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**Foreign Policy Rhetoric in the 1992 Presidential Campaign:  
Bill Clinton's Exceptionalist Jeremiad**

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**ABSTRACT**

This essay examines presidential candidate Bill Clinton's rhetoric regarding America's role in the world during the 1992 presidential campaign. Despite the fact that foreign policy was George H.W. Bush's strength during the campaign, candidate Clinton was able to develop a coherent vision for America's role in the world that he carried into his presidency. I argue he did so by fusing together the American exceptionalist missions of exemplar and intervention. In doing so, Clinton altered a tension embedded in debates over U.S. foreign policy rhetoric. To further differentiate his candidacy from President Bush, Clinton encased this discourse within a secular jeremiad that offered Clinton the opportunity to attack President Bush on the one hand, while articulating his own vision for American domestic and international affairs.

*Keywords: foreign policy rhetoric, campaign rhetoric, Bill Clinton, jeremiad, presidential rhetoric*

**Introduction**

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1994) observed in his sweeping and masterful history of international relations, *Diplomacy*, that American foreign policy and its accompanying rhetoric has always had at its heart a tension between those who would argue that "America serves its values best by perfecting democracy at home, thereby acting as a beacon for the rest of mankind" with those that maintain "America's values impose on it an obligation to crusade for them around the world" (p. 17). These two divergent approaches to U.S. foreign policy—known as the mission of exemplar and mission of intervention—flow from a similar belief structure in America's exceptionalism (see Edwards, 2008; McCartney, 2006; McCrisken, 2003; McDougall, 1997; Merk, 1995). The tension Kissinger noted stems from U.S. foreign policy makers largely diverging and debating on how the United States should *enact* its status as an exceptional nation. The tension between these two approaches is particularly evident during crises in international affairs where the United States actively debates what its true role in the world should be. This tension can be readily found in debates over the Mexican War, the Annexation of the Philippines, the League of Nations Debate, and the post-World War II debate.

After the end of the Cold War this tension was also readily apparent. Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles (2002) demonstrated the 1990s were a time of great anxiety both nationally and internationally because of the constant flux and transformation of the international environment. Historian Stanley Hoffman (1989) noted the end of the Cold War juncture meant that the United States had to “rethink its role in the world, just as it was forced to do by the cataclysmic changes that followed the end of the Second World War” (p. 84). H.W. Brands (1998a) suggested there was a great *crisis* in American thinking about its role in the world in the 1990s because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright (2005) confirmed that argument in a talk she gave at Hofstra University. According to Secretary Albright, concern over what America’s role in the world would be was *the* fundamental foreign policy problem the Clinton administration faced during the 1992 presidential campaign and when it took office in 1993. Without the USSR, the U.S. had lost its primary mission for its foreign policy. While the United States was now the sole superpower, America’s foreign policy establishment openly debated what the post-Cold War environment would look like and how should the U.S. position itself in this environment. Clearly, the United States faced an exigency regarding its role in the world after the end of the Cold War.

This paper examines how presidential candidate Bill Clinton rhetorically navigated this rhetorical exigency during the 1992 presidential campaign. Examining Clinton’s discourse in the 1992 presidential campaign is important for several reasons. First, there is a plethora of research on campaign discourse that surrounds political ads, economic issues, debates, new media, voter participation, and other subjects. Yet the focus on American foreign policy as a campaign issue continues to be one of the least developed areas within the literature surrounding presidential campaign discourse. Understanding how Clinton discussed America’s role in the world can serve as a basis for future studies of the subject. Concomitantly, the 1992 presidential election can be considered particularly important. For one, it marks one of the great transition periods within the history of U.S. international relations. Most of these transition periods are not discussed in a comprehensive fashion. Scholarship on foreign policy rhetoric tends to focus on a specific event, not a general transition period from one era to the next (for an exception see Schonberg, 2003). This study provides an opportunity to mine what the arguments were of this transition period and how those arguments have evolved over time. Third, the 1992 presidential election was the first presidential election in the post-Cold War era, a time of great transition and anxiety for the United States regarding its foreign policy. However, there is little discussion of this important transition period when discussing the 1992 election. The focus primarily is on the economic recession, the scandals of Bill Clinton, the third-party run of Ross Perot. However, the rhetoric of candidate Clinton had a profound effect on how he would set America’s foreign policy course for the next 8 years. The issues Clinton discussed are still part of the international affairs landscape today. Finally, examining candidate Clinton’s discourse offers a clear opportunity to demonstrate how candidate Clinton fused the narratives of American exceptionalism together to justify his foreign policy positions. Traditionally, those narratives are held apart by separate camps. Clinton fused them together and altered a tension embedded within American

exceptionalism. By studying how Clinton did this in the 1992 presidential campaign can inform how future presidents may engage in similar rhetorical arguments when constructing America's role in the world.

In this essay, I argue that Clinton consistently maintained the United States must continue its role as world leader. He did so by tailoring America's exceptionalist narratives to meet the needs of America's post-Cold War environment. Specifically, Clinton fused America's exceptionalist narratives of exemplar and intervention together (I explain what those narratives are composed of in the next section). In fusing these missions together, the future president altered a traditional tension within American exceptionalism to work for him rather than against him. Furthermore, I maintain that Clinton conducted and couched this exceptionalist fusion within a secular jeremiadic logic.

To make this argument, this essay proceeds in three parts. First, I provide a brief outline on the rhetoric of American exceptionalism, particularly as it relates to U.S. foreign policy. Second, I outline the debate surrounding America's role in the world amongst pundits, policymakers, and politicians. Third, I analyze five major speeches Clinton gave during the 1992 campaign to unpack his exceptionalist logic. Those speeches were Clinton's announcement address, his three "New Covenant" speeches at Georgetown University that outlined his vision for the presidency, and his nomination acceptance address at the 1992 Democratic National Convention. I use those specific speeches because they were the major policy speeches Clinton made during the campaign outlining his vision for the presidency. Finally, I discuss some implications concerning Bill Clinton's legacy and American exceptionalism.

