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Introduction by Christopher Ball, H-Diplo Editor

Since the Revolution, American statesmen have struggled to harbor their republican polity from the tempests of international politics, with varying levels of success. In *National Security and Core Values in American History*, William O. Walker III concludes that the largely self-imposed demands of foreign affairs have nearly swamped the core political values of the United States. Walker traces the development of the “security ethos,” which justifies expansionist internationalism and the subordination of domestic rights and liberties to achieve that end. What sets Walker’s account apart, according to all three reviewers, is the scope of his inquiry. Rather than start with the rise of the national security state in the Cold War or the emergence of the United States as world power in 1898, he begins in colonial America to explain the origins of America’s political culture and how fear, military power, and political economy shaped the security ethos. (8) The narrative continues up to the last term of George W. Bush, but Walker foresees no radical change in how the security ethos jeopardizes domestic values with the election of Barack Obama, noting that Obama’s sympathies rest with the foreign policy of George H. W. Bush. (305)

The reviewers are divided in their own sympathies toward Walker’s arguments, with James McAllister more skeptical than Robert Dean and Gerrit Dirkmaat. McAllister respects Walker’s scholarship, but regards his ‘jeremiad’ (Dean’s word, not McAllister’s) as more provocative than persuasive. Walker is often silent on the alternatives that U.S. officials could have pursued and the effects they would have had on “core values.” For example, McAllister points out that Charles Beard, one of Walker’s heroes in the book, opposed U.S. intervention in World War II, but Walker does not discuss how a neutral policy might have affected U.S. core values.

Dean accepts the broad outlines of Walker’s narrative, but is skeptical of the concepts of “core values” and “national security,” a concern shared by McAllister. For Dean, the content of core values is too static in the book; an approach that tracked changing meanings of those values would better show the co-evolution of domestic values and foreign policy. Likewise, the meaning of national security is too vague. Dean calls for an analysis of how it is constructed and politicized. McAllister also believes that the definition of the “security ethos” that Walker repeatedly invokes changes but those changes are not explained.

Dirkmaat praises Walker’s attention to the pre-20th century historiography of domestic values and national security to show how the “proto-national security state” developed in the 19th century. (42) His criticisms are ones of omission. First, Walker understates the magnitude and significance of Abraham Lincoln’s suspension of *habeas corpus* during the Civil War. Lincoln breached the explicit constitutional provision that only Congress can suspend the writ, and detained over 13,000 citizens, Dirkmaat notes. Over 2,800 military trials were conducted *outside* of occupied Confederate territory.¹ This was the most

¹ Mark E. Neely, *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (Oxford University

Press US, 1992), 168. Dirkmaat cites this book. The calculations are mine from Neely.

significant usurpation of power to that time. The detention of Japanese-Americans during World War II is also under-examined. Second, Walker sidelines the profound progress in racial and gender equality from the founding of the United States to the current day, and he idealizes the degree to which republicanism was practiced as much as preached in the early republic. While economic inequality remains, suffrage and civil rights for women and ethnic minorities advanced despite the security ethos.

Together, the reviewers present a challenge to the conceptual apparatus that Walker employs. The definition of the “security ethos” is never stated clearly in the book. Is this ethos an effect of internationalism or a cause of over-active foreign policy? The relationship between the security ethos and the national security state is also unclear. While Walker’s intention is to provide multi-century interpretation, he might have adapted the detailed concepts of the national security state and American political values that Michael Hogan developed in *A Cross of Iron* or that Aaron Friedberg developed in *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*, two studies of the early Cold War.² For Hogan and Friedberg, the significance of the national security state or the garrison state is that the government institutionalizes forms of temporary, war-time authorities indefinitely in peace-time. In this sense, Dirkmaat’s discussion of Civil War detentions and trials and the Japanese-American internments involves war-time practices, not peace-time ones, and once the respective wars ended, the practices ended.

The values that define America’s political culture are under-specified for all three. For Friedberg and Hogan, anti-statism was a central tenet of conservative opponents to both the New Deal and the national security state. Walker rightly sees the New Deal as having intellectual affinities with internationalism, but the substance of economic multilateralism embodied in the Bretton Woods institutions and the planned International Trade Organization (ITO) reflected neither the views of American conservatives, who rejected the ITO on anti-statist grounds, nor the hard-line proponents of the security ethos, who sought a pre-dominant U.S. role.

One aspect of Walker’s argument is not examined by reviewers, but is worth further inquiry. Walker points to an affinity between U.S. domestic security policies and those it pushed on foreign allies in the 1960s (150-157), implying that the United States cannot separate the techniques it promotes abroad from what it employs at home. This contrasts with the view that the United States employs a hypocritical set of policies – subverting democracy abroad to “protect” it at home.³

² Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Aaron L. Friedberg, *In the Shadow of the Garrison state: America's Anti-Statism and its Cold War Grand Strategy* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

³ Jason G. Ralph, “‘High Stakes’ and ‘Low Intensity Democracy’: Understanding America’s Policy of Promoting Democracy in Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi, *American Democracy*

Participants:

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James McAllister is a Professor of Political Science at Williams College. He received his PhD from Columbia University in 1999. His publications include: *No Exit: America and the German Problem 1943-1954* (Cornell University Press, 2002); "The Lost Revolution: Edward Lansdale and the American Defeat in Vietnam 1964-1968," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (2003), pp.1-26; "A Fiasco of Noble Proportions: The Johnson Administration and the South Vietnamese Elections of 1967," *Pacific Historical Review* (2004), pp.619-652; "The Limits of Influence in Vietnam: Great Britain, the United States, and the Diem Regime, 1959-1963," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (2006), pp.22-43. [Coauthored with Ian Schulte.]; "Only Religions Count in Vietnam: Thich Tri Quang and the Vietnam War," *Modern Asian Studies* (2008), pp.751-782; "What Can One Man Do? Nguyen Duc Thang and the Limits of Reform in South Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnam Studies* (forthcoming 2009).

Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts (Oxford University Press, 2000). Patricia Owens, *Between War and Politics: International Relations and the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Oxford University Press, 2009), ch. 6.

More than a hundred years of imperial policy has created a national security ethos among the governing elite of the United States. The discourse of “security”, and the institutions and practices that follow from it, threaten the core values of individual liberty and engaged democratic citizenship that ground American nationalism. So argues Bill Walker, who gives us a concise and comprehensively synthetic jeremiad on the threats to domestic democracy posed by the normalization of limitless imperial ambition. Walker sees this work as a complement to the work of William Appleman Williams and others in that historiographic tradition.

With this argument he joins a number of contemporary scholars, journalists, and commentators who see the ongoing military misadventures in Iraq and Afghanistan as a product of long-term patterns in American history, and who fear for the fate of the Republic as the militarized surveillance state inexorably grows. Chalmers Johnson, Andrew Bacevich, Noam Chomsky, Alfred McCoy, Tom Englehardt, Mark Danner, Seymour Hersh, Jane Mayer, and others, in their capacities as scholars, journalists, and public intellectuals have given us powerful critiques of American foreign policy and the threats it presents to domestic freedoms and civic life. For those of us familiar with these strands of political thought and historical inquiry, Walker’s book doesn’t contain big surprises. It is, however, a thoughtful, well-crafted narrative of the emergence of the trope of “national security” and its ossification into a permanent justification for global hegemony abroad and authoritarian tendencies at home. He bravely tackles the whole span of U.S. history in a brief argument, demonstrating a broad and deep familiarity with a very large body of literature.

Walker’s book grapples with a central dilemma of American history: the fundamental and pervasive contradictions between the ideals of liberty, equality, rule of law, individual rights, self-determination and consent of the governed, and the actual practices of the state. Racial inequality, class based political power, and militarized imperial expansion and domination have been central to the history of the U.S., and in a kind of perpetual tension with the enlightenment ideals of the founding fathers that presumably form the “core values” of the nation. Walker argues, rightly, I think, that the realization of those basic democratic ideals has reached a sad pass today, with the Bush administration’s institutionalization of doctrines and practices of preemptive (imperial) war, state authorized extra-legal torture, and myriad forms of warrantless surveillance of American citizens, all in the name of “national security.” The willingness of the current administration to escalate a misconceived imperial intervention in Afghanistan rather than embarking on a systemic reconsideration of just what “national security” actually might entail after a decade of failed policy demonstrates the death-grip that the “security ethos” has on American politics.

Citing Charles Beard and William Appleman Williams, Walker argues that the root of the contradictions between “core values” and imperial practice is the political economy of industrial capitalism. National security for a global empire is an almost infinitely expansive concept, and one that lends itself to policies that seem instrumentally expedient in the

short term, but which often produce disastrous unintended consequences in the long term. By construing unimpeded American global access to, and control of, raw materials and markets as vital national interests, the logic of a militarized national security state produces “war at the behest of a powerful executive, ‘unhampered by popular objections and legislative control.’” (302) This seems a reasonable encapsulation of the historical patterns in the U.S. since 1950.

Walker identifies three “momentous blunders” of American foreign policy, errors that appeared to be remarkable national security successes in the short term. Each provides cautionary lessons about the unintended consequences of empire. (198) The war with Spain in 1898, the overthrow of Mohammed Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, and the CIA sponsorship of the Afghan Mujahedin in a proxy war with the Soviets during much of the 1980s—each generated unanticipated “blowback,” revolutionary upheavals and resistance to U.S. domination that proved enormously costly and fundamentally destabilizing to the existing imperial order. One might quibble with this list—Andrew Bacevich would add the development and deployment of nuclear weapons, spurring an international arms race that still threatens the unintended consequence of nuclear holocaust either through state-to-state conflict or by the acquisition and use of the bomb by a non-state terrorist group.¹ The intervention in Vietnam might rate a mention; that imperial war had relatively few direct strategic consequences in the long term, but it ripped apart domestic political consensus, discredited the liberal state, and perhaps played a large part in generating a 30-year period of conservative reaction (thus producing some of the more recent imperial blunders).

Walker shows us too, how the maintenance of American hegemony through proxy dictators, covert interventions, anti-drug policies, and other standard operating procedures of empire left a trail of human misery in its wake—legions of victims throughout Latin America, Asia, and other contested regions of the globe. The lesson, if I read it right, is that “national security” provides a nearly limitless justification to project coercive power abroad. That global “engagement” itself leads to a kind of hubris and overreaching that endangers the republic in at least two ways: first is the “blowback” and global resentment and resistance that U.S. imperial domination generates. The second is the gradual but pronounced dissolution of a fully functioning participatory democracy with the emergence of unconstrained executive and military power, the growth of a national security surveillance state, and the erosion of basic constitutional protections of citizenship.

All this seems essentially correct to me; it is a sadly familiar story. I am personally sympathetic to the political value judgments that structure the narrative trajectory of the book, and it bears considerable resemblance to the story I try to convey to my U.S. history survey students. But from an epistemological or analytical standpoint, I think there are a couple of issues that get glossed over. The notion of “core values” itself deserves more

¹ Andrew Bacevich, “Farewell, the American Century: Rewriting the Past by Adding In What's Been Left Out,” TomDispatch.com:

http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175065/andrew_bacevich_whose_century_was_that_

scrutiny that it gets. The concept of “core values” functions as a kind of premise or given, against which judgments are rendered concerning how far the practice of the state deviates from the ideal. I can’t help but think about Eric Foner’s *The Story of American Freedom*, which interrogates the changing meanings attached to the fundamental concept of “freedom.”² He shows just how malleable and historically contingent the discourse about freedom has been over 235 years. Something similar, in an abbreviated form, might have strengthened Walker’s argument. After all, “core values” are realized (and perhaps reinvented) in social and political practice, and there must be a contingent history of discourse and interpretation against which we might understand the erosion or transformation of those values under the pressure of “national security.”

