was still grappling with the aftermath of Vietnam, which had shattered its confidence and

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[58]Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security from World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 279; and Zaretsky, "Restraint or Retreat?," 539–540.

[59]Herring, *From Colony to Superpower,* 837–838; and Zaretsky, "Restraint or Retreat?," 544.

[60]Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy,* emphasizes the treaty's motive force in developing the New Right as a highly organized movement; Herring, *From Colony to Superpower,* 837, notes that although "the United States plainly gained from the treaty," the only Americans who paid significant attention to it were staunchly opposed to it, generally for symbolic reasons, with the exception of major business organizations that recognized its value to enhancing trade in Latin America.

[61]Quoted in Herring, *From Colony to Superpower,* 838.

[62]Zaretsky, "Restraint or Retreat?," 536–538.

triggered a far-reaching debate over the nation's identity that had not yet been resolved. Given this context, it was not difficult for conservatives to frame Carter's decision to voluntarily cede control of a potent symbol of American strength to a weaker nation as "the cowardly retreat of a tired, toothless tiger."[63] They also developed a counternarrative to Carter's that held that the United States had benefited Panama rather than exploited it. Overall, the episode, in coalescing the New Right and providing a symbolic platform in which emotional appeals to American innocence and heritage trumped rational arguments reflecting trade interests and improved relations with hemispheric neighbors, contributed to the rightward shift in the public mood that culminated in Ronald Reagan's election and the conservative era thereby inaugurated.[64] Somewhat unusually, the Panama Treaty debates influenced the way Americans defined themselves through their place in the world by strengthening the voice of those who *lost* the policy debates. Nationalism's emotional potency accounts for this outcome.

Boundaries

Foreign policy expresses the relationship between a state and other actors on the world stage in ways that clarify the boundaries of the political community. As Kevin Coe and Rico Neumann explain in their analysis of the international sources of national identities, "It is through this constructed relation to an 'other' that citizens come to understand their own position in the world."[65] Categorization not only demarcates each identity but embeds it within a particular epistemological context. Thus, distinguishing actors on the basis of race, for example, presupposes race as a significant, defining attribute of their identities. Constructivists conceptualize international relations as the interaction of actors with given identities within an international arena that is an inherently social space.[66] The United States engages with other actors as friends, enemies, and so forth, and thereby helps establish which sorts of identities are "other."[67] Because the boundary-setting dimension of foreign policy is an inevitable consequence of the ontology of the international state system,

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[63]The quote, by Philip Crane (R-IL), is from Zaretsky, "Restraint or Retreat?," 549.
[64]Reagan gave a major speech opposing the treaty during prime time and became a figurehead of the opposition. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy*, 279–282. Appy notes that the late 1970s and early 1980s marks the time when the post-Vietnam debates about the meaning of that conflict to American identity began decisively to shift to the right (*American Reckoning*, 221–274).
[65]Coe and Neumann, "International Identity in Theory and Practice," 144.
[66]See especially Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*. See also Roberta L. Coles, "War and the Contest over National Identity," *Sociological Review* 50 (November 2002): 586–609, at 589.
[67]Hays, "Three Incarnations of the Quiet American"; and Campbell, *Writing Security*.

the question is not *whether* foreign policy helps to clarify the boundaries of the nation but *how*.

Most commonly, foreign policies reproduce and thereby reinforce domestic social boundaries.[68] Since white American citizens have held both power and racist attitudes for much of American history, for example, it is unsurprising that their interaction with weaker, nonwhite states have frequently duplicated the racial hierarchies that they had entrenched in domestic practice. From the differential treatment accorded to Japanese Americans and German Americans during World War II to the genocidal treatment of Native Americans, American history offers a sad panoply of examples of externalized white supremacy.[69] Religion has also featured prominently in boundary construction, as prototypical Americans have defined other states in many cases by reference to those states' embrace or rejection of Christianity. The status of Islam in particular can be precarious in a nation that has always been defined as Christian by a sizeable percentage of the American people.[70] Since the onset of the global war on terror, opponents of Islam have found their voices strengthened anew, as difference has become more easily constructed as threat in the age of al Qaeda and ISIS.[71] In this way, foreign policy not only affirms that race and religion are foundations of the national identity (rather than Creedal variables) but also creates national interests on the world stage that reflect commitment to these constituent attributes.

In addition to expressing existing self/other dichotomies, however, foreign policy has contributed to the evolution of social boundaries, as interactions with external others adds layers to identities that would otherwise be absent. For example, in the aftermaths of both World War I and World War II, communism was reinterpreted as an ideology not merely antithetical to American values but an active menace to American security. Constructing it as an inherent threat to national security allowed policymakers at home to impose draconian restrictions on individual

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[68]Coe and Neumann, "International Identity in Theory in Practice."

[69]Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*; Michael L. Krenn, *The Color of Empire: Race and American Foreign Relations* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006); and Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2000).