### **The Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism**

The arguments made about the U.S. role in the world are largely structured by its exceptionalist tradition (Edwards, 2008). According to this tradition, the United States views itself as a unique and superior state when compared with others. Alexis de Tocqueville (1830/1975) first used the term *exceptional* to describe America, but its actual roots can be found in colonial pronouncements. Most famously, Puritan leader John Winthrop declared the Massachusetts Bay Colony would be a "new Israel" and a "shining city upon a hill" that would serve as a beacon of hope for the entire world to admire and emulate (qtd in McCrisken, 2003, p. 5). Over one hundred years later, Thomas Paine stated in *Common Sense* that America had the power to "begin the world over again." This power led many to believe that through America's providential nature, it could escape the trappings of monarchy, hereditary elites, and all of the other ills that plagued Europe in the late eighteenth century.

Generally, three basic tenets make up America's belief that it is a chosen nation. The first precept is the United States is a special nation with a special destiny, which other states will want to emulate (McCrisken, 2003). This belief is rooted in colonial declarations where public officials forged the idea that God chose the United States for a special role in history. This principle is engrained in the American psyche. In foreign policy, this precept grounds the U.S.

argument that its role in the world is always performed with good intentions. Second, proponents of American exceptionalism proclaim that the United States is qualitatively different from the Old World or Europe. Corrupt European governments exploited their own people and sought to dominate peoples abroad solely to increase their power (McCrisken, 2003). The settlers of the New World escaped this political environment, travelling to a place they imagined as a virgin land where people could build upon ideas, values, and principles untried in other parts of the globe. The U.S. Constitution embodies these principles, providing America the structure it needed to develop into the greatest republican society in the world while escaping the corruption and discord found in European politics (Hofstadter, 1948). From this claim, the United States justifies that it can remain distinct from other regions. Third and finally, it is the belief of exceptionalists the United States can escape the problems that eventually plague all states. All great nations are destined to rise and fall. But America's founders argued it could escape this natural national devolution because of its unique geography, system of government, and Divine Providence. America is exceptional "not for what it is, but what it could be" (McCrisken, 2003, p. 8). Although a perfect union is never possible within the United States or in any nation, because it is always attempting to form a "more perfect union," its exceptional quality is never fully complete. This distinctiveness and superiority of the United States allows it to continually strive to better itself and the world. According to this logic, America will never experience devolution of its power. This reasoning serves as the basis for the United States to declare it knows what is best for the world.

Taken together, these basic tenets of exceptionalism are used by political leaders to declare America is "an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history" (McCrisken, 2003, p. 1). In foreign policy matters, this exceptionalist logic functions to give Americans "order to their vision of the world and defining their place in it" (Hunt, 1988, p. 15). In essence, American exceptionalism defines how the United States sees itself in the international order and American presidential candidates and presidents largely adhere to these basic premises (Campbell & Jamieson, 2009; McCartney, 2006; McEvoy-Levy, 2001). That said there have been significant differences amongst political figures as to *how* the United States should *enact* these exceptional qualities, particularly in presidential elections (i.e. McKinley and Bryan in 1896 and 1900). These differences have led to the creation of two distinct narratives of what America's role in the world should be: the mission of exemplar and the mission of intervention (see Baritz, 1985; Lipset, 1996; McCartney, 2004; Madsen, 1998; Merk, 1995).

Proponents of the mission of exemplar define America's role in the world as "standing apart from the world and serving merely as a model of social and political possibility" (McCartney, 2004, p. 401). Activities that create this exceptional model of "social and political possibility" include perfecting American institutions, increasing material prosperity, integrating diverse populations into one America, and continuing to strive for more civil rights. By doing these things, the United States demonstrates its exceptional quality and becomes a symbol for others to emulate. Proponents of this mission further argue that achieving and maintaining an exemplar status is a full time job; to do more than that (such as meddling in the affairs of other

states) would put an undue burden upon the American people. As H.W. Brands (1998b) warned, “in attempting to save the world, and probably failing, America could risk losing its democratic soul” (p. viii). For adherents of the exemplar worldview, the United States stands as a beacon of freedom, but it should not involve itself in the political or military battles of other states, lest it infect America’s body politic. Thus, the mission of exemplar acts as a constraint upon getting heavily involved with other nation-states. This narrative largely dominated the foreign policy discourse of presidents such as Washington, Jefferson, Monroe, Quincy Adams, Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover, while also serving as the foundation for isolationist arguments in the interregnum between World Wars I and II (Baritz, 1985; McCartney, 2004; McEvoy-Levy, 2001).

Around the turn of the 20th century, American ambitions in international affairs began to change. Leaders advocated a new mission—intervention—should guide U.S. decisions in foreign policy matters. Proponents of this mission, like the exemplarists, hold the United States is exceptional. But unlike these advocates they believe that America validates its exceptional nature by active engagement with the world in all spheres of political, social, economic, and cultural life (Bostdorff, 1987). These advocates included presidents such as Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and every president since Franklin Roosevelt. These interventionists argued exemplarists were naïve in thinking the United States could isolate itself from the world. The growth of American power at the turn of the twentieth century and the increasing interconnectedness of the world convinced these leaders America’s exceptionalist heritage is best demonstrated by engaging and leading humanity. According to the interventionist logic, our “special role” to play was to be a leader in helping the world progress toward greater democracy, freedom, human rights, free markets, etc., while also defending those that subscribe to similar ideals.

Both worldviews create a rhetorical tension within foreign policy in defining America’s role in the world. This tension grows during times of foreign policy transition. For example, after World War I, there was a large debate among America’s foreign policy establishment as to whether the United States should join the League of Nations. Woodrow Wilson, representing the interventionist tradition, advocated the United States be a fully vested member of the League of Nations; whereas Henry Cabot Lodge, a leader of the exemplarists, viewed full international investment with the League with skepticism (Ambrosius, 1987; Dorsey, 1999; Ikenberry, 2001). The United States failure to join the League of Nations resulted in a return to a “normal” foreign policy, but it did not end the conflict between these advocates.