Finally, and perhaps more significantly, a discussion of the processes by which the very concept of “national security” is socially constructed and rendered politically operational would have enriched the book. What exactly constitutes national security? What kinds of threats rise to a threshold that demands action by the state? What is the relationship between “authoritarian” personality structures, briefly discussed by Walker, and the discourse and practice of national security policy? (297) Why, for instance, do small bands of foreign terrorists who can inflict painful but limited damage on the U.S. come to be represented as existential threats spurring costly and interminable foreign wars, while the state refuses to mobilize to address entirely foreseeable environmental catastrophes like global warming which threaten to destabilize the biological systems upon which our dense human population depends? Why is threat perception focused only on perceived outsiders (or subversive insiders) whose actions seem to threaten the rupture of existing social and economic hierarchies, and not on collective practices that threaten the rupture of essential natural systems?

² Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (N.Y.: W.W. Norton, 1998).

A Core Meltdown

With the calamity of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent response of the United States, first in Afghanistan and then, more controversially in Iraq, the rapidity with which critiques of American foreign policy have been published has noticeably increased. As one historian explained when introducing his review of two books written on the topic of American imperialism in 2007, “There is nothing quite like a failed preemptive war in defiance of virtually the entire international community to revive discussion of whether the United States is an ‘empire.’”¹ William Walker’s latest contribution to the discussion, *National Security and Core Values in American History*, is noticeably different from many other such critiques for two distinct reasons.

First, Walker approaches the discussion from the position that a “disappointing” void exists in the literature surrounding the relationship between American core values and American foreign policy. (xiii) He notes in his preface that while some historians have mentioned the importance of American core values in the body of their arguments, there has been little effort to elaborate upon what these values are and how they have affected foreign policy and themselves been affected by the continual quest to achieve security. (xi) Walker frames the entire book by asking, “What... has been the relationship between American core values and U.S. security policy?” (xiii) Walker in no way leaves this question unanswered. He unequivocally concludes, at various times throughout the book, that the cost of American engagement in the world, in a professed attempt to ensure security, is “the rights and liberties of its citizens.” (10) It is not surprising that various administrations throughout American history have justified their foreign policy in terms of protecting American values and providing promised security. Yet, by the coming of the present war on terror, Walker argues American actions, primarily those of the Bush administration, have both shredded American core values and civil liberties in the name of security and “made a mockery...of America’s commitment to freedom, democracy, and human rights.” (269)

The second distinctive element to his work is Walker’s attempt to move away from another deficiency he sees in the existing scholarship. He explains to the reader that it is his “contention that too many books concerning the early Cold War and U.S. foreign relations suffer from a debilitating liability: They are surprisingly ahistorical in both concept and exposition.” (xi) Part One of his book, “The Origins of the Security Ethos, 1688-1919”, reflects his belief that an understanding of American foreign relations cannot be complete without a proper historical grounding in the first two centuries of the American experience. One does not gain an understanding of American core values in relation to foreign policy from the Cold War era alone, but through the multifaceted layers of U.S. actions, and particularly the justifications of those actions in the name of security, over the course the nation’s existence.

¹ Walter Hixon, “Empire as a Way of Life”, *Diplomatic History* 32:2 (April 2007), 331.

It is with necessity that Walker integrates a discussion of early American leaders and their actions into his narrative because his focus on American core values rests upon the fact that over the course of American history, these once tangible, immutable ideas have been slowly eroded to become abstract and fleeting. What does Walker consider these core values to be domestically? Primarily he focuses on rights which early Americans believed to be inherent and protected by the founding documents: “freedom of speech and assembly; freedom of the press; right to trial by a jury of one’s peers; protection from unreasonable search and seizure, which became synonymous with a right to privacy; and freedom from self-incrimination.” (5) When recounting the American values abused in the Bush administration’s war on terror on an international scale, Walker expands the list to include: “U.S. acceptance of sovereignty, the ideal of self-determination, adherence to international law, indefinite detention and habeas corpus, and the resort to torture in the name of security.” (269) While liberty and republican government, as well as commerce, are a part of the equation these definitions are much more fluid and change over the course of time, which is part of Walker’s point.

To a student of 19th century American imperialism this effort to incorporate the more distant past was initially refreshing. Other books that have attempted to reframe the understanding of American foreign policy have very often started the discussion with the Spanish American War, Wilsonian internationalism, or the Cold War as the usual jumping off points for a critique of American foreign policy. For example, Thomas Magstadt’s 2004 book, *An Empire If You Can Keep It: Power and Principle in American Foreign Policy*, shelved American continental expansion as something outside the realm of the imperial discussion, as he wrote rather dismissively, “this is not the place to re-tell how the West was won or to recount the wars and massacres associated with the winning.”² Even William Appleman Williams’ foundational classic for the current study of American foreign relations, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), to which Walker pays homage in his book, skimmed past the early American expansionist history from the Revolution to the Spanish American War in just four brief pages.³ Walker commendably makes a much greater effort to incorporate American history prior to the twentieth century. It is thus that he can conclude that the relative inaction of American citizens at present in the face of a security ethos that is slowly eroding the inviolability of American core values can be traced to “the expansionist political economy that was rarely challenged after 1815.” (295)

Walker argues that there is a great continuity in American security policy, especially since the advent of what he terms the “proto-national security state” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. (44) Each successive administration added to the building of the national

² Thomas G. Magstadt, *An Empire If You Can Keep It: Power and Principle in American Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2004), 50.

³ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1959), 23-26.

security state, and thereby further eroded civil liberties and American core values, all the while ironically arguing that the purpose of the security policy was to protect the American way of life. Thus the actions of the Bush administration were the culmination of decades of a security policy that viewed preemptive force as a necessity. The Bush Doctrine of preemption was merely a retooling of the views expressed in NSC-68 that “preemption in some form was the only reliable road to security.” (272) In fact, in a more sweeping conclusion, Walker writes, “In the wake of September 11, the damage that had been done to foundational ideals – that is, to the nation’s very identity – in the long age of the security ethos rendered them vulnerable to a frontal assault by George W. Bush and his administration.” (256)

Walker’s conclusions are suffused with pessimism which he would probably more appropriately designate simply as an informed statement of reality. Following the decades of security ethos run amuck, and the particularly damaging eight years of the Bush era policies, Walker posits that perhaps “the liberties sustaining American democracy have been damaged beyond repair.” (292) Later, when asking rhetorically if anything could be done to rescue core values from their current state of disrepair, his response is that “the prospect for change is not encouraging.” (296) In fact, the “history of the security ethos and the likelihood of its continuation do not instill confidence” that American core values can be salvaged in their present state. (308) Walker’s fears that that Obama administration would not differ markedly in its foreign policy decisions from Bush’s appear to have been quite prescient as the former sends thousands of additional soldiers to Afghanistan and in his Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech repeated the oft spoken affirmation of his predecessor that “evil does exist in the world.” In that same speech President Obama outlined a Wilsonian vision of foreign policy, that the United States had paid in dollars and blood for much of the world’s security and that Americans “have borne this burden not because we seek to impose our will. We have done so out of enlightened self-interest -- because we seek a better future for our children and grandchildren, and we believe that their lives will be better if others’ children and grandchildren can live in freedom and prosperity.”⁴ Such a world view is hardly the type of fundamental change that Walker sees as essential in order to rescue core values.

For those who have felt, as did Walker, that a recognition of American core values and their interplay with American actions at home and abroad is missing from the present historiography, they will find Walker’s synthesis of the extant literature engaging, well-written, and at times very poignant. And, it will be difficult for any reader to deny that American actions in the name of security have damaged foundational principles of American values given the numerous examples Walker offers.

Despite these strengths it is rather surprising, given this attempt at establishing continuity in relation to the erosion of American core values, that Walker chose to give little time to

⁴ Barack Obama, “Obama’s Nobel Speech Text”, NYTimes.com, December 10, 2009

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/11/world/europe/11prexy.text.html>.

the perhaps greatest usurpation of civil liberties in American history. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus for the entire nation and thousands of American citizens were eventually arrested and imprisoned without being charged in a criminal court. Those who were brought to trial faced a military court rather than a civilian one. In fact, in a move strikingly similar to present discussions involving captured suspected terrorists, the Lincoln administration invented a new term to classify these citizens being held in prisons under the suspension of the writ. To differentiate them from Confederate prisoners of war captured in the field of battle or military deserters being held for absconding from the Union armed forces, these citizen detainees were classified as “prisoners of state.” While some were Southerners in the North accused of spying or inciting rebellion, and most hailed from the disputed border states, others were newspaper editors accused of sedition. Some men were detained on the rumor that they had spoken against the war, even without witnesses to attest the fact. And some were religious pacifists like Judson Benedict of New York. A Campbellite preacher, Benedict was arrested through the suspension of the writ on the grounds that his preaching was discouraging enlistments. While defenders of Lincoln’s actions often cite the perils facing a nation engaged in a bloody civil war, one very much doubts that arrests like that of Benedict’s had any effect on the survival of the nation. More than 13,500 American citizens were detained under the authority of martial law because of the Lincoln administration’s suspension of the writ and Lincoln himself intervened on only a handful of occasions, and only then when it involved a high profile political prisoner or a well-connected, affluent citizen.⁵

Walker does address Lincoln’s wartime suspension of the writ, commenting that “civil liberties fared poorly under the duress of the Civil War” as Lincoln used executive power in the name of security. And, Walker affirms that these events created “the possibility of abuse of power at the highest level of government.” (41) Yet the entirety of this discussion occurs in one brief paragraph while the actions of the Bush administration make up nearly 50 pages. While some of this disparity is to be anticipated in a book making a presentist critique of current foreign policy and its effects on American values, the disproportionate nature of the time devoted to each serves to undermine his argument that the current

⁵ Mark E. Neely, Jr, *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 202. Neely has painstakingly examined the extent of the suspension of habeas corpus during the Lincoln administration. He believes the number of arrestees to be much higher than 13,000. His book details the excesses of the Lincoln presidency and the arbitrary way in which citizens were arrested after the suspension of the writ. Of the suspension of the writ and the haphazard way in which it was used and abused, Neely pointedly explains that the “sweeping and uncoordinated arrests that followed...constituted...the lowest point for civil liberties in U.S. history to that time, and one of the lowest for civil liberties in all of American history. It showed the Lincoln administration at its worst— amateurish, disorganized, and rather unfeeling.” (53).

security ethos cannot be viewed ahistorically. While not endorsing the actions of Lincoln, Walker certainly does not attack his policies with same rigor he will later actions, at one point writing, albeit facetiously, that such measures “could perhaps be defended as an unavoidable necessity.” (100) It begs the question: If there are ever any instances in which presidents are even partially justified in restricting civil liberties in the name of security, how can one measure whether or not a present crisis rises to that level of justification? The Civil War was a titanic struggle, but there are no instances for which an argument could be made that suspension of civil liberties proved the deciding factor. Likewise, the tens of thousands of Japanese and Japanese Americans interned under Franklin Roosevelt’s order were not only universally innocent, but the Japanese Empire also never even contemplated an invasion of the Western United States, making the entire justification for the internment as laughable as it was cruel. Again, while Walker makes powerful criticisms of the internment, this massive violation of constitutional rights does not receive more than a page of discussion. (120)