[70]Huntington, *Who Are We?*, 98–103.

[71]Hakimeh Saghaye-Bira, "American Muslims as Radicals? A Critical Discourse Analysis of the U.S. Congressional Hearing on 'The Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and That Community's Response,'" *Discourse & Society* 23 (September 2012): 508–524; and Campbell, *Writing Security*. On the marginalization of racial minorities and Christians by "strong nationalists" in the United States, see Theiss-Moore, *Who Counts as American?*

liberties that would in any other context have been intolerable.[72] Thus, while there was little support for communism or radicalism prior to the Red Scare of the 1920s, international developments converted anti-capitalist sentiment from an unpopular viewpoint into an existential threat while, in turn, transforming geopolitical strategizing into ideological crusading. As John F. Kennedy declared in a campaign speech at the height of the Cold War, "The enemy is the Communist system itself—implacable, unceasing in its drive for world domination. For this is not a struggle for the supremacy of arms alone—it is also a struggle for supremacy between two conflicting ideologies: Freedom under God versus a ruthless, godless tyrant."[73] Realist thinkers such as George Kennan, meanwhile, regarded the great-power status of the Soviet Union (and below the surface, Russian imperialism) as the true threat to American security, not communism.

Foreign policy has exerted an independent causal impact on racial boundaries as well, despite the overall tendency of domestic racial norms to find expression abroad. In particular, during the early Cold War, the poor state of race relations in the United States, especially in the Jim Crow South, was easily exploited by Moscow in the rapidly decolonizing Global South, prompting an adjusted response to the civil rights movement from Washington. Segregationists equated civil rights activism with communism, and Cold War presidents until Lyndon Johnson were not especially keen to pursue racial justice. But Vice President Richard Nixon expressed the geopolitics of Jim Crow when he told President Eisenhower in 1957, "We cannot talk equality to the people of Africa and Asia and practice inequality in the United States."[74] The humiliating (and legal) refusal of service at hotels and restaurants to dark-skinned foreign dignitaries in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC, complicated efforts to cultivate them as allies. Eisenhower therefore took a handful of symbolic positions, such as desegregating the capital and siding with the students at Little Rock (a particularly embarrassing episode on the world stage), that aligned the federal government more closely with civil rights—despite his own reservations on the matter. These steps also built on Truman's earlier decision to desegregate the military and collectively helped to move the

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[72]Meachem, *The Soul of America*; Campbell, *Writing Security*; Hixson, *The Myth of American Diplomacy*; and Jonathan M. Hansen, *The Lost Promise of Patriotism: Debating American Identity, 1890–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[73]Quoted in Campbell, *Writing Security*, 30.

[74]Quoted in Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and The Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 109.

needle toward racial justice.[75] This history, however, is noteworthy in part because it deviates so markedly from the main currents of American history, particularly before World War II.

Nineteenth-Century Imperialism

During the nineteenth century, as the United States expanded across the continent, the subject of boundaries assumed unusual salience. As America's territorial boundaries spread, they came to encompass not only broad new expanses of land but also existing populations. A variety of impulses motivated each expansionist foray, but all bore the normative imprimatur of some version of Manifest Destiny,[76] a nationalist myth granting to white Protestant Americans the divine right to universalize their experiment in republican governance.[77] The tricky part came when the United States asserted sovereignty over foreign lands and converted them into U.S. territories over which Congress exercised seemingly limitless authority as it considered how (and whether) to admit them as coequal states of the Union. Would the principles guiding this process be liberal, which are universalistic and take no cognizance of a population's ethnic or religious composition, or would particularistic attributes determine eligibility for participating in the national community? These circumstances forced Americans to confront the question of who could qualify for citizenship, and Creedal and ethnic constructions of American identity provided different avenues for addressing it.[78]

Today, the most familiar debate surrounding expansion concerned whether to allow slavery in the territories that were intended ultimately to become U.S. states, with the Civil War looming in the background. But slavery actually intersected with expansionism in more complex ways than the North-South balance of legislative power, since the practice built on a deeper and trans-sectional commitment to white supremacy. As Thomas R. Heitala argues, "the country's black population provided a powerful impetus to expansion in the 1840s" because territorial acquisitions were seen not as a way to "emancipate the slave, but rather, through annexation, to emancipate the United States from blacks."[79] This disposition toward nonwhites

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[75]See Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line,* for a thorough overview of this history.

[76]For the best overview, still, of this idea in its various incarnations, see Albert K. Weinberg, *Manifest Destiny: A Study in Nationalist Expansion in American History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1935).

