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Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations 2004 Conference

Panel 20: The Shape of Things to Come: U.S. Policy towards the Third World in the 1960s and 1970s

Chair: Tim Borstelmann, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

The Johnson Administration and Portuguese Africa  
Luis Nuno Rodrigues, ISCTE (Higher Institute for Business and Labor Studies)

Crossover Point: The Johnson Administration Rethinks Its Interference in Chilean Democracy, 1965-1969  
Mark T. Hove, University of Florida

Development and Drug Control: Modernization Theory, the U.S., the UN, and Thailand, 1970-1975  
Daniel Weimer, Northwest Vista College

Commentary: Dennis Merrill, University of Missouri, Kansas City  
Tim Borstelmann, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Commentary by Dennis Merrill, University of Missouri, Kansas City

The title of today's panel, "The Shape of Things to Come," is a reference to how the three papers we have just heard extend the study of US-Third World relations into the relatively unexplored period of the 1960s and 1970s. We are gaining a glimpse into what are likely to become some future historiographical trends. In this age of god-fearing imperial blunder, it is heartening to know that there are still those who seek to understand the non-Western world -- and the tangled history of U.S.-Third World relations. As some of you know, I began my career with a doctoral dissertation and a first book on U.S. relations with postcolonial India. I chose to make the foreign aid and development relationship between Washington and New Delhi the focus of my study, and advanced an overtly critical analysis of U.S. geopolitical and economic policy. I stand by my findings to this day -- at least most of them. However, in light of recent international affairs, I am struck by how cautious, sensitive, and sophisticated the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations were in pursuing U.S. global hegemony. We are now led by a cadre of post-Cold War Keystone Cops who after dismissing liberal nation-building as overly ambitious, have embarked on an imperial scheme the magnitude of which the American people have not seen since the age of Albert Beveridge. So, it is with great relief that I turn to today's three presentations -- embracing their fascination with the complicated nuances of U.S.-Third World relations during the Cold War.

The three presentations have grown out of some very impressive individual research efforts. However, they are also a reflection of how our field, and SHAFR, have accented the importance of relations between the world's haves and have-nots. The point of departure is probably traceable to the 1960s and 70s when, in the shadow of another costly war, a group of skeptics, lumped together under the imperfect label of "Cold War revisionism" combined archival research with some fresh conceptual thought to advance a powerful critique of U.S. policy toward Southeast Asia. During the 1980s a small but growing group of SHAFR members -- some with us today in the audience -- delved more deeply into post World War II decolonization and postcolonialism. Gary Hess and Bob McMahon investigated South and Southeast Asia. Thomas Noer examined Southern Africa, an area that received additional attention from our colleague Tim Borstellman. Peter Hahn and Diane Kunz began their careers as U.S.-Middle East specialists -- and Doug Little moved in that direction as well. Steve Rabe began his inquiry into postwar Inter-American relations. Today a growing list of scholars, including Nick Cullather, Ann Heiss, Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, Michael Latham, Andy Rotter, Bill Walker, and many, many others, labor to advance our understanding of U.S.-Third World ties.

Today's papers demonstrate that another generation of foreign relations historians are carrying on. The declassification of documents, as frustratingly and diabolically incomplete as it is, has allowed them to take the story through the 60s and 70s, the heyday of Cold War revisionism. Taken together, the three papers demonstrate a healthy lack of consensus when it comes to interpreting U.S.-Third World relations. Luis Nuno Rodrigues highlights how the Kennedy and Johnson administrations quickly backpedaled from their liberal anti-colonial rhetoric, in order to preserve U.S. security arrangements at the Azores. Mark T. Hove, on the other hand, argues that scholars have too easily dismissed the Alliance for Progress, the New Frontier's most ambitious development assistance program, and stresses that at least some policymakers, esp. US Ambassador to Chile Edward Korry, followed a learning curve that held promise for a more equal and more effective inter-American relationship -- or at least something short of embracing military coups and dictatorship. Better as well, than IMF-imposed economic austerity programs. Similarly, Daniel Weimer detects the continued presence of "modernization theory" in U.S. drug control efforts and opium crop substitution programs in Thailand during the first half of the 1970s.