Another area of potential criticism is Walker’s selectiveness of core values on which he chooses to focus. His succinct argument is that “America’s march to hegemony compromised the nation’s core values and thus the prospects for a healthy democracy.” (292) Yet this statement contains a glaring omission in the lack of Walker’s treatment of the idea of equality as a core value in American history. As Gordon Wood’s latest work on the topic reiterates, the ideal of equality suffused early republican thought, despite the stupefying inequities of the society which they created which gave legal sanction to slavery and deprived women, blacks, and Native Americans of legal and voting rights.⁶ Walker grimly recounts the circumstances of the stymied racial equality that occurred under various administrations, and particularly in the wake of Hurricane Katrina during the Bush years. (290-291). There is, however, no recognition that while the present American course may be further and further from the core values intended by the founding fathers in regard to personal liberty and the freedom of speech, in terms of legal racial equality the election of Barack Obama suggests that Americans today have improved upon equality as a value in ways Jefferson and Madison never attempted or dared. Idealizing the republican principles of the founding fathers is fraught with peril. The democracy they created, though radically liberal by the standards of the time, was anything but “healthy” when judged through a modern lens, as far more residents of the nation were excluded from the elective franchise (through race, gender, and property requirements) than were participants in the nascent government. This is not in any way to suggest that inequities based upon gender and race do not loudly demonstrate themselves in modern America. The embarrassing racial

⁶ Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty, A History of the Early Republic from 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 4. That equality is considered to be a core, foundational value in American history, at least across broad spectrum, is further reflected by the standard textbooks used to teach university students courses in American government, such as Thomas Patterson’s *The American Democracy, 9th ed.* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2009), 5-7.

profiling and unequal sentences in the criminal justice system and the transparency of the gender-biased workplace are all too clearly manifest. Economic inequality in particular will perhaps never be rectified short of the nation owning up to its responsibility to make the long-delayed monetary reparations to the African American community. Still, if American history is a steady progression of the security ethos gradually eroding American core values and rights, somehow in that malaise, however haltingly and frustratingly slow, American society has inched closer to the ideal of equality under the law; at any rate, it is far closer now to this ideal than it was in 1789. This success provides at least some hope for the future of American values.

These criticisms aside, Walker's book is essential in that it engages the topic of American core values in a cohesive and pioneering way. That Americans have taken these values for granted is perhaps tautologically manifested in the relative lack of publications on these topics. Recognizing the problem is nearly as important as the solutions offered to solve the problem. It is with difficulty, however, that Walker will be able to awaken Americans to the threat to core values that most take for granted. This apathy is similar to the view Americans have of their foreign policy in the world in general. Shortly after the invasion of Iraq, the lack of awareness of the American public of the realities of American foreign policy led noted apologist for American imperialism, Niall Ferguson, to comment, "The great thing about the American empire is that so many Americans disbelieve in its existence. Ever since the annexation of Texas and invasion of the Philippines, the U.S. has systematically pursued an imperial policy. They think they're so different that when they have bases in foreign territories, it's not an empire. When they invade sovereign territory, it's not an empire."⁷ Walker's book seeks to rectify a similar misconception commonly held by the public. The meanings, and the inviolability, of American core values are being strained, if not destroyed, by the constant American quest for security. Failing to engage in the discussion of core values is to render them even more susceptible to destruction. Those who believe that American core values are essentially intact, with only minor variances, will be forced to deal with Walker's scholarship going forward.

⁷ Quoted in Maureen Dowd, "Hypocrisy and Apple Pie", *New York Times*, April 30, 2003.

William O. Walker's *National Security and Core Values in American History* advances an ambitious and provocative interpretation of American foreign relations from the colonial era to the war in Iraq. It is also not the easiest book to review because it ranges widely over periods of American history in which I have no real or imagined claims to expertise, and it hardly addresses other important issues like the causes and merits of American involvement in two world wars, the origins of the Cold War in Europe, or the origins and course of American involvement in Vietnam. While I certainly do not consider myself a "triumphalist" let alone an apologist for the mistakes or crimes of American foreign policy since the colonial era, it is also nevertheless the case that I do not believe the overall history of American foreign policy and the health of American democracy is as black as the portrait painted by Walker. However, despite my own limitations and biases in approaching this book, it is important to state at the outset my admiration for Walker's achievement. This is a passionate and well argued book that rarely loses sight of the fundamental questions concerning the nature of American foreign policy and the relationship between national security and core values.

Walker's central thesis is that since the 1890's American elites have been under the intellectual sway of a misguided "security ethos" that has done great damage to our core values, which he essentially defines as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Walker certainly does not glorify American history as a "city on a hill" prior to the war with Spain. Indeed, Walker shows that some of the basic ways in which the American approach to the world has its origins in colonial encounters long before the American revolution. However, while some elements of the security ethos were present long before the closing of the frontier, Walker persuasively argues that our conceptions of national security were dramatically transformed at the turn of the century.

Unfortunately, one of the weaknesses of *National Security and Core Values in American History* is that Walker does not carefully define his important concepts. Terms like "republican virtue," "civic virtue," "containment capitalism," and "security ethos" are deployed throughout the book, but this reader did not always find their meaning to be as clear as the author seems to assume. For example, the security ethos is defined early on in the book as "a way of thinking about security that hereafter assumed military prowess to be the most reliable guarantor of prosperity (p.53)." However, it is clear from Walker's general lack of attention to strictly military issues throughout the book that he does not really believe that this is the primary component of the American security ethos. Indeed, Walker's discussion of disarmament proposals in the early interwar period seems to contradict his thesis. In this case, governmental elites, pacifists, women's organizations, isolationists, and even some important internationalists were strongly in *favor* of disarmament and arms limitations, which would seem to suggest that the security ethos was either not very strong or highly contested. But Walker reaches exactly the opposite

conclusion: “The appeal of disarmament indicated the influence of the security ethos on discussions by informed citizens about the United States and foreign affairs.”¹

The true essence of Walker’s security ethos is not to be found in the military realm, but in more basic understanding of how American elites believed that the nation could be both prosperous and secure. A pivotal figure in the history of the early Republic for Walker is Richard Price. In contrast to the visions of America’s role in the world put forward by both Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson, Price “envisioned a self-sufficient America without the potentially deleterious effects of foreign commerce (p.31).” Walker is clearly intrigued by Price’s counsel although he acknowledges that it was never seriously considered. A more self-sufficient America that did not emphasize foreign trade would have been a republic that did not need a strong navy to protect its commerce. Even Jefferson, a strong proponent of westward expansion, believed that “Nothing should ever be accepted which would require a navy to defend it (p.30).” Over the course of the 1890’s, as westward expansion ended, Walker suggests that the future course of American foreign policy was largely established. The health of the American republic was now considered to be dependent on expanding foreign trade, which necessitated a strong navy and greater involvement in world affairs. For Walker, this also meant the establishment of an early “national security state” long before most historians date its birth. While the security ethos contained many different components, its essence was quite simple: “the more the United States was involved in the world, the safer it would surely be (p.250).” For Walker, the acceptance of this security ethos by American elites from McKinley to Obama has exacted a tremendous cost on the nature of the American republic when viewed from the perspective of both our civil liberties and the vibrancy of our democracy.