[77]Hietala, *Manifest Design*; Frymer, *Building an American Empire*; and Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny.*

[78]Smith, *Civic Ideals*; and Frymer, *Building an American Empire.*

[79]Heitala, *Manifest Design*, 10, 54. See also Frymer, *Building an American Empire,* chap. 6. Krenn argues that similar logic had previously dissuaded the United States from seeking to annex Haiti (*The Color of Empire,* 76).

complicated efforts to integrate the Native Americans and Mexican Americans whose territory was claimed by the United States. Two rationales were consistently invoked to justify excluding territories as states that were dominated by these groups. The first concerned their refusal and/or inability to make proper use of the land, which meant showing "enterprise," generating wealth, and otherwise conforming to "civilized" norms.[80] Nonwhites' supposed failure to make productive use of the land provided a neat justification for their exclusion by white Americans because it blended the cultural, racial, and Lockean-liberal strands of American identity.[81] Andrew Jackson defended the Indian Removal Act, for example, by arguing, "What good man would prefer a country covered with forests, and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive republic, studded with cities and towns, and prosperous farms ... and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization and religion."[82] Only land cultivated by white settlers was fit for inclusion in the United States.

The second pretext for denying coequal status to Native Americans and Mexican Americans was the supposed inability of these groups either to assimilate into the United States—and by extension, of their need to reject their inherited cultures to do so—or to participate in self-government.[83] The belief that only whites had the capacity to contribute to democratic institutions had the effect of discouraging the annexation of Mexican territory below the Rio Grande after the Mexican-American War because of its insurmountable concentration of nonwhites, but it also meant that the territories that *were* acquired needed to be settled by white majorities before becoming admissible to the Union. Some territories, such as Arizona and New Mexico, were thus forced to wait more than 50 years, until white Americans' sense of the demographic basis of democracy had been satisfied, before they could join the Union as states. In the interim, Congress employed a range of policies designed to encourage white settlement of the land, including land grants to whites and the forcible removal of nonwhites.[84] In pursuing these policies, all of which were deeply contested, the United States chose to establish criteria for joining the nation that bore no relationship the liberal values of the Creed.

Religion raised similar questions. The unusual challenges posed by Mormons arose out of the revulsion most Americans felt toward

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[80]Krenn, *The Color of Empire,* 27–34; and Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny,* 25–26, 38–48.

[81]Smith, *Civic Ideals,* 49; see chap. 8 more generally and passim.

[82]Quoted in Jill Norgren and Serena Nanda, *American Cultural Pluralism and Law,* 2nd ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 16.

[83]Norgren and Nanda, *American Cultural Pluralism and Law,* 19; and Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny,* 46–48.

[84]See Frymer, *Building an American Empire,* chaps. 3–5; and Smith, *Civic Ideals,* chap. 8.

polygamy. After other Americans persecuted Mormons in the states they lived in, Brigham Young led them in 1847 beyond the territory of the United States to what is today Utah. But "Deseret," as the Mormons called it, became a territory under congressional jurisdiction in 1850 after the United States claimed the land in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican-American War two years prior. Full U.S. statehood for their colony was sought by the Mormons but withheld by Congress pending the Mormons' abandonment of polygamy. In addition to threatening imprisonment to those engaged in bigamy or polygamy,[85] congressional acts such as the Edmunds Act, Poland Act, and Edmunds-Tucker Act required the administration of oaths forswearing polygamy (those who refused could neither vote nor hold office in the territory), denied the Mormon Church the right to own property valued over $50,000 and seized such property already in the church's possession, disenfranchised polygamists, and prohibited them from serving on juries.[86] The Supreme Court upheld every challenged policy, thereby providing an early definition of the scope of the free exercise clause of the First Amendment and who could enjoy its protections. In response to Congress's clear willingness to employ all means at its disposal to eliminate polygamy, with no obvious constitutional limitations and the endorsement of the Supreme Court, the Mormons officially abandoned the practice in 1890; Utah then joined the Union in 1896.

Of note, the Supreme Court's decisions articulating the principles defining the scope of religious freedom in *Reynolds v. United States* (98 U.S. 146 [1879]) and *Davis v. Beason* (133 U.S. 333 [1889]) were only possible as a result of Congress's control over territories, which by their nature enter American sovereignty through either conquest or treaty.[87] In these cases, the court explicitly endorsed applying the standards of "Christian" civilization to its review of the laws. Until the court later applied the free exercise clause to the states in *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (310 U.S. 296 [1940]) through the incorporation doctrine, few opportunities existed for navigating the meaning of the First Amendment, as the court's jurisprudence in the religious clauses is overwhelmingly shaped by assessing

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[85]More than 1,300 were imprisoned for polygamy in the 1880s; Norgren and Nanda, *American Cultural Pluralism and Law,* 100.

[86]Norgren and Nanda, *American Cultural Pluralism and Law,* 98–101; and Sparrow, *The Insular Cases,* 28–29.

[87]Other Supreme Court decisions include *Murphy v. Ramsey* (114 U.S. 15 [1885]) and the *Mormon Church Case* (*Late Corporation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints v. U.S.*) (136 U.S. 1 [1890]).

state and local practices. As the next section shows more fully, foreign policy has shaped constitutional doctrine in other unexpected ways as well.