The end of the Cold War brought with it another debate. Candidate Bill Clinton advanced his view of America’s role in the world through a jeremiadic logic during the 1992 presidential campaign. The American jeremiad is a narrative used by many rhetors throughout U.S. history that has America’s exceptionalism as its basis. Its origins begin with the Puritans arrival in North America (Bercovitch, 1978). As noted earlier, Puritans saw themselves as a covenant-driven people who had come to the New World to establish a new Israel that would be a “shining city upon a hill.” When it was apparent that members of the community or the community at large had committed a large violation of that contract then the community’s minister would issue a

jeremiad that would intertwine spiritual guidance and advice on public affairs (Murphy, 1990). By the time of the American Revolution, all Americans were considered part of a larger covenant, such as Thomas Paine's exhortation that Americans had the power to begin the world over again. This covenant did not exalt allegiance to God, but rather allegiance to secular documents like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, while the Founding Fathers became god-like figures who bestowed this covenant upon the American people. From that covenant flowed bountiful expectations for the American people. If the United States stayed true to its convention then its citizens would be given the opportunity to live the American dream. The American dream, another fundamental storyline in the creation of American identity, is predominantly a tale about obtaining material success for one's self, children, and future generations (Fisher, 1973; Moore & Ragsdale, 1997). According to Hanno Hardt (1998), the creation of the middle class and the ability to achieve this goal is the ultimate fulfillment of the American promise. By becoming part of the middle class and furthering its growth, Americans essentially obtain this unique station in U.S political culture. It provides a coherent identity for American citizens. The stability of the middle class offers a sense of order in a sea of disorder.

As the history of the United States progressed, there would be many political figures who would argue that America and Americans strayed from the founding covenant. Consequently, many Americans would not be able to achieve the American dream and the very identity of its citizens was in peril. As a response, particularly candidates running for the president, rhetors would offer a jeremiad (Ritter, 1980). Presidential candidates, particularly during times of transition and flux within the American political culture, take on the role of prophet and s/he builds their message around three themes (Stoda & Dionisopoulos, 2000). First, the rhetor reminds its audience of their covenant. Second, the prophet describes the deviation from that promise and the consequences created from this deviation. Finally, s/he asserts that if people would repent, reform, and return to the hallmarks of the convention then they can still fulfill their overall mission (Bercovitch, 1978; Murphy, 1990; Stoda & Dionisopoulos, 2000). From the rhetor's perspective, the need and want to return to being a "chosen people" would unite citizens to achieve traditional goals. However, because the community could never quite go back to the original covenant the jeremiad functions as a means to create a climate of anxiety so that others act to stop the calamity from recurring (Bercovitch, 1978). In doing so, the jeremiadic message offers ways to rid people of their evil and provide for a time of renewal. Ultimately, as Murphy (1990) maintained:

Modern jeremiahs assume that Americans are a chosen people with a special mission to establish a 'shining city upon a hill.' They point to the difficulties of the day as evidence that the people have failed to adhere to the values that made them special, to the great principles articulated by patriots such as Jefferson and Lincoln. The evils demonstrate the need to renew the American covenant and to restore the principles of the past so that the promised bright future can become a reality. (p. 404)

In the 1992 presidential campaign, candidate Bill Clinton presented himself as a “modern Jeremiah.”

### **To Retreat or Lead the World**

Before we can understand Bill Clinton as a foreign policy Jeremiah it is important to contextualize the post-Cold War environment and the accompanying debate over America’s role in the world. When the Soviet Union collapsed there were a number of political pundits who debated the composition of the post-Cold War setting. Famously, political scientist Francis Fukuyama was one of the first. Fukuyama was invited by his mentor, University of Chicago philosopher Allan Bloom, to give a talk in his lecture series titled the “Decline of the West” (Beinart, 2010, p. 244). In his 1989 talk, given at a NATO meeting on the French Riviera, Fukuyama (1992) boldly declared the end of the Cold War marked the “end of history.” Despite some of the doom and gloom from some of the other speakers, Fukuyama reasoned that liberal democracy and free markets had triumphed over their communist rivals. As a result, it would lead to increased global interdependence and integration, economic prosperity, and generally more freedom within the global environment. Surely there would be bumps along the way to full global integration, but the forces of democracy and free markets had won and the march toward this end of history was an inexorable logic that all states would eventually adopt.

Others involved in this debate were not as optimistic. Robert Kaplan (1994) depicted the post-Cold War arena, not as the end of history, but as the “coming anarchy.” He envisioned a future where small nation-states break down amid dysfunctional domestic and international environments. These breakdowns would create a hornet’s nest of global problems, including conflict dominated by ethnic, religious, and tribal hatreds such as the ones in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia. At the same time, small governments did not have the ability to battle terrorists, drug cartels, and other criminal organizations. These states would be virtual prisoners within their own countries, causing worldwide headaches. The global integration of technology and capital threatened to dislocate thousands, if not millions, of people who were not ready for the global economy, causing extended economic hardship for a world that was still recovering from the 1991 recession. For Kaplan, this anarchic situation threatened to tear world apart, providing innumerable problems to the great powers and international institutions.

Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) shared Kaplan’s pessimistic view of the post-Cold War world. Although he argued the world was headed toward a “clash of civilizations” between differing cultural blocs of Western, Sinic, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African communities. For Huntington, these cultural entities replaced the bipolar international order of the Cold War. The fault lines between the civilizations had been masked by Cold War battles between the United States and Soviet Union, but with the breakup of the USSR and other nation-states, the cracks in the world order were ever apparent. Because of their divergent interests, these civilizations, Huntington reasoned, would disagree, sometimes violently, with how to order the civic and social life of the international community.

Princeton political scientist G. John Ikenberry (1996) took a much more optimistic view of the post-Cold War global environment than Kagan and Huntington. For Ikenberry, there was no disintegration of the international environment after the collapse of the Soviet Union. This common assumption was fundamentally false. In reality, the world order created after World War II was alive and well. This order consisted of international organizations and institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later the World Trade Organization), who were a little older and needed reform, but were ready to serve the needs of the international community. According to Ikenberry (1996), this world order was “more robust than during the Cold War years” (p. 79). For Kaplan and Huntington, the post-Cold War environment was one of disintegration and chaos; whereas for Fukuyama and Ikenberry, it was one of growing integration and interdependence, with some bumps along the way to this inexorable logic.