Despite the lack of consensus, the papers highlight a number of parallel themes. First, all accent the importance of the Cold War geopolitical context -- and the Americanization of the Vietnam War. This emphasis will no doubt continue to characterize historical analysis of this era. For nations of the non-western world the Cold War had a double edge. On the one hand, it could motivate Washington to reach out politically and economically. Luis Nuno Rodrigues explains how John Kennedy initially linked the ideological struggle against communism with US support for anti-colonial struggles in Portuguese Africa. Yet what the Cold War granted, the Cold War might take away. The Salazar dictatorship possessed the Azores bargaining chip that didn't even need to be played in order to force a New Frontier retreat. Lyndon Johnson's immersion in the Vietnam War further distanced the United States from African freedom movements. Finally, even as the Nixon administration pursued detente with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, it batted down the ideological hatches in the developing world and prioritized U.S. relations with Portugal over Angolan independence.

Mark Hove has constructed what strikes me as a very important reinterpretation of U.S. Cold War relations with Chile. According to Hove, Amb. Korry and his State Dept. associates not only remained committed to the Alliance for Progress's reformist goals, but they envisioned a less interventionist way of fighting the Cold War. Their approach, which included a reluctant acceptance of a Salvador Allende presidency, certainly contrasts with both the previously heavy handed manipulation of the 1964 Chilean election and the Nixon administration's subsequent embrace of Augusto Pinochet. Still Cold War inspired, and of course still interventionist, to my mind the Korry strategy resembled the Cold War liberalism that Chester Bowles and John Kenneth Galbraith applied to India where U.S. economic aid continued to grow even in the face of Jawaharlal Nehru's Fabian socialism and Cold War nonalignment -- America's military alliance with Pakistan notwithstanding. In the case of both South Asia and Chile, the Nixon administration ultimately abandoned a kinder and gentler Cold War containment for a more hard-headed but not necessarily more realistic policy of military aid for pro-U.S. dictators. Again illustrating the Cold War's double edge.

Turning to Thailand, David Weimer explains how the war against drugs evolved out of earlier U.S. foreign aid programs that sought to help the Thai Royal government suppress Communist-backed insurgencies in northern Thailand, spur economic development, and integrate hill tribes such as the Hmong into the national fabric. U.S. policymakers also hoped to reduce the supply of heroin to American GI's serving in South Vietnam. Correctly emphasizing that the Cold War produced different U.S. policies in different cases, Weimer accents that in Thailand U.S. development and drug control policies did not conflict with U.S. security goals. Indeed, even while President Nixon talked tough -- actually, mean and ugly might be more appropriate adverbs -- about "law and order" on America's city streets, his administration emphasized crop substitution and community development as well as law enforcement in Thailand.

In addition to Cold War policy, the three papers address a number of other related themes: modernization theory, development, ideology and culture. These social, ideological, and cultural themes are also likely to continue to shape future historiography, and it is this regard that I urge all three authors to consider some additional ways of thinking about U.S.-Third World relations. Of course this advice is extended with the understanding that we have heard only a small portion of their on-going projects. Daniel's paper broaches the cultural realm most directly -- drawing on Bill Walker's observation that the history of drugs is fundamentally a study of cultures in conflict. His discussion of modernization theory illustrates that in addition to Cold War ideology, modernization was also a cultural construct. Yet his analysis of America's cultural interaction with the Hmong seems one dimensional. First, I wonder to what extent the cultivation of opium for export was not itself form of agriculture that should be categorized as modern. It did, after all, connect the Hmong to the international cash nexus. Second, maybe it's because I have spent too much time traveling down dirt roads to research tourism in exotic and rustic locales, but I have to wonder how the Hmong reacted when they were told to plant crops in straight rows. Did they agree with American and Thai modernizers that treating illnesses with modern medicines from Eli Lilly was preferable to poppies? I recognize the many benefits that modernity bestows, but I suspect that these cultural and economic innovations also stirred resistance and I would love to hear some Hmong voices in the narrative. We seem to encounter at least three communities here who perceive their social order and cultural identity to be

threatened: Nixon's America with its crime, drugs, racial and gender strife, and the unraveling of the Cold War consensus; the Royal Thais seeking to forge a modern nation in a multi-ethnic cauldron (sound familiar?); and the Hmong, a people caught up in the web of global modernization and global geo-political conflict. Man, for a historian of inter-cultural relations, it doesn't get much better than this!

