Selling Progress: Benevolent Hegemony and the Remaking of the Latin American Ideological Structure

Hiroaki Ataka and Jose Caballero
University of Warwick, UK

“The ‘stars and the stripes’ have appropriated my flag
our freedom is nothing more than a prostitute,
if the external debt has taken away our ‘splendour’
the hell with geography, borders are gone”

Ricardo Arjona, Si el Norte fuera el Sur

The ongoing debate about the existence of a US Empire has caused heated discussions and emotional reactions. Scholars argue that “it is now the time to rescue the [empire] idea and put it back where it belongs: at the centre of the discussion.”

The concept of empire has been implicitly incorporated in the literature by uncovering the relationship between culture and hegemony. While some studies have acknowledged the existence of an empire in the form of “cultural imperialism,” defined as the spread of (capitalist) modernity of the West and in particular of the United States; others, deny the mere existence of the idea by “redressing” it in terms of a benevolent system that “is an American-led open-democratic political order that has no name or historical antecedent.” Yet, after 9/11 the focus has shifted towards “high politics” emphasising the muscular unilateralism of the Bush Administration. Such focus overlooks the “social basis of hegemony.” This is a serious shortcoming, since the cultural/ideational dimensions are an important pillar of US hegemony. To understand the full nature of the American empire, therefore, the intersection between the political, economic and the cultural sources of power needs to be examined.

One pathway into unravelling this complex interchange is to focus on the representation of the United States as a “benevolent hegemony.” Arguably the world order established by the US reflects its “benevolent” characteristics; a benevolent
hegemony that is good for humanity. Within this order, the US delimits its own power through an “unprecedented creation of new intergovernmental institutions.” This notion of benevolent power is rooted in the so-called American exceptionalism. The latter indicates that the US is “an extraordinary nation with a special role to play in human history; not only unique but also superior among nations.” This superiority belief leads to the conclusion that the US’ actions are benevolent because they are not motivated merely by material but by “…a dedication to principles of liberty and freedom for all humankind…” from this righteousness, it follows that “it is the duty of the United States to help the rest of the world follow the example of the chosen people.” As, a well-known US national security document establishes, the power of the US is “[s]ustained by faith in the principles of liberty, and the value of a free society, this position comes with unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunity…” to spread those principles and values.

For this paper, two points are important. First is the general orientation of the United States to spread its values and ideas abroad. The firm belief in the superiority of its ideals along with confidence in its basic benevolence has led the US to take on missionary tendencies to “enlighten” others. Americans perceive that their values and ideas are “universally applicable.” The second and more important point is how this diffusion of American values and ideas remake the political, economic and cultural structure of the recipient society, facilitating its inclusion into the world order established by her. Here the relationship between culture and imperialism is fundamental. Said argues that what we understand as imperialism (e.g. the British in India) is no longer a valid concept. However, “imperialism lingers where it often has been in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as its specific political, ideological, economic and social practices.” For Said, imperialism depends on “… impressive cultural formations, that include ideas that certain people and certain territories require and beseech domination.”

In this context, benevolent hegemony is a discursive space in which different cultures meet; a site where discursive struggles takes place. An excellent case in highlighting this discursive struggle and remaking is the case of Latin America and how it was incorporated into the US led postwar. While Latin America has certainly been exposed to US power historically, we argue that it was the internalisation of US
values and ideas that ultimately brought them to accept the hierarchical relationship through a new identity constructed around the neoliberal model. In particular, we focus on the Alliance for progress, a programme designed to accomplish rapid economic progress, strengthen representative democracy and to spawn greater social justice in the hemisphere as a key moment of the remaking and incorporation of Latin America into the US hegemonic order. Through a critical reading of benevolent hegemony and by tracing the discursive struggles, therefore, we aim to uncover the far-reaching nature of US power.

**Benevolent Hegemony as Discursive Space**

Exploration into the notion of benevolent hegemony must begin with the examination on the conceptualisation of hegemony. As one of the central concepts in International Relations and International Political Economy, hegemony can be defined as the order in which a “single powerful state controls or dominates the lesser states in the [international] system.” Its conceptual development has been closely linked to the theory of hegemonic stability, which proposes that an open and liberal world economy requires the existence of a hegemonic or dominant power. Thus, the theory links stability of world order to the hegemon’s rise and fall. For example, it argues that destabilisation of the international economy in the 1970s was a consequence of the decline in US power.