Civil Liberties Jurisprudence

In the years since September 11, Americans have revisited a debate that arises during wars and periods of unrest: how to strike the right balance between security and freedom. Freedom in America has traditionally been defined as freedom from state infringement, whereas security is provided by the state, which can intrude more conspicuously into daily life when addressing foreign sources of insecurity. When grappling with the question of how much liberty to surrender to the state in the name of security, therefore, Americans directly engage and problematize one of the core concepts of American identity. Whether taking shoes off at airports, agitating against a war, or publishing articles critical of the government, Americans' behavior becomes subject to heightened state regulation or scrutiny when security concerns are invoked. The lineage of laws passed during wars that restrict freedom includes the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, Abraham Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War,[88] the Espionage and Sedition Acts in 1917 and 1918, the Smith Act in 1940, and the USA PATRIOT Act in 2001. Many provisions of these laws remain in effect. Less appreciated, however, is the way that the constitutional law surrounding individual rights and liberties has been shaped by cases brought in response to wartime restrictions on Americans' freedom, including cases challenging provisions of some of the laws listed here. These precedents, though triggered by circumstances rooted in foreign affairs (usually wars), have altered the meaning of constitutionally protected liberties in a more general way.

What follows is a brief overview of significant Supreme Court decisions that illustrate this dynamic. This list does not intend to capture all or even most Supreme Court cases dealing with civil liberties that emerged from foreign policy contexts, and it does not mean to argue that foreign policy is responsible for the bulk of civil liberties jurisprudence. In presenting a sample of cases from different foreign policy contexts that have had important effects on how Americans understand the scope of their civil liberties, however, this overview demonstrates that foreign

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[88]In this article, I omit discussion of Civil War cases such as *Ex Parte Merryman* (17 F. Cas. 144 [1861]), despite the precedential and topical value they have for evaluating the effects of wars and other foreign policies on civil liberties. The primary reason for this reticence is the ambiguous status of the Civil War as a "foreign" policy, a thorny topic that would require elaboration of themes such as federalism and consociationalism that exceed the scope of this project. For insight into this complexity, see Hendrickson, *Union, Nation, or Empire,* 201–234.

policy has often forced Americans to confront and reconceptualize their understanding of freedom, the attribute most consistently presented as a core constituent of American identity.

The so-called World War I cases concerned violations of free speech, particularly claims arising out of the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918. These laws were part of a broader crackdown on dissent against the war and, subsequently, the Red Scare. In addition to suppressing the mails, federal, state, and local officials regularly fined individuals for not saluting the flag; jailed people for expressing analyses of World War I, communism, or war in general that varied from officially sanctioned accounts; or otherwise punished Americans, sometimes violently, on the basis of their expressed political opinions.[89] The Supreme Court's response to these conditions yielded an uneven doctrinal legacy. *Schenck v. United States* (249 U.S. 47 [1919]), for example, introduced the "clear and present danger" test, which remains fitfully part of First Amendment doctrine, although *Abrams v. United States* (250 U.S. 616 [1919]) and *Debs v. United States* (249 U.S. 211 [1919]), upholding the convictions of war protesters (including that of Eugene Debs, who had won 6 percent of the presidential vote in 1912), seemed to narrow its protections.

Other landmark free speech cases that emerged from the 1920s Red Scare hysteria include *Gitlow v. New York* (268 U.S. 625 [1925]) and *Whitney v. California* (274 U.S. 357 [1927]). *Gitlow*'s primary significance is ironic: through the Fourteenth Amendment, the court used this case to expand the reach of the Constitution's free speech clauses to embrace state laws, but it did so in the course of upholding the imprisonment of Benjamin Gitlow under New York State's anarchy statute. Like many Supreme Court decisions, *Gitlow* is also remembered for its dissent, in which Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. challenged the majority's too-neat distinction between incitement, which is not protected under the First Amendment, and the articulation of abstract ideas—in this case, the inevitability of a global proletarian revolution—which are protected, by noting, "Every idea is an incitement."[90]

World War II also produced landmark decisions. In one of the Supreme Court's most famous cases, *West Virginia v. Barnette* (319 U.S. 624 [1943]), the court upheld the right to refuse to salute the flag, thus

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[89]Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 123–168; Geoffrey Stone, *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004); Meacham, *The Soul of America,* 111–116; and Hixson, 125–131.
[90]*Gitlow v. New York,* 268 U.S. 625, at 673.

overturning *Minersville v. Gobitis* (310 U.S. 586 [1940]). Both cases arose out of the atmosphere of hyperpatriotism generated by the war.[91] Justice Robert Jackson's decision in *Barnette* acknowledged the pressures induced by wartime to delimit the ordinary scope of civil liberties, but rebukes them in sweeping language: "The very purpose of the Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy, to place them beyond the reach of majorities and officials ... If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."[92] This passage crystallizes how international circumstances can generate distinctive pressures that prompt reassessment of the scope of Americans' liberty. On the other hand, Supreme Court cases also affirmed official constructions of the ethnic boundaries of the nation,[93] most famously in *Korematsu v. United States* (323 U.S. 214 [1944]), which upheld the internment of American citizens of Japanese descent during World War II. For the majority in *Korematsu,* it was reasonable for government officials to equate ethnicity with threat.