Amidst this intellectual debate about the composition of the international environment, there was another layer to this debate amongst pundits and politicians about what America’s role in the world should be in this environment. Many pundits questioned and predicted the decline of American power in the post-Cold War environment. The 1990s was a time of considerable angst for many in the United States because politics at the national and international level was in constant flux, causing anxiety about America’s global leadership. Because of the economic recession and America’s inability to deal with domestic and international problems (e.g. the political chaos in Haiti, Yugoslavia, and Somalia), *Time* magazine asked in October of 1992 “is the US in an irreversible decline as the world’s premier power?” The French newspaper *Le Monde* published a twelve-part series on how America’s leadership role in the world and its subsequent power was being diminished at an increasingly rapid rate (Cameron, 2005). British historian Paul Kennedy predicted that the power of the United States would significantly start to wane in the post-Cold War arena as it ran against other powers like Japan, China, and a resurgent and unified Germany (Kennedy, 1988). This predicted decline in American power and its subsequent leadership role would inevitably jeopardize its exceptionalist mission of intervention and American exceptionalism itself.

Accordingly, this debate spilled over into American politics as to what the United States should do to deal with this supposed decline. One side of the debate featured prominent foreign policy voices calling for the United States to return to a more “normal” American foreign policy (i.e. return to its exemplar role). Amongst the most vociferous advocates of this position was former United Nations Ambassador during the Reagan Administration Jeane Kirkpatrick (1990; 1991) and the stalwart neoconservative thinker Irving Kristol. Once the Soviet Union had collapsed Kirkpatrick and Kristol, as Peter Beinart put it (2010), “let out a sigh of relief and declared that it was time for America to become, in Kirkpatrick’s words “a normal country in a normal time” (p. 295). The United States had, according to Kristol and Kirkpatrick, been on the battlefield for too long. Accordingly, America’s house was in disorder, its domestic community

was suffering, and the economy needed to be tended. America did not need to go looking for “more armies to slay” (Beinart, 2010, p. 295).

Three specific reasons oriented the specific debate amongst those who wanted to American foreign policy to return to normal. First, the United States did not have the financial resources to continue its superpower role. As Paul Kennedy (1988) attempted to demonstrate in his book, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, all great empires eventually experienced imperial overstretch and collapsed from within. Because of its battles with the Soviet Union, the United States did not have the financial wherewithal to go around the world combatting additional enemies. The Reagan administration had driven up debt and deficits too far and too fast. The end of the Cold War provided the opportunity for America to get its economic house in order and stop trying to police the global neighborhoods.

Additionally, America not only lacked financial resources to continue its interventionist mission, but it also lacked the basic will to do so. American foreign policy elites were convinced that the United States would not spend its treasure, let alone shed its blood in the absence of some great foreign menace. Instead, these exemplarists argued for disbanding NATO, getting American troops out of Asia and Europe, withdrawing from the United Nations, and cutting defense spending. As Irving Kristol (1990) put it, “there are theorists who would happily burden us with the mission of monitoring and maintaining the Middle East, Asia, etc. . . . We are just not going to be that kind of imperial power . . . The American people violently reject any such scenario” (p. 23).

Finally, America lacked the wisdom to continue its interventionist mission. The United States should not try to convert the world to its particular ideology, lest it go the way of the Soviet Union. Rather, they should let nations develop on their own. To demonstrate this point, Jeanne Kirkpatrick and Irving Kristol both applauded the Bush administration for standing by while the Soviets tried to crush Lithuania’s fledgling democracy. Furthermore, Kristol vociferously denounced the efforts of Bush administration officials to spread democracy to the Ukraine or any other Eastern European country (Beinart, 2010). The United States did not have the knowledge and wherewithal to be imposing itself into every domestic situation across the world.

The above exemplarist arguments were soon taken up by Republicans and Democrats within the 1992 presidential election. For example, Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan largely echoed Kirkpatrick and Kristol’s points of view. Buchanan argued the United States had won the Cold War and now it was time to come home. The U.S. should get out of the United Nations and NATO, remove its troops from foreign countries, and disentangle itself from the world. Buchanan’s ideas were also reflected by some Democratic presidential candidates such as Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder and Iowa Senator Tom Harkin who accused the Bush administration of spending too much time on foreign affairs and ignoring the domestic arena. It was time, as Kirkpatrick maintained, for the United States to come home and tend to its own household first and deal with any international problems a distant second (Ornstein, 1992).

On the other side of this debate, there were those who argued that the United States must maintain its traditional leadership role that it had held since the end of World War II. One of the

largest advocates of said position was columnist Charles Krauthammer. While Jeanne Kirkpatrick wanted to come home, Krauthammer wanted to stay on patrol. The world, according to Krauthammer, still contained a proliferation of dangers such as: rogue states (i.e. Saddam Hussein's Iraq), terrorists, and narco-states like Venezuela. The United States, in Krauthammer's worldview as well as others, need to be even more vigilant than ever (Beinart, 2010).

More importantly, however, was the removal of the Soviet Union provided the United States the opportunity to make and transform the world in its own image. For example, William Kristol (Irving Kristol's son) and Robert Kagan, advocated throughout the 1990s, for something they called "benevolent hegemony." For Kristol and Kagan (1996) the world had never known a greater power than the United States who did not want to readily wield that power to dominate other states. Because of this benevolence toward states—America's lack of willingness to use its power solely for its own interests—the United States must maintain its hegemonic interventionist role. Only through American intervention can the world maintain its balance and its structure. The United States being on patrol and being active was especially important in a global environment without clear guideposts. The United States provided stability without the fear that it would be an empire like previous states in history. Further integration and involvement was needed for the continued stabilization of the world as it dealt a time of immense transition, while at the same time this maintained American dominance in all areas: military, economic, political, cultural, and socially.