In his critique of the hegemonic stability theory, Snidal distinguishes two variants of hegemony based on their distributional implications. One type is the benevolent hegemony, or the benevolent leadership model. Here, the hegemon is the sole provider of public goods (e.g. institutional arrangements) that facilitates a stable international order. The hegemon has an incentive to provide public goods because it is the dominant beneficiary of this order; its primary concern is the “free-riding” of other states (not providing public goods but “exploiting” the benefits). The second hegemony type is coercive hegemony, or the coercive leadership model. On this account the hegemon is the provider of public goods but forces other states to contribute to the costs. It is assumed that the hegemon uses its superiority to structure the international system to its own advantage. The emphasis is on military issues, and
it is argued that the (military) dominance of the hegemonic state generates interest in providing a generally beneficial order so as to lower the cost of maintaining the system. In essence, Snidal questions the general application of the hegemonic stability theory, and in doing so introduces variations in the “publicness” of the world order, clarifying the circumstances in which hegemony will be exploitative and conditions under which the hegemon will be constrained to operate in the more general interest.20 In this formulation, therefore, benevolent hegemony refers to the stable international order underpinned by a hegemon who provides essential public goods for the general interest of the international society. This order is associated with the US hegemony.21

Such understanding of the United States as a benevolent hegemon is further advanced by Ikenberry, who examines various moments of postwar settlements in order to explore how international orders are created. Responding to the question, what do states that win wars do with their newfound power and how do they use it to build order, Ikenberry argues that “leading states have increasingly used institutions after wars to ‘lock in’ a favorable postwar situation and to establish sufficient ‘strategic restraint’ on their own power as to gain the acquiescence of weaker and secondary states.”22 Throughout history “postwar settlements have moved in the direction of an institutionalized order, and have begun to take on constitutional characteristics”; this has been most evident in the 1945 postwar order.23 The order reflect the nature of the US domestic system one that provides “…transparency and ‘voice opportunities’—and the extensive use of binding institutions served to limit the returns to power and provide assurances to states within the order that they would not be dominated or abandoned;” such structure has led to a “distinctive—multilateral, reciprocal, legitimate, and highly institutionalized” order.24 This “constitutional order” is a political system based on “agreed-upon legal and political institutions that operate to allocate rights and limit the exercise of power…. by making it less consequential. The stakes in political struggle are reduced by the creation of institutionalized processes of participation and decision making that specify rules, rights, and limits on power holders”.25 Thus, we see a convergence in the meaning of benevolent hegemony—between Snidal’s conception of a public goods provider and the idea of the US as a liberal beacon, a missionary of democracy and freedom. The implication is that the current order reflects a glorious achievement in the historical development of the international order.26
However attractive the idea may be, representation of the US as a benevolent hegemon and the conceptualisation of the postwar order established by her as “constitutional” is problematic. First, these notions offer an uncritical appraisal of constitutionalism and the rule of law. The asymmetrical implications of international institutions, a set of shared rules in the international arena, among “economically developed” and “developing” countries and how it serves the interest of the hegemon is abound. For instance, there is a dangerous relationship between the US and international “rule-making.” For Barnett, the US’ “imperial creed” is anchored on a law-making theory which leads the US’ foreign policy to spawn a “world increasingly subject to the rule of law;” as the hegemon the US must “‘organize the peace’ [and] impose the ‘international interest’ by setting the ground rules for economic development and military deployment across the planet.” Thus, as an exceptionally blessed hegemon destined to be “the bearer of the Law,” the US “stands above the international system, not within it. Supreme among nations…”. This perspective gives the US benign face a different angle: an intolerant guardian of world order.

Second, and more problematic, is that these notions assume the postwar order to be legitimate, while ignoring why this legitimacy is accepted and adopted globally. The key to examining this issue lies in the operation of power within the discursive space. Legitimacy of US hegemony is accepted because it is projected in such a way that the hierarchical relationship between other states and the US becomes “natural and acceptable.” It is here that the notion of United States as a benevolent hegemon and its missionary tendencies to spread its values and ideas abroad becomes important. In this sense, it may be useful to think of benevolent hegemony as a discursive space in which different cultures meet inter-subjectively; that is, using Pratt’s term, a “contact zone.” This zone enables the dominant state to “force” into consent other states by embedding in their discourse its cultural and ideational power; for example, it enables the hegemon to assign meanings to development thereby defining other countries’ goals and objectives, and simultaneously, advancing its own interests; and more importantly, legitimising its development model in the “eyes” of others.

The US mechanisms to “force” others into consent are brought to the fore by the Gramscian formulation of hegemony. This conceptualisation establishes “the social
basis of hegemony” from which hegemony is constructed as a “social artefact;” one that is, contestable and irreducible to the “preponderance of material resources.” This approach expands the conventional understanding of hegemony as dominance based on material power to include aspects of legitimacy, and invites us to focus on the role of culture and discourse in underpinning hegemony. It highlights the coercion exercised by the hegemon and the consent of other states. While this consent ultimately comes from the prestige of the hegemon, it is also underpinned by the various strategies of persuasion that sustains its hegemony. In short, it is not only by its military and economic supremacy as the basis of its hegemony that the US’ role and place in the world order is secured but also by the diffusion of its values and ideas.