The Vietnam War generated a range of Supreme Court decisions assessing the constitutionality of governmental responses to the widespread protests that the war engendered. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a considerable portion of the court's jurisprudence on the flag (its inviolability, ability to be used in protests, etc.) grew substantially out of situations involving these protests. Cases in this arena include *Street v. New York* (394 U.S. 576 [1969]), *Schacht v. United States* (398 U.S. 58 [1970]), and *Spence v. State of Washington* (418 U.S. 405 [1974]).[94] Other cases, such as *Watts v. United States* (394 U.S. 705 [1969]), *Cohen v. California* (403 U.S. 15 [1971]), and *Bond v. Floyd* (385 U.S. 116 [1966]), also clarified the boundaries of protected free expression through cases arising out of opposition to Vietnam.[95] *Tinker v. Des Moines* (393 U.S. 503 [1969])

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[91]See Wander, "The Rhetoric of Foreign Policy," 343.

[92]*West Virginia v. Barnette,* 319 U.S. 638, at 642.

[93]This list of cases omits the category most salient to boundary drawing, immigration, which is too large a topic to tackle here. Smith's *Civic Ideals* treats this subject comprehensively, along with naturalization and voting rights decisions, and concludes that "for over 80 percent of U.S. history, American laws declared most people in the world legally ineligible to become full U.S. citizens solely because of their race, original nationality, or gender... . Those racial, ethnic, and gender restrictions were blatant, not 'latent'" (15).

[94]These cases upheld the right to use the flag as part of political speech acts protesting the war; other flag desecration cases, mostly surrounding the Vietnam War, arrived at a similar conclusion.

[95]In *Watts v. United States,* the Supreme Court held that "threats" against the president must be material and not just metaphorical to be punishable. *Cohen v. California* established that four-letter words are not necessarily obscene but can also be employed to express political views. In *Bond v. Floyd,* the court

established the right of schoolchildren to engage in symbolic protest and, with *United States v. O'Brien* (391 U.S. 367 [1968]), helped shape the parameters of protected symbolic speech. *New York Times v. United States* (403 U.S. 713 [1971]), which articulated the principle of no prior restraint on a free press, grew out of the publication of documents pertaining to the conduct of the Vietnam War. Finally, the conscientious objector cases also grew out of opposition to the Vietnam War and helped establish the parameters of the free exercise clause; decisions include *United States v. Seeger* (380 U.S. 163 [1965]) and *Welsh v. United States* (398 U.S. 333 [1970]).

As explained earlier, international circumstances converted a philosophical opposition to communism among prototypical Americans into a national security concern. This new frame created a generous space for policymakers to legally marginalize Americans sympathetic to radical ideas, which in turn triggered several court cases. Consequently, the right of association was substantially shaped in a series of rather inconsistent rulings involving membership in the Communist Party during the early Cold War. Jurisprudence in this area includes *Dennis v. United States* (341 U.S. 494 [1951]), a landmark case holding that membership in the Communist Party was tantamount to inciting overthrow of the U.S. government and hence was unprotected by the First Amendment; *Yates v. United States* (354 U.S. 298 [1957]), which reframed *Dennis* (by drawing on Holmes's dissent in *Gitlow*) as having articulated a "balancing" doctrine in which abstract speech regarding the government's overthrow was protected, whereas imminent incitement to do such was not; *Communist Party v. SACB* (367 U.S. 1 [1961]), and *Scales v. United States* (367 U.S. 203 [1961]), which overturned the requirement that communists register with the federal government; *Garner v. Board of Public Works* (341 U.S. 716 [1951]), which upheld a law requiring public employees to swear that they did not belong to the Communist Party; *Wieman v. Updegraff* (344 U.S. 183 [1952]), a case taking almost the opposite stance as *Garner* by holding that membership in the Communist Party could not be used as the sole grounds for excluding people from public service; and *United States v. Robel* (389 U.S. 258 [1967]), which held that members of the Communist Party could not be legally prohibited from working in a defense facility.

These cases chipped away at but did not overturn (and sometimes supported directly) the Smith Act of 1940 and Internal Security Act of

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unanimously held that the Georgia House of Representatives violated the First Amendment when it excluded Julian Bond from membership for speaking against the Vietnam War and the draft.

1950, both of which effectively linked active support for communist beliefs with anti-Americanism. More broadly, the decisions helped clarify the parameters of the rights to speech and assembly in American society, particularly when the ideas are toxic to strong nationalists.