The interventionist rhetoric of pundits like Krauthammer, William Kristol, and Kagan, did not totally spill over into the 1992 presidential campaign. Both George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton opposed abandoning America's post-World War II leadership role. However, Clinton took a unique rhetorical position in trying to navigating this overall debate. Clinton argued through a secular jeremiad that U.S. leadership was predicated on it getting its house in order at home. The mission of intervention flowed from the mission of exemplar in Clinton's campaign and subsequent presidential rhetoric. Only through restoring the U.S. as an example for the world to emulate could it maintain and extend its interventionism.

### **Candidate Clinton's Foreign Policy Jeremiad**

During the campaign candidate Clinton educated Americans on what the true mission of America and the American government should be. Procter and Ritter Procter and Ritter (1996) call this element of the jeremiad "the promise." The promise is typically related to our past, our heritage and those who had been exemplars of that promise. Interpreting the promise in the right way allows rhetors to link their present policies with the "historic purpose of the nation" (p. 5). In his announcement address seeking the presidency, Clinton (1991a) stated that at Georgetown he had a professor "who taught me that America was the greatest country in the world because our people believed in and acted on two simple ideas: first that the future can be better than the present; and second that each of us has a personal responsibility to make it so" (para. 12). The job of government, candidate Clinton (1991a) argued, was "to create more opportunity. The

people's responsibility is to make the most of it" (para. 2). For Clinton, the "promise" of America was that its leaders continued to look forward; it continually progressed to become a "more perfect union." The job of America's leaders and government was to enact policies that would "create more opportunity" for Americans to obtain the American dream, which would perpetuate America's exceptional status.

To assure this promise would be there for future generations, Clinton (1991a) asserted his primary responsibility would be to "keep America strong and safe from foreign dangers . . . but we cannot build a safe and secure world unless we can make America strong at home. It is our ability to take care of our own at home that gives us the strength to stand up for what we believe around the world" (para. 13). To drive that point home Clinton (1991a) maintained the demise of the Soviet Union provided an important lesson for all Americans. As he put it "the historic events in recent months teach us an important lesson: National security begins at home: For the Soviet Empire never lost to us on the field of battle. Their system rotted from the inside out, from economic, political, and spiritual failure" (para. 10). Here, candidate Clinton directly linked U.S. foreign and domestic policy together. Candidate Clinton asserted our status as an exemplar nation was the basis for American global leadership abroad. If that exemplar mission was damaged in some way, then U.S. global leadership and the very nature of its exceptionalism was in danger. Furthermore, by linking the mission of exemplar with an interventionist role in world affairs Clinton rhetorically modified an inherent tension in American exceptionalism. During other foreign policy transitions in American history, exemplarists and interventionists were traditionally odds with each other (i.e. the League of Nations debate). Proponents for each side carried out fierce debates as to what America's true role in the world should be. For candidate Clinton, in a new global economy, this old debate did not apply; "national security begins at home." By implication this meant that in a post-Cold War environment, the missions of American exceptionalism must be fused together. America's role in the world, its leadership, was predicated on what occurred in the domestic sphere. To lead the world, the United States needed to "take care of its own at home." Clinton's history lesson about the "Soviet Empire" proved that maxim to be true. The Soviet Union did not lie on the dustbin of history because of battlefield losses. Rather, it "rotted from the inside out" because it did not pay attention to its domestic sphere. Consequently, the Soviets were no longer a superpower and a world leader. According to Clinton's reasoning, the same future awaited the United States if it did not enact policies that facilitated the American dream. Thus, America's true foreign policy mission was to create more opportunity for the dream to be achieved. By being strong at home, the United States could then maintain and extend the leadership role it achieved after World War II. Consequently, Clinton's rhetoric then ex

However, candidate Clinton (1991b) viewed America's foreign policy mission and its subsequent leadership role in the world as being in grave danger. As he put it:

in the last three years, we've seen the Berlin wall come down, Germany reunify, all of Eastern Europe abandon communism, a coup in the Soviet Union fall, and the Soviet Union itself disintegrate, liberating the Baltics and other republics . . . America should be celebrating today. All around the world, the American dream is ascendant . . . Yet today

we're not celebrating. Why? Because all of us fear deep down inside that even as the American dream reigns supreme abroad, it's dying here at home. We're losing jobs and wasting opportunities. (para. 8)

As a result of losing the American dream, the United States was “losing America’s leadership in the world because we’re losing the American dream right here at home.” The end of the Cold War marked a triumphant period for U.S. foreign policy. American and Western values appeared to be ascendant. As noted earlier, Francis Fukuyama (1992) famously stated the end of the Cold War marked the end of history because the great ideologies of communism and socialism had lost to the forces of free markets and democracy. America’s exportation of democracy and the “American dream” abroad was finally coming to fruition all across the globe. There were more free-market democracies in the post-Cold War than in the history of humankind. The United States was triumphant. Yet the world the United States had built was one where it could no longer maintain “its leadership in the world.” Clinton’s previous discussion of the Soviet Union and his allusions to it above suggested the United States was in the early stages of becoming the next Soviet Union, unless America woke up to the signs of its own decay. Without clear intervention, the providential covenant established over three hundred years ago would disappear. Subsequently, the United States would be merely another nation-state.

During his presidential campaign, candidate Clinton openly laid the blame for the United States’ decay with the Reagan and subsequent Bush administration, along with Republican congressional leadership. Clinton’s rhetoric outlined a myriad of problems President Bush and Republicans created, causing the United States to stray from its founding covenant. For example, Clinton (1991a) argued President Bush “devoted his time and energy to foreign concerns and ignored dire problems here at home” (para. 4). According to Clinton, Bush paid more attention to international troubles resulting from the massive post-Cold War changes than he did on trying to get the United States out of its economic recession. The president had forgotten the primary lesson of the Soviet Union’s collapse: “The Soviet Union collapsed from the inside out—from economic, political, and spiritual failure” (1991b, para. 2). These specific “economic, political, and spiritual failures began with Bush being “caught in the grip of a failed economic theory” (Clinton, 1992, para. 21). This theory—supply side economics—produced during the Reagan administration and carried over with the Bush presidency fashioned an era when America’s capitalists “have exalted private gain over public obligation, special interest over the common good, wealth and fame over work and family” (Clinton, 1992, para. 21). During the 1980s and early 1990s, the president’s economic policies “ushered in a gilded age of greed and selfishness, of irresponsibility and excess, and of neglect” (1991b, para. 14). This “gilded age” saw “S&L crooks steal billions of dollars in other people’s money. Pentagon consultants and HUD contractors stole from the taxpayers,” while “many big corporate executives raised their own salaries even when their own companies were losing money and their workers were being put into the unemployment lines” (Clinton, 1991c, para. 6). Clinton further asserted “for 12 years, the Republicans have been telling us that America’s problems aren’t their problem. They washed their hands of responsibility for the economy and education and health