In Chile, Mark has done an excellent job of reinterpreting what U.S. policy was during the late 1960s, but I would encourage him to more fully address the question of WHY? Was the Korry cohort simply more politically astute than other officials? Were they more committed to the tenants of Cold War liberalism -- like Bowles in India? Were Cold War liberals imbued with a more flexible modernization ideology and cultural outlook? And how do we explain Korry's willingness to come to terms with an Allende presidency? Did Allende's state-centered socialism and Korry's bureaucratic, Alliance for Progress Keynesianism in some ways draw on the same modernizing intellectual and cultural traditions -- allowing the two to look past their Cold War political differences? This series of questions leads me to raise one last overarching query: to what extent were U.S.-Third World relations shaped by factors other than Cold War politics. Mark Latham has noted in his book on Modernization that many of the basic elements in the Cold War development theory have roots traceable to the nineteenth century -- both the age of Manifest Destiny and the era of dollar diplomacy. If we are to understand modernization as a cultural construct, something quite a bit less rigid and self-conscious than ideology, then the existence of historical antecedents becomes even more likely. Emily Rosenberg's recent book on dollar diplomacy explains how the manly science of economics combined with racialist concepts of civilization and U.S. strategic interests to shape American occupation policies in Central America and the Caribbean at the turn of the century. In all three papers we have heard today, striking cultural phrases pop up and jar the reader. The U.S. assumption that "political maturity" for the tribalistic Angolans lay well down the road; U.S. and Royal Thai expressions of what might best be termed as modern noblesse oblige toward the benighted Hmong; and Korry's orientalist reference to "fitting President Frei for pants," all beg for further analysis.

In searching for some additional interpretive tools, it might be well worthwhile to also place the development decade within the context of modern globalization -- a process of integration which both preceded and survived the Soviet American rivalry. As Akira Iriye, Kristin Hoganson, and others have demonstrated, the globalizing trends of the late nineteenth century were cultural and political, as well as economic. On the one hand they appear to have been accompanied by universalistic tendencies -- US expansionists assuming that American values and doctrines carried world wide application. At the same time, globalization has exposed the survival of particularist trends, most often expressed in political resistance movements, anti-colonial, nationalisms, and negotiations between the hegemonic power and collaborationists who often turned out to be less pliant than originally thought. Modernization theory, and in at least some cases, U.S. development assistance programs during the Cold War, manifested these same contradictory trends. Walt Whitman Rostow may have touted the universality of capitalism's stages, but US officials encountered and often made peace with competing economic models: whether it was Nehru's fabianism, or as Nick Cullather has shown, Taiwan's state-guided capitalism. We certainly can see in today's presentations how U.S. policy varied significantly from society to society. Washington worked jointly with the Thai Royal Govt to carry out a

shared vision of modern state-building and identity formation. But in Chile, the U.S. passed up Korry's accommodationist strategy. In Africa, Ambassador George Anderson placed his decolonization plan on the back burner, and eventually Nixon and Kissinger dismissed Angolan independence altogether. Political interests undoubtedly influenced these various outcomes, but the evidence suggests that global integration, culture, and ideology also carry explanatory power.

Please don't misinterpret these comments. I am not calling on the presenters or the audience to reject Cold War political history. I simply advocate that we approach foreign relations history, well, more historically. Let's not think of 1960, or even 1945, as year zero, but rather work harder to link the international trends of the twentieth century with those of the nineteenth century. In a wonderfully thoughtful piece which appeared in DH in Fall 2000, Nick Cullather suggested that we accept the 1960s conception "development" as discourse -- but that we also work to place that discourse in a context that allows politics and personalities to matter. It is a discourse in which the world's poor have from time to time carved out a modicum of negotiating space and played roles as historical agents. Like all discourse, it has evolved over times and produced different results in different historical times and places. Cold War modernizers, like their nineteenth century counterparts, may have dreamed of a world that conformed to a certain model, but they inevitably encountered a world characterized by differentiation. Within each setting they made choices -- and the process goes on today. In its dealings with the non-Western world the US can pontificate and bludgeon, or it can negotiate and accommodate. We can impose our vision of modernity on others, or we can help others construct their own modernity. Our choices will most likely influence the shape of things to come.

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