The United States and the Global Struggle for Democracy
Tony Smith

in America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy

Published in print: 2012 Published Online: October 2017
Item type: chapter

This book offers a historical account of American efforts “to make the world safe for democracy” and the results of these attempts in the context of their own ambitions. It also examines how American foreign policy has contributed to the increase in the number, strength, and prestige of liberal democratic governments worldwide at the end of the twentieth century. The book focuses on American liberal democratic internationalism and the United States's democratizing mission on a selected group of countries such as Japan, Germany, Iran, and the Philippines, along with the impact of this agenda on world politics as a whole. To better understand the American operational code with respect to liberal democratic internationalism, this chapter analyzes the nature of American liberal democracy and cites a historical example that reflects the character of American liberal democratic internationalism in the twentieth century: the Reconstruction after the Civil War.

Good-Bye Hegemony!
Simon Reich and Richard Ned Lebow

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Many policymakers, journalists, and scholars insist that U.S. hegemony is essential for warding off global chaos. This book argues that hegemony is a fiction propagated to support a large defense establishment, justifying American claims to world leadership, and buttressing the self-esteem of voters. It is also contrary to American interests and the global order. This book argues that hegemony should instead find expression in
agenda setting, economic custodianship, and the sponsorship of global initiatives. Today, these functions are diffused through the system, with European countries, China, and lesser powers making important contributions. In contrast, the United States has often been a source of political and economic instability. Rejecting the focus on power common to American realists and liberals, the book offers a novel analysis of influence. In the process, they differentiate influence from power and power from material resources. Their analysis shows why the United States, the greatest power the world has ever seen, is increasingly incapable of translating its power into influence. The book's analysis formulates a more realistic place for America in world affairs.

The Rise of Neo-Wilsonian Theory
Tony Smith


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This chapter addresses the rise of neo-Wilsonianism. The problem with neo-Wilsonianism is that it replaced the relatively amorphous thinking of liberal internationalism with a much “harder” ideology, one that gave its adherents a moral commitment to a more militant foreign policy based on social-science reasoning that represented a new argument in American liberal internationalism. Democratic peace theory, democratic transition theory, and the responsibility to protect in combination were a strong mixture, one with murderous consequences for the people in the Middle East and Southwest Asia as well as for American pretensions to hegemony in world politics. Neither human rights nor democratic government abroad was served by these imperialist adventures, nor was the national security of the United States in any way enhanced.

The Liberal High Tide and Educative Democracy
Leslie Butler

in Critical Americans: Victorian Intellectuals and Transatlantic Liberal Reform

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This chapter explores the liberal high tide amid the Union victory, the abolition of slavery, and the vindication of democracy. In the early years of postwar Reconstruction, an alliance of American and British intellectuals developed as they looked forward to increased liberal progress in both countries. During this period of high patriotic exultation, the Anglo-American liberals focused on the treatment of former slaves, including a shared commitment to racial “fair play” and a shared ambition of leading their respective countries through rapid programs of nationalization.

Know Thyself: What Is “Wilsonianism”?
Tony Smith
Published in print: 2018 Published Online: January 2019

This introductory chapter provides an overview of Wilsonianism, which comprises a set of ideas called American liberal internationalism. More than a century after Woodrow Wilson became president of the United States, his country is still not certain how to understand the important legacy for the country's foreign policy of the tradition that bears his name. Wilsonianism remains a living ideology whose interpretation continues either to motivate, or to serve as a cover for, a broad range of American foreign policy decisions. However, if there is no consensus on what the tradition stands for, or, worse, if there is a consensus but its claims to be part of the tradition are not borne out by the history of Wilsonianism from Wilson's day until the late 1980s, then clearly a debate is in order to provide clarity and purpose to American thinking about world affairs today.

From Theory to Practice: Neo-Wilsonianism in the White House, 2001–2017
Tony Smith
Published in print: 2018 Published Online: January 2019
This chapter examines neo-Wilsonianism in the White House, considering the Bush Doctrine—often referred to as the National Security Strategy of the United States, September 2002, or NSS-2002. In the annals of American foreign policy there had never been anything even remotely like NSS-2002, its façade of Wilsonianism covering a far more aggressive imperialist claim for American exceptionalism than Woodrow Wilson had ever espoused, which in due course threatened to destroy altogether the credentials of good stewardship for world affairs that American liberal internationalism had enjoyed from the 1940s through the 1980s. One month after NSS-2002 appeared, the Iraq Resolution passed Congress with strong majorities in both chambers. Neo-Wilsonianism, born in theory during the 1990s, entered into practice five months after this historic vote with the invasion of Iraq that started on March 20, 2003. The chapter then looks at neo-Wilsonianism during the Obama presidency.