Culture and Hegemony

Understanding the far-reaching nature of US hegemony will not be complete without an investigation into the role of its diffused values and ideas in underpinning the order. A useful starting point into this intricate issue of culture and hegemony is offered by Nye’s “soft power” concept, defined as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments… When [the US] policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, [its] soft power is enhanced.” Soft power rests primarily on the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political values and policies. The US benefits massively from both its high and popular culture, through its intake of international students for higher education, academic and scientific exchanges, popular entertainment, sport and music; from domestic values and cultures; and from its foreign policy substance and style such as being a provider of public goods, and promoter of broadly shared values such as democracy and human rights. Furthermore, the worldwide adoption of “Americanized cultural goods and practices” involves the dissemination of the “U.S.-style development” which heavily emphasises “progress in the form of unlimited, quantitative growth and economic-technological expansion.” This trend has led to the emergence of the “McWorld” which benefits the US through the global spread of the “culture of consumerism.”

While soft power offers a useful foothold for our understanding of culture and hegemony, it nonetheless has limitations. First, the basic separation between military,
economic and soft or cultural power is problematic. While Nye does make the effort to connect soft and hard power (i.e. military and economic power), they are conceptualised as having a separate dynamism. However, the most serious shortcoming of soft power is that it misses the operation of power within the realm of culture, and the asymmetry between different cultures and how this in turn affects the realm of political economy. According to Nye, “When a country’s culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcome because of the relationships of attraction and duties that it creates.” Yet, he overlooks how specific values and ideas become and are kept universal; how cultural attractiveness translates into state power. As we have seen in the previous section, diffusion of culture is tightly interwoven with the operation of hegemony, and therefore the force of attraction does not work in a power vacuum. It is this “complicity” between US culture and hegemony that needs to be examined in order to understand the nature of the postwar order.

Said sheds light onto this interwoven nature by demonstrating how cultural practices such as literature function to maintain imperialism. The latter is defined as the “practice, the theory, and the attitude of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory;” imperialism is sustained and even advanced by culture. Thus, for Said, “colonial discourse” extensively reorganises society in such a way that transmutes “popular ways of thinking and feeling, of people’s conceptions of themselves, their moral standard and their history.” From this perspective it follows that hegemonic discourse remakes the “weaker” states popular consciousness to such extent that the hegemon’s “rule” is willingly accepted.

Contrary to other approaches which ultimately prioritise the material and especially military power over discursive power, hence unsatisfactory, Said places cultural practices at the centre of analysis—where power and knowledge intersect. He argues that “so influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism and opportunity, that imperialism in the United States as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of the United States culture, politics and history.” Yet, in the US there is an “astonishingly direct” link between “imperial politics and culture.” The belief about the US ‘greatness,’ has “obscured the realities
of empire, while apologists insist on American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom.” Here, the connection between imperial politics and culture within the benevolent hegemony discourse is clear. Building on this insight, we will trace the discursive practices embedded in the representation of the US as a benevolent hegemon and how the diffusion of its values and ideas remake other states’ political, economic and cultural structure, thus facilitating their inclusion into the world order.

The construction and sustainability of the American-led constitutional order based on benevolent hegemony required the hauling of countries that deviated ideationally; this process is evident in the Latin American context. The US and Latin America diverge greatly in the ideational sphere. For example, the US sees education as a mechanism that facilitates social mobility. Conversely, in Latin America the educational system has traditionally been used as an instrument to perpetuate social inequality, and thus, the status quo.

Notwithstanding such differences in the realm of ideas, by the 1980s and 1990s Washington’s triumph in the region was hailed: Latin American countries were now open-market economies committed to democratic values. However, as Garrenton argues, the process did not comprise merely market-economics shifts. It was a transformation of the “sociopolitical matrix” in which “the state, the system of representation, and social actors” interplay. The process resulted in a comprehensive “rupture and tentative reorientation” of the Latin American development model thereby redefining the state’s role. This rupture embodied an ideological dimension which created a space for the emergence of a paradigmatic market. We contend that a remaking of the Latin American ideational realm was essential for such rupture, and it is to the exploration of this remaking that we now turn.

The Alliance for Progress and the Ideological Remaking of Latin America

In the preceding section, we argued that benevolent hegemony is a discursive practice in which different cultures meet inter-subjectively; from this interaction, the current world order emerged. However, at times, this “contact zone” becomes conflictive as different cultural and ideational values come face to face. Nevertheless, hegemonic benevolence enables the dominant power to “force” others to internalise its values by
minimising the options they can pursue. The internalisation process leads the recipient countries to learn to see themselves, as a Chilean philosopher puts it, through the hegemon’s perspective. By doing so, the hegemon gains the consent of others, and is able to define their goals and objectives; at the same time that protects and advances its interests. Furthermore, once internalised by political and social elites, the hegemonic ideational and cultural values are socialised or disseminated through out the non-hegemonic states’ societies. Thus, for the mass of the population in these countries the goal becomes, as Galeano indicates, “to be like them;” as long as they follow the hegemonic values without complains, non-hegemonic states will be “rich, cultivated and happy.”