Finally, the Iraq War yielded a series of decisions on habeas corpus that vivified this area of the law to an extent not seen since the Civil War.[96] The first batch of cases, *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld* (542 U.S. 507 [2004]), *Rasul v. Bush* (542 U.S. 466 [2004]), and *Rumsfeld v. Padilla* (542 U.S. 426 [2004]), defined jurisdictional and procedural principles regarding the rights that enemy combatants have to federal courts and similar protections.[97] Subsequent cases, including *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (548 U.S. 557 [2006]), which held that the use of military commissions to try enemy combatants violated the Geneva Conventions and the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and *Boumediene v. Bush* (553 U.S. 723 [2008]), built on the 2004 decisions. Collectively, these and other cases stemming from the war on terror not only overturned several practices used to handle enemy combatants—some of whom were American citizens—but also clarified the general protections of habeas corpus. They also strengthened judicial independence, particularly *Boumediene,* which overturned Congress's effort to restrict the Supreme Court's habeas jurisdiction. In concluding his opinion for the court in *Boumediene,* Justice Anthony Kennedy articulated a principle germane to all of the cases discussed in this section when he wrote, "The laws and Constitution are designed to survive, and remain in force, in extraordinary times. Liberty and security can be reconciled; and in our system they are reconciled within the framework of the law."[98]

Many of the cases identified in the preceding paragraphs are staples of constitutional law courses, indicating their central place in the development of constitutional doctrine. They are not, in other words, cases that pertain only or even primarily to situations involving foreign affairs, but are precedents that help to define range of freedom enjoyed by Americans in all facets of their lives. While this

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[96]Richard H. Fallon Jr., "The Supreme Court, Habeas Corpus, and the War on Terror: An Essay on Law and Political Science," *Columbia Law Review* 110 (2010): 352–398.

[97]*Hamdi* upheld the legitimacy of the government's decision to detain combatants from Afghanistan and Iraq who were not soldiers but were "enemy combatants"; *Rasul* rejected the government's claim that because it was outside America's sovereign territory, habeas protections did not apply to prisoners held at Guantánamo.

[98]573 U.S. 723, at 793.

was not a comprehensive summarization of civil liberties case law generated by foreign policy contexts, the range and importance of these cases indicates the underappreciated extent to which foreign policy has shaped this dimension of national identity. As with the Mormon cases and the *Insular Cases* (noted later), they show that foreign affairs has played an underappreciated role in raising fundamental issues that lie at the heart of Americans' understanding of themselves and their values.

The Spanish-American War and Colonialism, 1898–1900

The Spanish-American War's influence on American national identity illustrates most of the themes presented throughout this article. It marked a turning point in American history, and not only because it was the occasion when the United States for the first time acquired territories with no intention of ever admitting them as states.[99] As important, the war ushered in an era that World War II completed, during which Americans reconceptualized themselves as a great power on the world stage. As one contemporary author expressed the sentiment, after "less than four months of war the United States has taken a new position before the world ... Europe has discovered that we are ... destined to be a leader in the van of human progress."[100] Although formal colonialism withered fairly quickly, the sense that the United States had become a great nation through the war did not.

Subtle shifts in the language of inaugural addresses reflect the change in sentiment. Previously, the anticipatory term "destiny" was likely to be used in those passages that discussed American identity in broad form; James Monroe's inaugural address is representative: "If we persevere in the career in which we have advanced so far and in the path already traced, we cannot fail, under the favor of a gracious Providence, to attain the high destiny which seems to await us."[101] After the Spanish-American War, however, themes of "greatness" and "leadership" replaced destiny. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, asserted in his inaugural, "We have become a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with other nations of the earth, and we must behave as beseems a people with such responsibilities," while William Howard Taft declared, "The policy of the United States in the Spanish war and since has given it a

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[99]Sparrow, *The Insular Cases*, explores the uniqueness of this feature of the conflict most insightfully.
[100]Charles Morris, *The War with Spain* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1899), 6–7.
[101]Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States: From George Washington, 1789, to Donald J. Trump, 2017* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2017), 40.

position of influence among the nations that it never had before."[102] Roosevelt's and Taft's addresses capture the pervasive sentiment generated by the war that their nation had definitively and permanently been transformed. Americans now thought of themselves as a great power alongside the Europeans.

The Spanish-American War launched this transformation not only because of the ease with which the United States dispatched Spain, but also because the peace treaty ending the conflict included annexationist provisions that mimicked the prevailing international norms of the other great powers. These same provisions, however, were immediately recognized as raising fundamental questions about core American values, the nature of the boundaries defining the country, and the very meaning of America. From the halls of Congress to Main Streets around the country, the United States exploded into a hotly contested and protracted debate about whether to embark on such a course, with a clear sense that their nation's identity hung in the balance.[103] William McKinley embarked on speaking tours to generate support for his colonial program, invoking "duty" and "destiny,"[104] while his allies offered a variety of legal, cultural, and political defenses invoking American exceptionalism, the imperatives of power and sovereignty, and related themes. Americans' fervent, genuine belief in their exceptionalism and noble motives in ending Spanish rule in its colonies lent rhetorical strength to constructions of colonialism that presented it as fitting into the larger mission of the United States to universalize its blessings, but America's own origins in escaping from colonialism complicated this picture.[105] As the anti-imperialist Senator

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[102]*Inaugural Addresses,* 210, 218.