The Fervent Embrace

Caitlin Carenen

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When Israel declared its independence in 1948, Harry Truman issued a memo recognizing the Israeli government within eleven minutes. Today, the United States and Israel continue on as partners in an at times controversial alliance—an alliance, many argue, that is powerfully influenced by the Christian Right. This book chronicles the American Christian relationship with Israel, tracing first mainline Protestant and then evangelical support for Zionism. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, American liberal Protestants argued that America had a moral humanitarian duty to support Israel. Christian anti-Semitism had helped bring about the Holocaust, they declared, and so Christians must help make amends. Moreover, a stable and democratic Israel would no doubt make the Middle East a safer place for future American interests. The book argues that it was this mainline Protestant position that laid the foundation for the current evangelical Protestant support for Israel, which is based primarily on theological grounds. Drawing on previously unexplored archival material from the Central Zionist Archives in Israel, the book tells the full story of the American Christian–Israel relationship, bringing the various "players"—American liberal Protestants, American Evangelicals, American Jews, and Israelis—together into one historical narrative.
The End of A Global Pox
Bob H. Reinhardt

By the mid-twentieth century, smallpox had vanished from North America and Europe but continued to persist throughout Africa, Asia, and South America. In 1965, the United States joined an international effort to eradicate the disease, and after fifteen years of steady progress, the effort succeeded. The book demonstrates that the fight against smallpox drew American liberals into new and complex relationships in the global Cold War, as the text narrates the history of the only cooperative international effort to successfully eliminate a disease. Unlike other works that have chronicled the fight against smallpox by offering a “biography” of the disease or employing a triumphalist narrative of a public health victory, the book examines the eradication program as a complex exercise of American power. The book draws on methods from environmental, medical, and political history to interpret the global eradication effort as an extension of U.S. technological, medical, and political power. This book demonstrates the far-reaching manifestations of American liberalism and Cold War ideology and sheds new light on the history of global public health and development.

The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass
Nicholas Buccola

Frederick Douglass, one of the most prominent figures in African-American and United States history, was born a slave, but escaped to the North and became a well-known anti-slavery activist, orator, and author. This book provides an important and original argument about the ideas that animated this reformer-statesman. Beyond his role as an abolitionist, the book argues for the importance of understanding Douglass as a political thinker who provides deep insights into the immense challenge of achieving and maintaining the liberal promise of freedom. Douglass shows us that the language of rights must be coupled with a robust understanding of social responsibility in order for liberal ideals to be realized. Truly an original American thinker, this book highlights Douglass's rightful place among the great thinkers in the American liberal tradition.
This book examines classic and contemporary Jewish and African American children's literature. Through close readings of selected titles published since 1945, the book analyzes what is at stake in portraying religious history for young people, particularly when the histories in question are traumatic ones. In the wake of the Holocaust and lynchings, of the Middle Passage and flight from Eastern Europe's pogroms, children's literature provides diverse and complicated responses to the challenge of representing difficult collective pasts. In reading the work of various prominent authors, including Maurice Sendak, Julius Lester, Jane Yolen, Sydney Taylor, and Virginia Hamilton, the book changes our understanding of North American religions. It illuminates how narratives of both suffering and nostalgia graft future citizens into ideals of American liberal democracy, and into religious communities that can be understood according to recognizable notions of reading, domestic respectability, and national sacrifice. If children are the idealized recipients of the past, what does it mean to tell tales of suffering to children, and can we imagine modes of memory that move past utopian notions of children as our future? The book asks readers to alter their worldviews about children's literature as an “innocent” enterprise, revisiting the genre in a darker and more unsettled light.

Wilson’s Wilsonianism
Tony Smith


This chapter assesses Woodrow Wilson's Wilsonianism. At the heart of the Wilsonian project—the keystone of American liberal internationalism—is the promotion of democracy worldwide for the sake of a peaceful international system and thus for American national security. Here is the essential building block of the system of Wilson's notion of “collective security,” itself the best guarantee of world peace his generation could hope to provide. Through the League of Nations, Wilson proposed that
a community dominated by democracies pledge itself to a combined military effort to preserve the international system from the threat of a devastating war, or at least to preserve the security of the democratic world. Ultimately, the enduring impact of Wilson's thought on American policy-makers makes him the most important president the United States has ever had with respect to its conduct in world affairs.

The Essais Framed for Modern Intellectual Life
Warren Boutcher

in The School of Montaigne in Early Modern Europe: Volume Two: The Reader-Writer

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The core topic of 2.6 is two modern reader-writers of Donald Frame’s American translation of the Essais (Gore Vidal and David Denby). We consider a range of related intellectual contexts for Frame’s work, a product of the culture of liberal education and of American liberal individualism: modern, pedagogical versions of ‘human philosophy’; the educational goals of elite institutions such as the École Normale Supérieure and Columbia University; the legacy of Pierre Villey’s work in twentieth-century Montaigne studies. We see how twentieth-century humanists in America and Europe called up the real person ‘Montaigne’ from behind his text and made him explain that text’s value to idealist programmes of general literary education. The chapter includes discussions of figures in the German idealist tradition such as Auerbach and Burckhardt, as well as the critic of Renaissance ‘self-fashioning’, Stephen Greenblatt, and the British critic Terence Cave.