An excellent case of benevolent hegemony as a discursive practice is that of President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress between the United States and Latin America. By 1960, the Cuban revolution had led the United States and Latin America to recognise that it was possible for the social conditions through out the region to escalate into revolutionary struggle. The US saw imperative to protect its interests (e.g. market access, raw materials and investments) in the region. This realisation led the United States to adapt the principles embedded in the Marshall Plan to the Latin American Context. In 1961, the Alliance was designed as a ten year plan aimed at achieving democratic progress in the region. Explicitly, it proposed to combat illiteracy, diseases, unfair land distribution and outdated tax structures; at the same time, it was to improve productivity, land usage and access to education. Implicitly, the Alliance was to establish a capitalist society under a system of political democracy in which Latin Americans were to share the US’ “life style, consumer patterns,” and more importantly, its “values.”

Before proceeding, however, we must address a caveat. There is evidence that the Alliance incorporated ideas emanating from Latin American. Indeed, as Wiarda indicates, the elements of the Alliance were anticipated in an aid programme (Operation Pan-America) originally proposed by Brazil’s President Kubitschek in 1958 and later supported by Colombia’s President Lleras Camargo. In addition, members of the Latin American Structuralist school of thought (the predecessor of Dependency theory) and of the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), particularly Raul Prebisch and Osvaldo Sunkel, actively participated in the
preparations leading to the conference of Punta del Este in which the Alliance was established. One could not deny the influence of Latin American intellectuals on the Alliance’s program. It may have been the case that there was a degree of convergence between the ideas emanating from a small epistemic community and some of the US ideational elements. Perhaps, they agreed in that social and land reforms and an increase US investment in the region were necessary for economic progress. But as we will see, they disagree on the centrality of the state in development.

That the Alliance incorporated and supported ideas (e.g. development planning by undemocratic-authoritarian states) emerging in Latin America does not mean, however, that Latin America overpowered the United States ideationally. Within the Alliance, President Kennedy was acting according to the US ideological and value system. Kirkpatrick indicates that authoritarian states can evolve into a “popular democracy” if the state is capable of meeting “societal aspirations.” Moreover, policy makers in the US believe that undemocratic regimes are the result of endogenous factors and they merely are transitional phases in the path to democracy; the latter, can be achieved with “the US help.” The Alliance aimed at providing such help. Help, however, was not simply economically; the thrust for democracy was to be rooted in the ideational sphere. For this reason (and whatever the origin of the ideas), it is clear that it was the United States, as the benevolent hegemon, that took over the Alliance discourse in order to impose its ideational power. For example, by 1963, Lleras Camargo indicated that the Alliance had become “involuntarily” the United States’ “national policy and program” toward Latin American; according to him, such a transformation was the result of the degree of responsibility that the US had assumed in order to salvage the alliance. Also, as cited previously, decades later Sunkel would admit that the Alliance imposed the US’ values on Latin America. Despite the importance of the ideational origin of the Alliance, our objective is not to trace such origin, nor to evaluate its success, but to critically assess the discursive struggle through which Latin America was hauled into the then emerging world order.

The idea of progress and the discursive struggle
Embedded in the Alliance design there was a striking contradiction. Progress is an essential component of the ideational Latin American political context. However, the notion of progress held in the United States differs significantly from that of Latin
America. In the US’ ideational sphere democracy and freedom are imperative for progress. Conversely for Latin Americans, order, and the implicit strong and controlling state, is the key to achieve progress. This conceptual divergence led the Alliance discourse to become a contact zone in which a discursive struggle took place. Within this struggle, the United States set about deconstructing the Latin American conceptualisation of progress. For this purpose, it was essential to transmit its values and ideas; and at the same time, Latin Americans had to internalise them.

A conflictive point was that of the role of government and central planning in development. Latin Americans believed that progress could be rapidly achieved through state-led industrialisation. Prebisch, for one, attempted to justify the government’s role in his programme. Hoover indicates that for Prebisch governmental economic planning was not a mean to “maintain the status quo” but it was a facilitator of the changes necessary to achieve the Alliance’s goals. The conceptual divergence with the US and the resulting struggle is hinted at by Prebisch. He indicates that “… though facing strong opposition, we, the Latin Americans, were the ones that launched the idea of the need for systematic planning as a means to act in a conscious and deliberate way upon the economic and social forces and thus expedite the achievement of the great goals of development in an orderly and progressive fashion.” Such ideas were confronted by “very strong resistance … frequently couched in intractable and dogmatic terms.” According to Prebisch, “[n]ow they [the ideas] are recognized as sound and valid and are largely embodied in the Charter of Punta del Este.” As we will see shortly, some of those ideas were discursively appropriated and modified by President Kennedy. Before proceeding, however, first it is fundamental to analyse how progress is perceived in Latin America: its origins and subsequently conceptualisation.