[103]Studies of these debates include Robert L. Beisner, *Twelve against Empire: The Anti-imperialists, 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968); Michael Patrick Cullinane, *Liberty and American Anti-Imperialism, 1898–1909* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Fabian Hilfrich, *Debating American Exceptionalism: Empire and Democracy in the Wake of the Spanish-American War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[104]McKinley's agency in this history was debated until Lewis L. Gould established his role as a strong leader; see Lewis L. Gould, *The Spanish-American War and President McKinley* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1982).

[105]Sources examining this history in a way that also explores the role of nationalism and cultural variables include David Healy, *U.S. Expansionism: The Imperialist Urge in the 1890s* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Bonnie M. Miller, *From Liberation to Conquest: The Visual and Popular Cultures of the Spanish-American War of 1898* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011); Ernest May, *Imperial Democracy: The Emergence of America as a Great Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961); Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*; H. Wayne Morgan, *America's Road to Empire: The War with Spain and Overseas Expansion* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965); Matthew McCullough, *The Cross of War: Christian Nationalism and U.S. Expansionism in the Spanish-American War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014); and Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

George Vest (D-MO) argued, "The colonial system ... is an appendage of monarchy. It can exist in no free country, because it uproots and eliminates the basis of all republican institutions, that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." He then lambasted the annexationist proposal as a "fantastic and wicked attempt to revolutionize our Government and substitute the principles of our hereditary enemies for the teachings of Washington and his associates."[106] This kind of overheated rhetoric was standard in 1898 and 1899, and the Declaration of Independence was invoked in speech after speech, pamphlet after pamphlet, almost as a talisman.

Colonialism's foes offered additional bases of objection, including racist constructions of the nation's boundaries. Senator "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman (D-SC), for example, insisted that southerners like him "understand and realize what it is to have two races side by side that can not mix or mingle without deterioration and injury to both and the ultimate destruction of the higher." Why, then, admit Filipinos? "Those people are not suited to our institutions. They are not ready for liberty as we understand it."[107] Others, such as William Graham Sumner and Stanford University president David Starr Jordan, argued that American liberty would be irrevocably altered and potentially lost as a consequence of the growth and increased centralization of American institutions that a colonial policy would require.[108] As Sumner wrote, "We cannot govern dependencies consistently with our political system, and if we try it, the state which our fathers founded will suffer a reaction which will transform it into another empire just after the fashion of all the old ones."[109]

But achieving great-power status according to the international norms of the 1890s required colonies, which by definition were home to different races, and the United States determined that its principles and institutions could be reinterpreted to accommodate greatness. And so they were. Once again, the Supreme Court upheld Congress's

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[106]"Speech of Senator George Vest (D-MO)," *Congressional Record,* 55th Cong., 3rd sess., 12 December 1898, 96.

[107]"Speech of Benjamin Tillman," *Congressional Record,* 55th Congr., 3rd sess., 7 February 1899, 1532. On the role of racial arguments more generally and among anti-imperialists in particular, see Eric T. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[108]David Starr Jordan, *The Question of the Philippines,* pamphlet (Palo Alto, 1899).

[109]William Graham Sumner, *The Conquest of the United States by Spain,* pamphlet (Boston, 1899), 30. Sumner's argument has particular relevance in the context of this article, as Hans Kohn argued that Americans throughout the nineteenth century and beyond defined themselves to a considerable degree as being *not* European. Hans Kohn, *American Nationalism: An Interpretive Essay* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

discretion in administering territories—despite understanding that they would never become states, in a sharp break from past practice—in a series of cases, beginning with *Downes v. Bidwell* (182 U.S. 244 [1901]), that established that the U.S. Constitution and American sovereignty were amenable to having two tiers of territory and people, those who were fully included in the body politic, and those who were subjects. Justice Henry Billings Brown disclosed why this was not a problem when he wrote in the majority opinion, "There are certain principles of justice inherent in the Anglo-Saxon character which need no expression in constitutions or statutes to give them effect or to secure dependencies against legislation manifestly hostile to their real interests."[110] While non-Anglo-Saxons might have disagreed with Justice Brown's assessment of the "inherent justice" of Anglo-Saxon character, the decision affirmed decisively the imperialist policy that was formally initiated by ratifying the treaty ending the war with Spain. The Reverend Josiah Strong captured the meaning of these events in one of his best-selling books when he wrote, "It is time to dismiss 'the craven fear of being great,' to recognize the place in the world which God has given us, and to accept the responsibilities which it devolves upon us in behalf of Christian civilization."[111]

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

If the United States psychologically prepared itself for "greatness" in 1898 by confronting the fact that world leadership would necessitate changes both in its domestic institutions and also in its relations with other states and peoples, it did not truly achieve that status until after World War II and the birth of the Cold War. Unsurprisingly, these were the global circumstances that did more to shape American identity than any other. It was the period when Americans received transparent validation of their sense of destiny, greatness, leadership, and role in representing liberty to the world. It was the moment of national self-actualization.