care and social policy and turned it over to fifty states and a thousand points of light.” (1991a, p. 2). Instead of helping America’s middle class, Bush was actually harming it by raising “taxes on the people driving pickup trucks” and lowering “taxes on the people riding in limousines” (Clinton, 1992, para. 15).

As a result of President Bush’s ignoring America’s domestic problems, the United States suffered a number of different consequences. Economically, Clinton (1992) asserted, America was “falling behind . . . We have gone from first to 13<sup>th</sup> in the world in wages since Ronald Reagan and Bush have been in office” (para. 16). America’s CEOs now were “paid about 100 times as the average worker,” which was four times higher than Germany which as at “23 to 1” and Japan who was at “17 to 1” (Clinton, 1991c, para. 7). The collapse in wages had the greatest impact on America’s middle class. For Clinton, the middle class were “forgotten” during the Reagan-Bush years (Clinton, 1991c, para. 7). During the Bush administration, “middle class people are spending more hours on the job, spending less time with their children, bringing home a smaller paycheck to pay more for health care and housing and education. Our streets are meaner, our families are broken, our health care is the costliest in the world and we get less for it” (1991c, para. 10). Because of President Reagan and Bush’s “gilded age” economic policies, candidate Clinton (1991c), argued “the very fiber of our nation is breaking down: Families are coming apart, kids are dropping out of school, drugs, and crime dominate our streets (para. 10).” Even in U.S. foreign affairs, supposedly President Bush’s strength and expertise, American leadership suffered. Because of “the longest economic slump since World War II . . . elements in both parties now want America to respond to the collapse of communism and a crippling recession at home by retreating from the world” (Clinton, 1991d, para. 3). Clinton (1991a) pointed out that America’s global leadership was so imperiled that the “Japanese prime minister actually said he felt sympathy for the United States” (para. 14). Ultimately, President Bush provided “no national vision, no national partnership, no national leadership” that would restore the United States and the American dream for millions of Americans (Clinton, 1991a, para. 5).

In the above passages, Clinton analogized the Reagan and Bush years of the 1980s and 1990s to America of the 1880s and the 1890s. Historical analogies are often imperfect vehicles for making judgments about the present from the past. However, rhetors consistently use historical analogies to facilitate judgment about present situations. They evoke perceived lessons of past experience that can legitimize certain policy options and delegitimize others (Edwards, 2007; Paris, 2002). Clinton’s contextual use of the gilded age analogy certainly suggested his attempts to delegitimize Reagan-Bush economic policy. The “Gilded Age,” a period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly the 1880s and 1890s, signaled the rise of the modern American industrial economy. The American economy expanded more rapidly than at any other time in U.S. history. Industrial production rose faster than any other nation. The United States began to challenge great powers, like Great Britain, for global economic supremacy. Moreover, it also marked the rise of the great capitalists of American industry. Men like Cornelius Vanderbilt, John Rockefeller, Andrew Mellon, Andrew Carnegie, and J.P. Morgan became extremely wealthy and demonstrated that opulence. However, there were immense

social inequities that came with the Gilded Age. The expansion of the economy and the subsequent wealth was done without safeguards for the American worker. Extreme wealth for men like Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Mellon, and Morgan was obtained on the backs of American labor. Unions were busted; worker protests were violently put down. Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie, and the like grew extremely wealthy, while laborers and farmers grew poorer. American presidents offered little in the way of legislation to curb the excesses of American industry (Edwards, 2005; Hopkins, 1940). For Clinton, the 1980s and the 1990s, were America's new "gilded age." The modern industrial economy was replaced by supply-side economics. "S&L crooks," "Pentagon and HUD contractors," and "corporate executives" replaced the greater robber-barons of Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, and Morgan. By implication President Reagan and President Bush were akin to the do-nothing presidencies for American workers of the 1880s and 1890s. The consequences of Reagan and Bush's Gilded Age were certainly not the violence that broke out between American workers and corporations during the 1880s and 1890s, but they were just as dire. The Reagan-Bush Gilded Age pushed down wages for middle-class families, while the gap between the average worker and corporate executives rose. Middle-class families worked longer hours for less pay and less time spent with their families. They spent more on housing, education, and health care, while receiving less of it, than at any time in American history. Under the Reagan-Bush Gilded Age, the American middle class was being squeezed from all sides. Obtaining and maintaining middle-class status proved to be elusive than ever. By analogizing the Reagan-Bush years with the Gilded Age, Clinton attempted to delegitimize Bush's economic policy; further suggesting those presidential policies were destroying the American dream and subsequently American exceptionalism. Part of the American covenant is the ability of every American to be given the opportunity to achieve the American dream. Obtaining, maintaining, and expanding middle class status is a barometer of the health of that narrative. For Clinton, the Reagan-Bush years narrowed, not expanded that dream for millions of Americans. As a result, if the United States could not maintain and expand its middle class then the United States would lose its status as an example for other nations to emulate, endangering its core identity as a chosen nation.

Moreover, the Reagan-Bush gilded age analogy implied America's role as a world leader was in peril. Recall, Clinton argued U.S. global leadership flowed from "our ability to take care of our own at home that gives us the strength to stand up for what we believe around the world." President Bush's inability to "take care of our own at home" negatively impacted the United States' ability to lead on international issues. America's economic struggles had grown so bad that the Japanese prime minister felt "sympathy" for the United States and elements from the Democratic and Republican parties wanted the United States to "retreat from the world." The Reagan-Bush years led America away from its founding covenant, which put its foreign policy leadership in danger. Ultimately, Clinton's rhetoric cast a negative light on the Reagan-Bush era, setting the stage for a resetting and restoring of the American covenant, which would then strengthen its leadership abroad.