The significance of the idea of progress for Latin America originates in the post independence struggle between Conservatives and Liberals and in the emergence of the latter as the region’s dominant ideological force. Nineteenth Century Latin American Liberals advanced a “positivist” doctrine: the social and political spheres could be interpreted through scientific laws. Latin American positivism was rooted mainly in Comte’s ideas and arose hopes in the region for confronting its problems: “the failure of constitutional democratic forms” and the lack of economic growth,
Latin American positivists shared a strong belief in economic progress through higher levels of productivity aiming to attract foreign exchange and generate comparative advantages as the political objective. Thus, as the Latin American states emerged their construction gravitated towards this conceptualisation of progress: as they became nations they were oriented towards the achievement of progress; the construction of the nation became associated to progress itself. In this doctrine, progress became a synonym of economic development, and more importantly, order became paramount for the process. In other words, progress demanded order. Order was achieved through “a strong man or an army.” In the name of progress individual rights were to be limited and authoritarianism was to be imposed. Dictatorship as the de facto form of government became acceptable as the obsession with progress and order made it necessary.

Although Positivism faced a nationalistic countermovement during the early decades of the Twentieth Century, it generated a discourse endorsed by empirical and scientific premises which could not be disputed. Thus, the idea of progress, and all its social implications, as the ultimate goal of the state remained as the background of politics in the region. In practice, neo-positivist dictators such as Somoza in Nicaragua maintained the positivist conceptualisation of progress alive.

Theoretically, its fundamental belief in the centrality of the state as a catalyst for progress would be inherited by the aforementioned Structuralist school. Even as the region experienced profound structural reforms, Positivist progress still resonated in the literature about the region’s transformation. For example, Bresser Pereira, indicates that although the state became an obstacle to growth, previously was “a strategic agent” of development; true, “a smaller state” is fundamental, but “state intervention is not intrinsically bad.” Positivism, and its inevitable search for progress, remains as powerful today as it was over 180 years ago.

Such conceptualisation of progress came to a head-on confrontation with its counterpart in the US’ hegemonic discourse as presented in the Alliance for Progress. Up until that point, the US policy was one of intervention, sometimes overt (e.g. Nicaragua) and other times covert (e.g. Guatemala). Both types would make a come back after the Alliance was established (e.g. Dominican Republic, and later in Chile and Panama). Yet, the Alliance marked a transition in the United States’ policy
towards Latin America. The Alliance’s discourse differed from its predecessor in that it explicitly correlated economic development, social reforms and democracy. These policies challenged the prevailing Latin American binary concept of progress and order. As Michaels indicates, it was obvious that the United States possessed the economic and military power to protect its interest in Latin America and to force the region into accept the reforms proposed by the Alliance; yet the US lacked an ideology to attract the Latin America mass population to its “interests.” Therefore, it was essential to haul the Latin American political and social elites, since these controlling groups represented one of the main obstacles to the successes of the Alliance. Kennedy was aware of the necessity to impose the US values; it was imperative to modify the Latin American ideational context. Kennedy attempted, within the Alliance, to construct an ideology aimed to achieve such a task; the program thus became a “comprehensive ideology of democratic development.”

At the onset of the Alliance, President Kennedy strived to project a benevolent image of the US hegemonic role. First he sets out to construct Latin America as a “mirrored other” by establishing a common root in the origins of all these nations. He refers to a hemispheric “American civilization” whose values had to be advanced. All “…Our nations are the products of a common struggle, the revolt against colonial rule. And our people share a common heritage, the quest for the dignity and the freedom of man.” The achievement of such ideals was an incomplete “common mission.” In other words, the objectives set by the Alliance were not the United States’ per se, but they were values embedded in the ideational core of all the region’s countries. The US was there merely as a sister nation pointing the path to follow. For this reason, in their quest, “every American republic [was] the master of its own revolution and its own hope and progress.”

Dignity and freedom were to be universal if the region was to reach higher levels of economic development. Therefore, Kennedy quickly established the need to incorporate democratic values into the Latin American ethos. He argued that “man’s unsatisfied aspiration for economic progress and social justice can best be achieved by free men working within a framework of democratic institutions.” Kennedy, of course, was aware of the resistance and entrenchment of the Latin American political and social elites. He stated, “…it is true that many in your own countries have not
fully understood the urgency of the need to lift people from poverty and ignorance and despair.” Such ideational backwardness had to be abandoned in order to overcome the lack of progress in the region.

The end goal of the Alliance was to construct a “hemisphere where all men can hope for a suitable standard of living, and all can live out their lives in dignity and in freedom.” To realise such a plateau it was fundamental that “political freedom” accompany “material progress.” Success was viable only through the “democratic progress” which required the establishment of structural “machinery for vital social change…” Therefore, it was imperative for the region to launch an “attack [on] the social barriers which block economic progress.” The attack was to target then the socio-political structures that hindered progress, the elites that protect these structures and the values and ideas through which the elites justified them.