As the anti-imperialists had recognized, an engaged, global foreign policy requires a commensurately large state apparatus to administer.[112]

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[110]Quoted in Sparrow, *The Insular Cases*, 88–89.

[111]Josiah Strong, *Expansion under New World-Conditions* (New York: Baker & Taylor Company, 1900), 302.

[112]See Sparrow, *From the Outside In*; and Saldin, *War, the American State, and Politics since 1898*, chap. 4, which explain how the profound alterations in the structure of the American state caused by World War II have permanently altered how Americans understand their relationship to the state and each other.

World War II thus altered, massively and permanently, the structural relationship between Americans and Washington. The state-building effects of World War II are familiar topics in the second-image reversed scholarship, and they carried with them implicit consequences for Americans' self-understanding. In addition, when the United States chose to build the liberal international order out of the ashes of World War II, it adopted an approach to global leadership that diverged from those of previous hegemons in a way that reflected an internationalist version of its Creed. In this way, the emergence of the United States on the world stage as a great power helped to entrench Creedal norms as significant to American identity in a new way. How the United States engaged other states as "leader of the free world," as Americans liked to think of themselves, suddenly carried real meaning for the national identity, while hegemony confirmed the validity of America's world-historical mission. The myth of innocence, shielding as it does American identity from its more unsavory actions abroad, strengthened in consequence.

Foreign policy provides signature national moments that become touchstones in the national memory and baked into the core of the nation's self-understanding in a way that can be difficult to replicate when the subject is purely domestic. In the twenty-first century, September 11 stands as a defining moment in the American psyche that has no parallel. A sense of vulnerability, mistrust, and volatility has infused American culture since the global war on terror created a new background reality for American life, contributing to an already strong backlash against globalization and immigration, as embodied in the presidency of Donald Trump, and feeding the sharp polarization of American politics. As others have noted, intensifying nationalism in response to globalization, terrorism, and mass migration has become a global phenomenon, with manifestations not only in the United States, but in Hungary, Poland, and other emergent autocracies, as well as in the Brexit vote.[113]

The United States is nonetheless in a distinctive position vis-à-vis these forces. Not only has it anchored the liberal international order that is so deeply implicated in the present anxieties and of which it was itself the primary architect, but the Creedal expression of its identity has, since the founding, posited for the nation a destiny to transform the world in its own

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[113]John B. Judis, *The Nationalist Revival: Trade, Immigration, and the Revolt against Globalization* (New York: Columbia Global Reports, 2018); and Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty,* with new preface (New York: Zone Books, 2017).

image, to become, in other words, a universal nation. As the United States confronts the realization of its identity through the putative globalization and institutionalization of its norms, it has found itself reluctant to embrace the full implications of its Creed, which in this context can seem disempowering to a fearful public seeking the security of boundaries denied by the Creed's universal aspirations. Under such circumstances, the ethnic alternative, which ever lies available like a loaded gun, has assumed greater prominence in American nationalist discourses. President Trump's characterization of immigrants and refugees as criminals and undesirables, his denigrations of the liberal international order and America's democratic allies, and his embrace of dictators such as Viktor Orbán and Rodrigo Duterte, could generate the latest step in the evolution of American identity if they become fixtures of American policy. So far, policy expressions of these sentiments have been meager, and robust debates have again emerged at the nexus of foreign policy and nationalism. Their outcome is unsettled, but then again, they always are.

The goal of this article has been to draw our attention to the overlooked influence of international circumstances on American national identity, which is negotiated in part through the process of developing policy responses to them. It has done so by highlighting insights drawn from nationalist theory that are acknowledged but not deeply attended to in dominant accounts of American national identity—namely, that it is a living, evolving manifestation of norms that are contested and expressed in policy and action—to gain analytic leverage on the claim that policies, in combination with the ideas used to justify them, shape identity. American national identity, quite simply, is not the same as it was at the founding, and foreign policy has contributed to this evolution.

It is tempting to call these exceptional times, but they are not. Every era has featured significant foreign policy and identity-defining choices, from the expansionists of the nineteenth century to the architects of the postwar liberal international order and the Cold War. How Americans have interpreted and responded to the circumstances confronting them has shaped not only the policy milieu, but the national identity itself. In just the same way, the American people today are the latest Founders, creating the nation that the next generation will inherit.