While the gilded age produced a number of economic inequities within the United States, it also ushered in movements to offer a different vision for American significantly reform its economic, social, and spiritual covenant. American workers began to demand better wages, shorter hours, and better working conditions. The women's suffrage movement accelerated as more women entered the workforce and demanded to have their voice heard at the ballot box. The Third Great Awakening also accelerated during the Gilded Age. Organizations such as the YMCA and the Salvation Army were all established to help combat societal ills created by the rapid expansion of American industry (Edwards, 2005; Hopkins, 1940). Although there was no great social movement that appeared when Clinton ran for the presidency in 1992, candidate Clinton offered himself as a modern Jeremiah who could reset and restore America's covenant, which would reify American exceptionalism and its global leadership.

Clinton's prophetic vision came through his campaign theme of a "New Covenant." Candidate Clinton wanted to re-establish the social contract between the American government and its citizens through shared responsibility, opportunity, and community. The campaign theme of "New Covenant" took on a whole host of different principles that Clinton assured the American people would restore its promise. One of the fundamental tenets Clinton advanced was to remove the false choice policymakers created in discussing domestic and international policy. Clinton asserted U.S. global leadership flowed from its ability to take care of its own house at home. Only when that was finished could the United States build, broaden, maintain, and defend the rest of the houses in America's global neighborhood. Clinton (1991d) took that idea one step further in his "New Covenant on American Security" speech at Georgetown. In that address, Clinton emphatically asserted "foreign and domestic policy are inseparable in today's world. If we're not strong at home, we can't lead the world we've done so much to make. And if withdraw from the world, it will hurt us economically at home" (para. 2). Clinton made two rhetorical moves in this short passage. Aside from America's role in the world flowing from one sphere to the next, his linkage of domestic and foreign policy was part of his larger campaign's emphasis on renewing U.S. competition in an ever-broadening global economy. During his campaign and his presidency, Clinton continually asserted globalization was the dominant paradigm in global affairs (Edwards, 2008). Accordingly, the United States cannot separate its domestic sphere from the international. The U.S. must maintain both for the American economy to grow, create a broader form of prosperity for all, and expand the middle class, which would give greater access to the American Dream at home and also abroad. By recognizing this new reality of the global economy, Americans better prepare themselves to compete on a much larger scale, deal with the problems that come from that competition, but harness the larger benefits that can be created with new markets and new customers. This new reality provides a means for the United States to extend its exemplar status as the economic envy of the world, which then warrants it to maintain its global leadership.

Additionally, linking the two policy spheres sent a message to American isolationists that their desire to retreat from the world was not an option in a new global economy. Recall, our description of the debate that broke out about what America's role in the world should be in a

post-Cold War world. Politicians on both the left and the right argued the United States had won the Cold War and should begin to retrench, going back to a more “normal” foreign policy that was free of foreign entanglements. For Clinton, this traditionalist, non-interventionist, neo-isolationist position was untenable in this new era of globalization. It marked a position of regression, not progression and directly imperiled America’s role as world leader, a role it had held for well over forty years. By declaring domestic and foreign policy were linked, he offered a progression in thinking about American politics and a vision for how the United States would conduct themselves in this new global environment. The United States would not historically regress. Rather, under a Clinton presidency they would extend their leadership position further that offered to restore America’s economy, the American Dream, and the American covenant.

In arguing for removing the tension between domestic and foreign policy, the president made specific proposals that directly tied into his new vision of the global economy to renewing America’s exemplar status at home and reassert its leadership in the world. Clinton’s “New Covenant” offered proposals for cutting taxes, cutting waste in the federal government, reinventing domestic programs like welfare and social security, and spending more to educate American citizens. As part of this new covenant in foreign policy, Clinton pledged to restructure American military forces to meet the new threats of a post-Cold War world (i.e. nuclear proliferation, ethnic and religious conflict, and environmental threats) and continue to promote democracy abroad. But it was his discussion of economics in American foreign policy that was the centerpiece of his plan to renew America, its leadership abroad, and its basic exceptionalism nature. Clinton (1991d) explained that one of the most important; if not the most important, major challenge facing a new president was to “help lead the world in a new era of global growth” (para. 4). In the 1990s, Clinton (1991d) continued, “international economics is essential and that success in the global economy must be at the core of national security in the 1990s” (para. 6). America’s “economic strength must become a central defining element of our national security policy. We must organize to compete and win in the global economy.” In these short sentences, Clinton brought a new vision to American national security. Up until the post-Cold War era, national security was defined in fairly narrow terms by focusing on weapons systems (i.e. nuclear weapons), military structures, and the strength of the Soviet Union’s military might. International economics were largely left out of a calculus when considering America’s foreign policy strength. For Clinton, this narrow focus was a product of the Cold War, not a post-Cold War era. In an era of globalization where everything and everyone is connected more than ever, economics must be become a part, if not the center, of a nation’s economic policy. To make this national security expansion required someone with a vision that went beyond the immediate campaign. As candidate Clinton (1991c) put it “we need a President, a public and a policy that are not caught in the wars of the past—not World War II, not Vietnam, not the Cold War. What we need to elect in 1992 is not the last President of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the first President of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (para. 21). In expanding America’s thinking about national security, Clinton fashioned himself as “the first President of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” His rhetoric suggested he was a modern Jeremiah who had the competency to renew American strength at home and abroad.

Electing Clinton would arrest the United States straying from its covenant and provide the basis for its exceptionalism to be restored and expanded into a new era.