Walker’s critique of the dominant American security ethos is effective and it would be pointless for any historian to deny the costs—both to ourselves and to others—from conceptualizing our security needs in terms of an unreflexive global engagement and involvement with the world. Where *National Security and Core Values in American History* is less effective is in coming to terms with the nature and possible consequences of an alternative security ethos. Walker often brings in actors who are opposed in one way or another to the dominant security ethos, and demonstrates how their views were ignored or suppressed, but he rarely examines or comments on the merits of their alternative. For example, Walker certainly believes that FDR and Henry Stimson were exemplars of the dominant security ethos in the 1930’s, but it is far from obvious exactly what he thinks about the alternative security ethos put forward by the isolationists and Charles Beard.

¹ *National Security and Core Values in American History*, p.83. The lack of clarity becomes clear on the following page when Walker suggests that naval officers who wanted to maintain a program of naval building shows how they too “embraced the security ethos.” If every conceivable stance on naval building, arms control, and disarmament show the influence of the security ethos, then it is hard to imagine what position would be left for those who rejected the security ethos.

Walker spends little time discussing the isolationists, but beyond arguing that isolationism was a “fiction” it is never clear what he thinks of their alternative to FDR’s globalism. Walker persuasively argues that American leaders often “evaded history,” but it does seem like something of an evasion to not address in greater detail the merits and weaknesses of the isolationist case in the 1930’s.

To be fair, Walker does spend a fair amount of time discussing Beard’s views in the 1930’s. Like Andrew Bacevich, Walker views Beard as occupying a “middle way between isolationism and reflexive internationalism” (p.103). Unfortunately, Walker never fleshes out what that middle way would have looked like and whether it would have been superior to the course that FDR ultimately pursued. Did Beard’s path of “continentalism” reflect a viable alternative, or was Beard’s critique of FDR largely a critique of his methods rather than his goals? These are the kinds of questions that still remain unanswered after reading *National Security and Core Values in American History*. In the chapter of his book that deals with FDR, Walker approvingly cites the critiques of FDR offered by Beard and depicts him as an advocate of globalism roughly along the same lines as his predecessors. Hardly anything in the chapter would prepare the reader for the summary judgment Walker offers much later in the book, awkwardly placed in a section on right wing authoritarianism in the Bush administration: “It is also important to state clearly that Nazi Germany posed a clear and present danger to the vital interests of the United States and that Franklin Roosevelt’s efforts saved the nation from disaster (p.295).” Needless to say, this reader would have welcomed a more extended discussion of how Walker ultimately reconciles his admiration for FDR with his consistent admiration for Charles Beard, undoubtedly one of FDR’s harshest critics.²

Walker’s brief discussion of the origins of the Cold War raises similar questions. One can understand Walker’s reluctance to delve into all of the debates over the origins of the conflict since, as he notes in the preface, he was inspired to write his own book because of his dissatisfaction with much of the previous scholarship on the origins of the Cold War (p.xi-xii). Nevertheless, his treatment of the early Cold War is much too brief. Truman is introduced by Walker as “parochial and strongly nationalist” but he also emphasizes that in his basic approach Truman was as “globalist” as his predecessor (pp.104, 123). Drawing on the research of Geoffrey Roberts, Walker dispatches the entire question of the origins of the Cold War between 1945-48 to a single paragraph. In his view, Stalin did not want a Cold War with the West and wanted to maintain a détente with the United States and Great Britain. Stalin’s only real contribution to the collapse of the Grand Alliance and the origins of the Cold War was that he “sought to defend Soviet interests (p.122).” This is not the time or the place to offer an alternative view of the origins of the Cold War, but Walker could

² A good contrast here is Andrew Bacevich’s discussion of Beard in his book *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (2002). Bacevich fully shares Walker’s appreciation for Beard, but he ends his discussion with an unambiguous statement that “On Hitler, Roosevelt had been right, and Beard’s 1940 prescription for U.S. foreign policy would have been a disaster (p.23).”

and should have spent more time dealing with the basic question of whether and to what extent the Soviet Union did represent a threat to the national security of the United States and Europe. All that he really needed to do was to address the very question that he himself posed on p.136: "To what extent were the fears of communism well founded?" Regrettably, he chose not to address let alone provide an answer to his own question.

Walker extends his analytical framework through the eras of détente and the end of the Cold War. His arguments are complicated and defy an easy summation. Walker's chapters on American foreign policy during the Clinton and Bush years are also interesting and provocative. Walker is very tough on the Clinton administration for what he sees as its unwillingness or inability to challenge the reigning security ethos despite the end of the Cold War. While Walker does convincingly show connections between the Clinton and Bush eras, I was left somewhat unconvinced by the totality of his attack on the Clinton administration. I think he goes too far in suggesting that the administration adopted a "paranoid style" in challenging critics who were not as sympathetic as they were to globalization and free trade. While the administration surely did "stack the deck" in making arguments in favor of globalization and maintaining America's position as a global hegemon, it is also true that these goals enjoyed wide support both before and after Clinton's time in office. In addition, Walker is very critical of Clinton for his supposed lack of support for what he calls "human security." However, it is also true that Clinton, despite criticism from both the left and right, did support military actions that advanced human security in places like Kosovo. Since Walker indicates his own support for NATO's airstrikes, which he believes prevented ethnic cleansing from becoming genocide, it seems clear to me that Clinton perhaps deserves some modest praise for putting human security at a somewhat higher level than previous administrations did.