President Kennedy concluded his initial address by arguing that “the task [was to] create an American civilization where spiritual and cultural values are strengthened by an ever broadening base of material advance...” and it is here that the benevolence of the US hegemony comes to the fore as he indicates that even after remaking the Latin American path to progress through the Alliance’s goal “each nation is free to follow its own path toward progress.” Thus, Latin American countries were to elaborate their own long-range plans for development. Also, the US’ benevolence shines because, as May observes, the United States was there to support the Latin Americans; crucially, he adds, “in doing so [the US] has cast aside its long-standing and patronizing attitude that all the Latin Americans need to do is to emulate the economic and political policies which have worked so well in the United States.”

Wasn’t this patronising attitude embedded in the review of advances on which the distribution of funds depended? After all, the panel of experts known as the “Nine Wise Men” included Latin American members, and none else but the key figure in modernisation theory and a White House policy adviser, Walt Rostow. In short, despite imposing objectives that protect the hegemon’s interests, this hegemony was benevolent because it “granted” a degree of freedom to other states. Yet, the establishment of their objectives virtually “forced” the latter to follow the path designed by the hegemonic country. For Kennedy, the Alliance was to forge a “social framework” by strengthening “democratic institutions through a program of economic
development and social progress” from which political freedom and social change would emerge. The Alliance made the adoption of the US conceptualisation of progress fundamental for Latin American development.

In contrast to the Latin American conceptualisation of progress, it is clear in this brief review that in the US value system progress is tantamount with freedom and democracy. Perhaps due to their need for economic resources and the conditions attached to the Alliance, Latin American statesmen relinquished their interpretation of progress and the US’ discourse began to “de-construct” such conceptualisation. The Declaration to the Peoples of America establishes that all countries “agree” to strive to “improve and strength democratic institutions through the application of the principle of self-determination by the people.” The underlying assumption was that only “representative democracy” can lead to progress because it enables “free men” to satisfy their “aspirations, including those for work, home and land, health and schools.” The US was to establish a new model of progress “under freedom and democracy.” Similarly, the Charter of Punta del Este indicates that the Alliance is an effort to obtain economic progress and “broader social justice within the framework of personal dignity and political liberty.” More importantly, it was an effort to generate “equal opportunity for all” since progress could only be obtained through the utilisation of the “creative powers of free men” in the context of a democratic society.

Effects of the Alliance

By the 1970s, observers indicated that the Alliance had “lost its way” and that it had delivered “more shattered hopes that solid economic accomplishments.” However, there is evidence that the Alliance generated a “democratic opening” which enabled the organisation and mobilisation of the Latin American peasants, labour, indigenous and lower-classes. As Wiarda indicates, this effect “frightened the traditional wielders of power: the military, the Church, and the economic elites.” This effect produced the “unravelling” of the “Latin American social fabric.” The US position toward the interconnectedness of social reforms and progress produced a degree of “certain estrangement” amid a set of “natural allies;” that is, the United States and the Latin American elites. The Alliance marked the first instant in which the Latin American elites came under direct pressure to allow social reforms in the region. Through the Alliance, “reformist political ideas” and other topics began to be received by “wide
For a large segment of the region’s population, the Alliance offered the first opportunity to internalise the importance of democratic principles, their benefits and the possibility of their achievement. Because Kennedy opened the discursive “door” for such possibilities, he became an icon for the majority of Latin Americans.

According to Sunkel, the Alliance established an “interpretation” of development for Latin America in which “the criterion and ideology” for “growth and modernisation” became the “assimilation and reproduction of the behaviour patterns, values, consumption, technology, social and even institutional and political organisation characteristic of the industrialised countries and in particular of the United States.” Furthermore, the Alliance established regional and national development goals; it forced Latin America to espouse a “definitive attitude” towards development. Considering the Alliance’s underlying ideology, this new attitude was partly the result of the internalisation of democracy as an element of progress in the Latin American ideational realm. In other words, the ideational struggle that occurred within the Alliance discourse initiated a learning and socialisation process through which the Latin American conceptualisation of progress was re-made thereby constructing the adequate ideational space in which democratic values could be implanted. In short, the Alliance modified the Latin American elites’ values setting the foundations for the changes that came in the 1980s.

The incorporation of Latin America into the postwar international order required an ideational break-away with the region’s conceptualisation of its progress’ objectives and the means to achieve them. The evidence we have presented here points to the Alliance for Progress with its progress/democracy formula as one of the catalysts in the ideational rupture experienced by the Latin American political and social elites. The Alliance discourse enabled the United States to “sell” its idea of progress to Latin America and with it, the implied US values that such an idea carries. Latin American elites came for the first time directly under pressure to modify their conceptualisation of the “good” society. For the elites were made aware by Kennedy’s message that socio-political reforms were necessary for their own survival. They had been ideological defeated! Yet, the US’ discourse afforded the Latin American elites a way to overcome such ideational defeat: a “fork” on the road to progress in which they
“chose” the path to a “higher truth;” that is, democracy. Thus these elites were benevolently forced into adopting a new set of ideas that partly ignited the “re-making” of Latin America’s ideological structure that led to the region’s democratisation process.