For Clinton (1991d), the benefits of expanding American national security were boundless. As he put it, “free trade means more jobs at home. Every \$1 billion in U.S. exports generates 20-30,000 more jobs” (para. 5). But the perils of not recognizing this fact were too great to ignore. “Without growth abroad, our own economy cannot survive. Without global growth, healthy international competition turns all too readily to economic warfare. Without growth and economic progress, there can be not true economic justice among or within nations” (Clinton, 1991d, para. 7). For Clinton, free trade and an expansion of global growth was *the* linchpin for America’s economic and foreign policy future. Against the backdrop of an accelerating era of globalization, the United States had no choice but to compete and expand its economy with the world. The consequences of American inaction were dire. Clinton predicted the U.S. economy could not survive without some expansion of “growth abroad.” Expanding free trade led to thousands, if not millions, more jobs. These jobs would certainly increase U.S. prosperity, expand the middle class, help to renew the American dream, and become the basis for restoring America’s status as an exemplar nation. More importantly, Clinton viewed global growth as *the* linchpin for ensuring the world continued to progress toward a brighter future in the twenty-first century. The reasoning of Clinton’s rhetoric works something like this: through global growth the American dream would be restored at home, but expanded to more states. It would continue its ascension. More economic prosperity meant a growing global middle class. That global middle class offered more internal stability among and within nations. That stability created a safer global environment in which all nation-states could operate. Consequently, the global economy must expand to serve both the United States and the international community. By contrast no global growth meant “economic warfare” and “economic justice” would wither “among and within nations.” Considering the United States was the world’s sole remaining superpower and its de facto leader, as America’s voice, the president could not allow the world to slip into economic chaos. Such a result would destroy U.S. leadership abroad and its providential character. Ultimately, renewing America’s community and economy, particularly through free trade and global economic growth, was candidate Clinton’s vision for restoring the American covenant. That restoration provided the rhetorical groundwork to maintain America’s leadership abroad, while serving as a counterweight to the growing chorus of neo-isolationist voices clamoring for the United States to retrench and withdraw from the world. Clinton’s jeremiad suggested he would be the president to revamp the U.S. as an example for the world to emulate and expand its leadership abroad. Thus, assuring that American exceptionalism continued into the twenty-first century.

## Conclusions

Presidential candidate Bill Clinton crafted his understanding of America’s role in the world in unique and subtle ways. Unlike many of his political opponents, Clinton, like President

Bush, advocated that the United States must maintain and extend its leadership role. However, unlike President Bush, Clinton asserted America's leadership must begin at home with the power of its example. The presidential candidate argued, couched in a jeremiadic reasoning, President Bush and the Republicans had failed the American people with their economic philosophy; a philosophy that brought ruin to America's middle class, which in turn endangered America's mission as an exemplar nation for other states to model. The key to restoring U.S. credibility in the world was for it to revitalize and stabilize its own economy. That stabilization would come through a greater emphasis on education, free trade, and integration with the global economy. Accordingly, the United States' economy would once again become the engine of global economic growth. That growth would restore its exemplar mission, which would become grounds for U.S. advocacy that it could more easily take on the burdens of its post-World War II role as world leader. By using an exceptionalist jeremiad, Clinton modified American exceptionalism in an important way. Candidate Clinton intertwined the exemplar and interventionist missions together, removing an inherent tension that had been and is still embedded for some, since the early days of the founding era. Clinton's discourse provides interesting implications and legacies for American foreign policy argument.

First, candidate Clinton's discourse breaks down the fundamental divide between foreign and domestic issues. Aaron Wildavsky (1966) argued there are "two presidencies," one in foreign affairs and one in domestic. Typically, policy matters that presidents talk about can be divided into those two spheres. However, Clinton argued this type of thinking is fundamentally out of date. There is no foreign policy or domestic issues in a global economy. Instead, there are only "intermestic" issues that deal with both spheres of presidential politics (Barilleaux, 1985). Certainly, past presidents had discussed how some policies affected both the domestic and foreign policy spheres, but Clinton was really the first president to talk about how all issues can be considered to be intermestic in some way. Clinton's campaign discourse broke new ground on how to talk about specific issues and laid the groundwork for future presidents to discuss those issues in similar ways.

Additionally, Clinton's fusion of exceptionalist narratives provides another important implication. As we discussed earlier, traditionally exceptionalists occupy one of two camps: exemplar or interventionist. After World War II, those camps began to be fused together. For example, President Truman (1947) argued in his famous Truman Doctrine speech the United States must intervene in Greece and Turkey to stem the tide of communist aggression, but at the same time these actions would make us safer at home. Clinton became the first president to reverse that logic. In order to maintain our status as a world superpower we must take care of our own economic house first and then that gives us a warrant to maintain and extend our leadership abroad. Thus, Clinton not only removed a fundamental tension within the rhetoric of exceptionalism, but started a new trend by reversing the old Cold War exceptionalist logic. Presidents Bush and Obama have continued this exceptionalist fusion except that Bush reversed Clinton's logic in light of September 11<sup>th</sup> and President Obama returned to Clinton's initial rhetorical fusion (Edwards, 2008; Edwards, 2014). This might indicate that in a post-Cold War

era presidents of different political parties emphasize different arguments when articulating America's role in the world. It is still too early to tell, but the trends indicate a subtle, but fundamental difference between Republican and Democratic presidential foreign policy rhetoric. More studies must be done to determine if this is the case.

Finally, Clinton's blending of America's exceptionalist narratives makes it extremely difficult for any mainstream political figure to argue that the United States can give up its global leadership role. By arguing that the basis for U.S. global leadership and involvement was to be a great example for the world, plus his argument that all political issues have domestic and foreign policy aspects to them, Clinton made it extremely difficult for his opponents to argue the United States needed to return to its "normal" foreign policy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Future presidential candidates have continued Clinton's rhetorical groundwork making it extremely difficult for a presidential candidate to make an effective case the United States needs to profoundly alter its foreign policy. Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul attempted to do so in 2008 and 2012, but his following was quite small and his foreign policy arguments gained little traction in America's political environment. That does not mean the United States might not curtail some of its leadership efforts abroad, but opponents of American intervention may never gain much traction again. Thus, candidate Clinton's campaign discourse planted the seeds of a rhetorical legacy that continues to influence U.S. foreign policy today.

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