Walker's conclusions about the future are certainly not optimistic. While others might see a vibrant and ongoing debate between Realists, Wilsonians, neoconservatives, multilateralists, and hybrid traditions, Walker is more impressed by what all these schools of thought share; namely, a belief in American engagement abroad and support for continued American hegemony, benevolent or otherwise. In his view, the disasters of the Bush era and Barack Obama's election don't really change anything important since support for the reigning security ethos remains undiminished. Borrowing from Joan Hoff, Walker raises the possibility that America could turn to a "global cooperative foreign policy," but he never really spells out what it would mean or how such a foreign policy would not also risk the "peril of losing the nation's soul in foreign entanglement" (p.305).

Of course, *National Security and Core Values in American History* should not be judged on the basis of its prescriptions for the future of American foreign policy. Despite my own disagreements with some of its arguments, Walker has produced a major work of scholarship that should provoke arguments for years to come. I look forward to the discussions it will surely provoke among my students in the future. It has surely earned its place on my bookshelf alongside *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.

Author's Response by William Walker, Houston, Texas

Let me begin by thanking Robert Dean, Gerrit Dirkmaat, and James McAllister for their careful reading and thoughtful critiques of my book. I also thank the editors of H-Diplo for making this exchange of views possible.

In April of this year I attended the annual meeting of the Rocky Mountain Council on Latin American Studies (RMCLAS). I was fortunate to hear a splendid presentation by Tracy Brandenburg of Wells College, "Beyond the Black Palace: Telling Mexico's Dirty War through Indigenous Tradition." One of her principals, Nicéforo Urbieta, a Zapotec artist, lamented in the course of an interview with Brandenburg that his experience with the Mexican government's assault on human rights in the 1970s led him to wonder whether his culture was still alive, or whether it primarily resided in museums. I will return to Urbieta in due course.

Robert Dean has two main concerns about my book. He wishes that the concept of core values had received a fuller exposition, one -- like Eric Foner's treatment of "freedom" -- that shows how "malleable and historically contingent" they have been. Fair enough. I am selective about my choice of what I see as core values, largely restricting my discussion to basic rights enumerated in the Bill of Rights and especially the impulse to self-determination (a core value not limited to the American populace) and, more recently, the matter of human rights. Though not as a sustained theme, I do indicate my belief that what constituted freedom for American citizens and others was highly situational. Especially in the wake of the First World War and in the Cold War, U.S. officials arrogated to themselves the right to set the boundaries of freedom. This turned out to be true at home and abroad. At certain points I therefore inquire whether the aggrandizement over time of executive power and its abuse might not also constitute a negative kind of core value, one at odds with more salutary concepts that permeate our nation's history.

Dean also contends that discussion of how national security is constituted "would have enriched the book." I chose not to examine the origins of the term or how it is portrayed in specific situations, but rather found it applicable to the activities of those in the 1890s and after who created and perpetuated the way of thinking about the United States that I call the "security ethos." As for his derivative question about how "foreign terrorists . . . come to be represented as existential [security?] threats," I would respond that the pervasive role of fear, and its attendant exaggerations, throughout the course of American history should not be discounted; as such, the issue of fear suffuses my book.

Gerrit Dirkmaat, who nicely synthesizes a number of the book's themes for which I am grateful, raises a couple of important points that deserve comment. I will address them in reverse order to his presentation of them. Drawing upon the recent work of Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty* (2009), Dirkmaat finds "a glaring omission in the lack of Walker's treatment of equality as a core value in American history." However much I would like to agree with Dirkmaat, and Wood for that matter, I cannot. I am persuaded that what Dirkmaat accurately calls "stupefying inequities" that limited the basic rights of "women,

blacks, and Native Americans" undercut whatever bow in the direction of equality the founders had made. What I do believe is that the movements for self-determination by these and other historically marginal or excluded groups, particularly in the forms they took after about 1890, compelled Americans then to place the ideal if not the reality of equality in the pantheon of basic rights. In that way it became akin to the core values I discuss. Perhaps there is no better illustration of the limited sphere in which equality was possible than that found in the sad case of Abraham Lincoln. The Great Emancipator opposed slavery but did so "on rather cold economic grounds." He deemed blacks to be inferior to whites, which hardly suggests that he possessed a devotion to the principle of equality.¹

I am also taken with Dirkmaat's discussion of Abraham Lincoln and his wish that I had spent more time on Lincoln's actions during the Civil War in contravention of basic rights. My utilitarian response is that the book most fundamentally concerns the 1890s to the present; thus, the overview of the introduction and first chapter is necessarily brief. That said, I was remiss in not referencing Mark E. Neely's important book. Substantively, I do not believe that Lincoln's actions were indicative of a security ethos; hence, the paragraph on p. 41 is sufficient for my purposes. Even for a book that presents a sweeping theme, the presumptive linkage between how Lincoln acted and developments thirty years later is too reductionist for me. The imperial whims of William Henry Seward notwithstanding, Lincoln did not have in mind the creation of a proto-security state like the one that came into being in the 1890s. In my estimation, to argue otherwise is to minimize the contingency of Lincoln's times.

James McAllister raises a number of important issues in his critique of my book that merit response. First, my characterization of the security ethos as a dependence on military prowess as "the most reliable guarantor of prosperity" is not intended to presage an extensive discussion of military issues. Rather, it reflects what those who initiated the security ethos believed about the world around them as they acted to make the United States a great power. Their perception was hardly different from the perspective of those who earlier had determined that security could best come from subduing the continent. Mahan, Lodge, Theodore Roosevelt, and others assumed that a strong America might well alienate the other powers of the day and, thus, the nation should be prepared to defend its interests -- with force as necessary as they saw it. In a related vein, what McAllister calls disarmament proposals in the years following the First World War are perhaps better understood as arms limitation regimes even though some contemporaries saw the accords as opportunities to promote disarmament. I would agree with McAllister that the security ethos was being contested in the early interwar years. Where we might differ is over who set the terms of the discussions; in my view, it was the advocates of a greater global American presence than had historically been the case.