If such values’ modification has had positive or negative consequences in the region is beyond the scope of this paper. What interest us here are the US’ hegemonic discursive practices and how these practices enhance the others’ perception that its hegemony is benevolent. For instance, the Alliance for Progress enabled the United States to extol only the positive aspects of its domination; that is, the idea that if Latin America became a participant in the emergent world order, then it was destined to benefit greatly from the system. However, at the same time, the Alliance’s discourse thrust the subtleties of the United States’ power: the cultural and ideational dimensions. Partly as a result of this thrust, for a large majority of Latin Americans progress and development have become equivalent to the United States’ image. Arguably, the Alliance was, as Perloff (another member of the Nine Wise Men) adequately labelled it “… A Social Invention in the Making.”

**Conclusion: From “Empire by Invitation” to “Empire by Denial”**

Lundestad locates the far-reaching nature of US power by characterising the American empire as an “empire by invitation.” In the context of the cold war, he argues that “The American influence often went deeper than the Soviet exactly because Washington’s forms of control were more in accordance with the will of the local populations than were Moscow’s.” This characterisation highlights a different aspect of US power than what contemporary commentators emphasise: its persistent cultural/ideational power.

As we have examined in this paper, cultural/ideational factors are fundamental for the hauling of divergent states into a hegemonic order. A hegemon may achieve such incorporation by redefining its policies (as in the case of the Alliance for Progress) in order to include ideas that force its values onto other states. More importantly, the process requires an ideological endorsement by divergent states and “the construction
of a new identity;’’ in the case of the US hegemonic order, a “new liberal democratic identity.”94 Empire by invitation or benevolent hegemony may not be friendly after all. In the case of Latin America, as the epigraph indicates: the US empire, or “the stars and stripes” have taken over the region’s identity (i.e., “my flag”), the “external debt” limits the Latin American economic possibilities (i.e., “taken away our splendour”), and the freedom search for by the new order is not that of the region, so why the need for different borders (i.e., cultures)? This lyric lays bare the far-reaching nature of US power: the adoption of the hegemon’s values and ideas by other societies makes the latter learn to see themselves through the hegemon’s eyes; thereby diminishing the value of their own culture.

The hegemon’s values and ideas, in other words, become universal. They are embedded in the ideational system of the recipient society to such an extent that become paradigmatic elements which modify their identities: the hegemon’s image is planted in the ideational space and then used as a “map” to construct and delimit the self. In the case of the US, its image has become so highly cherished that if the recipient societies were to accomplished higher levels of progress they cannot construct the hegemon as an opposite “other;” they can only imagine themselves as the hegemon’s parallel self. For example, in Brazil, there is a vision that the country is “destined for greatness” which has led to belief that the country is to become “The United States of South America”;95 that is, if Brazil is to achieve its potential, it cannot construct itself but as an “Americanised-self” parallel to the United States. This is indeed a powerful far-reaching hegemonic characteristic which serves as a perpetuator of the Unites States “benevolent” hegemony.

Returning to the debate on American empire, what implications may be drawn from this study? Conclusions are mixed. On the one hand, the legitimacy of the United States is being increasingly challenged and anti-American sentiment is on the rise which may lead to difficulties of pursuing its long-term goals.96 On the other hand, there is a persistent diffusion of US values and ideas throughout the world. This may facilitate acceptance of the American empire through the forces of remaking and incorporation that we examined in this paper. While both Ferguson and Ignatieff focus on the “imperial denial” of the United States—lack of consciousness of itself as an empire,97 it may be the shift in the understanding of US hegemony from “empire
by invitation” to “empire by denial”—redefined as empire without the consent, or with the “forced” consent, of other states that will be important in the coming decades.

Notes

6 Stuart Hall, ed., Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices (London: SAGE, in association with The Open University, 1997). According to Stuart Hall representation is one of the central practices which produce culture. What we are interested here is how US culture, the “shared meanings” of the society, is connected to its hegemony.
10 Ibid., 10-11.
12 For example, according to the Pew Global Attitudes survey, 79 percent of the Americans polled agreed that ‘It’s good that American ideas and customs are spreading around the world.’” See Minxin Pei, ‘The Paradoxes of American Nationalism’, Foreign Policy 136 (2003): 32.
21 Hasenclever, Mayer and Rittberger, Theories of International Regimes, 90-104.
22 Ikenberry, After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars, xi.
23 Ibid., 19.
24 Ibid., 20.
This also resonates with other liberal concepts that portrayed the postwar order such as embedded liberalism. For instance, see John G. Ruggie, *Winning the Peace: America and World Order in the New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

G. John Ikenberry, 'America’s Imperial Ambition,' *Foreign Affairs* 81 (2002), Ikenberry, 'Liberalism and Empire: Logics of Order in the American Unipolar Age'.


Mary L. Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone', in *Ways of Reading*, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrofsky (New York: St. Martin's, 1999).


Ibid., 11.

Ibid., Ch. 2.


Osvaldo Sunkel, 'Change and Frustration in Chile', in *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*, ed. Claudio Veliz (London: Obstacles to Change in Latin America, 1968), 138.


At the heart of this plan was an initial 500 million US investment. The Alliance was to immediately reinforce the Food for Peace program, and technical training programs in the region. Militarily, the Alliance, sought to protect any country in the region whose independence came under threat (e.g. from communist revolutions).


The Alliance suffered from several contradictions. In some cases to achieve the Alliance’s goals some US’ interests had to be negatively affected. For instance, the US objective of increasing the purchasing power of the Latin American working classes meant that other classes would have to reduce their consumption patterns which in turn would affect the profit patterns of US corporations. See Albert L. Michaels, ‘The Alliance for Progress and Chile’s ‘Revolution in Liberty,’ 1964-1970’, Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 18, no. 1 (1976): 76.

The Latin American ideational context is based on progress and regional integration. The latter was also an essential component of the Alliance’s program. In his speeches, President Kennedy resorts to Latin American integrationist figures such as Bolivar and Marti in order to “awake” the ideal of one Latin America and by doing so impulse the Alliance. See Jonh F. Kennedy, ‘Special Message to the Congress Requesting Appropriations for the Inter-American Fund for Social Progress and for Reconstruction in Chile, March 14, 1961’, in Available at: http://www.jfklink.com/speeches/jfk/publicpapers/1961/jfk_contents_papers1961 (1961). See John P. Hoover, ‘Book Review: The Alliance for Progress: Problems and Perspectives’, The Western Political Quarterly 16, no. 1 (1963).


The aims was to achieve a greater level of economic development without threatening or diminishing the elitist nature of Latin American society. See Howard Wiarda, The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 14. The system was to prepare the masses to fulfill their civic duty by accepting their position in society. For an analysis of the use of education in Latin America with such aim see Nikita Harwisch-Vallenilla, ‘La Historia Patria’, in Inventando la Nacion: Iberoamerica Siglo XIX, ed. Antonio Aminno and Francois-Xavier Guerra (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 2003).


As Wiarda indicates the two concepts remain “emblazoned” on Brazil’s national flag. See Wiarda, The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition, 14.

Mercier Vega, Roads to Power in Latin America, 98.


Woodward, Central America: A Nation Divided, 156.


Miller, Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America, 110.

Woodward, Central America: A Nation Divided, 220.


The transition began under the Eisenhower administration within the policy reforms proposed by Millikan and Rostow. See Walt Rostow and Max Millikan, A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy (New York: Harper, 1957).


This board was later replace by the committee of Inter-American Economic and Social Council (Comité Interamericano de la Alianza para el Progreso—CIAP).

The composition of the Nine Wise Men board is not clear. According to Smith, Rostow was a member of the board. See Peter H Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of US-Latin American Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 150. Others, such as Levinson and Onis do not mention Rostow as a member but include Perloff and Rosentein-Rodan as the US representatives in the panel. See Levinson and Onis, *The Alliance That Lost Its Way: A Critical Report on the Alliance for Progress*, 109. Sáez, a member of the board, does not list the panel’s members, but offers an excellent review of the Nine Wise Men origins and functions within the Alliance, and a general review of the latter. See Raúl Sáez, ‘The Nine Wise Men and the Alliance for Progress’, *International Organization* 22, no. 1 (1968).

Kennedy, ‘Special Message to the Congress Requesting Appropriations for the Inter-American Fund for Social Progress and for Reconstruction in Chile, March 14, 1961’.


Ibid., 304-05.

Ibid., 275.


Ibid., 87. Levinson and Onis indicate that President Kennedy’s popularity among the Latin American masses was such that “In back-land villages of Colombia, Peace Corps volunteers had found photographs of Jesus and Kennedy as the only adornments in humble homes.”


It is interesting to note the reaction of some members of the Latin American Structuralist/Dependency School as their paradigm surrendered to the imposition of the US’ ideas and values. Leading dependency theorists such as Cardoso began to “see things differently” becoming a “pragmatist” and abandoning his earlier “anti-colonialist passions...hostility to foreign links, with the implicit dependency.” See David Landes, *Culture Makes Almost All the Difference*, in *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, ed. Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (New York: Basic Books 2000), 296. The latter is obviously the result of the US hegemonic benevolent discourse that encourages such institutions in order to attain higher levels of progress.

Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of US-Latin American Relations*, 40-41. Smith argues that historically “Gospel of Democracy” has provided the US imperialistic attitudes with three legitimizing dimensions: first, the support from domestic society; second, it set an intellectual challenge for other hegemonic rival nations to find “an ideological rationalization of their own, one that was plausible if not superior” than democracy and which would justify their expansionists intentions; and finally, in
“the subjugated society … engender a rationale for acceptance by local peoples of new power arrangements. The colonized could interpret the new situation not so much as national (or societal) defeat but as a march toward a higher truth.”