McAllister also wonders about my treatment of the isolationists. The political isolationists never were strong enough in numbers or influence seriously to challenge the security ethos

¹ Garry Wills, "Lincoln's Black Mastery," *New York Review of Books*, June 11, 2009, pp. 52-55.

as it became manifested in either the 1920s through Herbert Hoover's economic internationalism or in the late 1930s as Franklin Roosevelt guided the United States toward a globalist foreign policy. And yet, the isolationists were not insignificant; they slowed the onset of FDR's globalism. They did not, however, offer the nuanced critique of a expansive foreign policy that Charles A. Beard espoused; nor did their political efforts -- indicative of a limited kind of civic virtue -- serve as a guiding principle of international affairs comparable to the ideas, for example, of the American Student Union in its less-sectarian guise or internationally-minded black Americans. Curiously, none of the reviews addresses the efforts of the individuals or groups in the 1930s, or for that matter the 1960s or 1990s, who practiced what I see as progressive civic virtue, notwithstanding harassment by the federal government, in questioning the decidedly hegemonic foreign policies pursued under the influence of security ethos.

As for squaring my regard for Roosevelt's decision to fight in 1941 with my admiration for the overall thrust of Beard's critique of FDR, I will say this: recognizing the need to respond to a surprise attack like that of Japan on Pearl Harbor or the threat that Nazi Germany posed to the United States (or responding to al-Qaeda's actions of September 11, 2001) is not the same as embracing the security ethos as reflected in the policies that followed those responses. Also, Harry S. Truman and those who influenced his foreign policy were, I believe, parochial in their view of the world they were determined to engage and lead. They believed that they could shape it in ways that would persuade others to emulate America's historical experience. That aspiration was nothing if not a globalist aspiration, and one with a powerful hegemonic dimension.²

McAllister is right about my not surveying the early Cold War. I do point to the problem of reliable threat perception given the nature of post-1945 globalism and I reference Madeleine Albright's revelation that Dean Acheson acknowledged exaggerating the Soviet threat in the early Cold War. My contention is that the way in which American leaders had long used fear to build support against possible threats is more instructive of the history of the security ethos in the late 1940s than another discussion of the origins of the Cold War.

McAllister further contends that key terms in the book are not as clearly defined as he would like them to be. Readers will have to decide for themselves the extent to which that is true. I will concede, however, that the concept "containment capitalism" could have been more fully described, though what I intended to convey is clear enough. I am satisfied with my presentation of the meaning of the key concepts "security ethos," "republican virtue," and "civic virtue."

What is missing from these three reviews of my book is consideration of the link between economic and financial matters, the security ethos, and the diminution of core values. The

² A recent inquiry into the shortcomings of this parochialism is Frank Costigliola, "After Roosevelt's Death: Dangerous Emotions, Divisive Discourses, and the Abandoned Alliance," *Diplomatic History* 34 (January 2010): 1-23.

deeply held belief that economic growth had to be global in scope in order to protect American freedom was integral to the emergence of the security ethos in the 1890s. It persisted through Wilson's internationalism and the successive grand strategies of global containment, strategic globalism, and preemptive war. As the nation's economy became increasingly securitized after 1945 through extensive engagement abroad, there were decidedly negative consequences for core values. Not to discuss this connection is to miss an opportunity to ask, as Andrew Bacevich and others have, whether America's global military presence is in the nation's best interest.³ It would seem all the more important for an informed citizenry to make this connection. At present, money is being squandered and U.S. troops are losing their lives in Afghanistan, a conceivably failed state that is ruled by America's latest security asset in the region, Hamid Karzai, who has threatened to join the Taliban unless he is given more leeway to run his country's affairs.

Many practices of the financial community affected core values as well. In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the internationalization of American banking assisted the furtherance of the security ethos despite nascent balance-of-trade and balance-of-payment troubles. By the time of the recession of 2008, global finance arguably served only its own interests. On a related matter, the commanding influence of money in American politics through lobbying by Wall Street's biggest banks and powerful corporations made an opposing public voice virtually quiescent. Banking regulation, under consideration by Congress as I write, will not curb the excessive role of money in politics. In the process, an active citizenry would not be wrong to see their protests as akin to tilting at windmills. As such, the role of civic virtue in the nation's public life will have eroded further.⁴

Gerrit Dirkmaat generously points out that President Obama's Nobel Prize acceptance address supports my thesis about the persistence of a security ethos. As if in testimony to the president's pursuit of a grand strategy of strategic globalism, it is telling that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton resisted the efforts of several NATO allies to persuade the United States to remove outdated tactical nuclear weapons from Europe.⁵ Moreover, Obama's support of FISA, the Patriot Act, and the defense by the Justice Department of some of the dubious legal practices of the Bush administration regarding prisoners in the war on terror combine to show that core values remain at risk even as many citizens still celebrate the presidency of a black American.

³ Andrew J. Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008).

⁴ Ronald Dworkin, "The Decision That Threatens Democracy," *New York Review of Books*, May 13, 2010, pp. 63-67 for an analysis of *Citizens United v. FEC*, the controversial Supreme Court case that appears to remove limits on how much corporations can spend to influence elections.

⁵ *New York Times*, April 22, 2010.

All of which brings me back to Nicéforo Urbieta, the Zapotec artist who saw his culture disappearing under the heavy hand of an oppressive Mexican state in the 1970s. Paraphrasing Urbieta, I submit that it is vital for American citizens to ask at this juncture in history whether our core values still endure, or whether they only survive as artifacts in archives and museums. James McAllister writes that my book "should provoke arguments for years to come." I thank him for that thought, but it is the government's policies that must command our attention as citizens and scholars if we are not to lose beyond recovery the essence of our national identity.

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