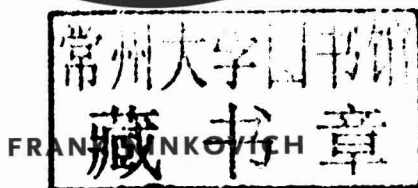


FRANK NINKOVICH

THE GLOBAL REPUBLIC

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*America's Inadvertent Rise
to World Power*



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

Chicago and London

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The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 60637

The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

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Printed in the United States of America

23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 1 2 3 4 5

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-16473-1 (cloth)

ISBN-13: 978-0-226-17333-7 (e-book)

DOI: 10.7208/chicago/9780226173337.001.0001

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ninkovich, Frank A., 1944– author.

The global republic : America's inadvertent rise to world power / Frank Ninkovich.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-226-16473-1 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-226-17333-7 (e-book)

1. United States—Foreign relations—20th century. 2. Exceptionalism—United States. 3. Globalization. I. Title.

E744.N543 2014

327.73009'04—dc23

2014004076

© This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992
(Permanence of Paper).

*To Akira Iriye
For turning on the lights
and allowing me to see*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This is a book that just happened, with little conscious planning, at a point in my scholarly life when I believed that the writing of books was behind me. In retrospect, however, it is obvious that more than a few of its key ideas have been gestating for at least a decade. Most of the points raised in chapter 3 about the discontinuities of American policy in the 1890s were first made in a paper delivered at the University of Konstanz at a conference on imperialism and the civilizing mission in September 2003. Much of chapter 4 has been borrowed from a presentation at the Wilson Center in Washington in October 2006 and a complementary paper delivered at the Sorbonne in January 2008. Parts of the concluding section of chapter 9 are based on an essay, "Paradigms Lost: The Cultural Turn and the Internationalization of American Diplomatic History," written for a *Festschrift* for Detlef Junker. Some of the arguments about the importance of the cultural background were previously tried out in a paper on culture and anti-imperialism for a conference on American anti-imperialism that met in Oxford in 2011. A revised version of this paper will be published in a *Festschrift*, edited by Robert David Johnson, in celebration of Akira Iriye's eightieth birthday. Complete references to the published versions of these papers can be found in appropriate locations in the endnotes.

Writing is a lonely business, but doing history is more communal and collaborative than it might seem at first glance. Without the contributions of a host of scholars, it would have been impossible to undertake this work. Some have been acknowledged in the notes, which I had intended to keep to a minimum, but most have gone unnamed. For those

who contributed in a hands-on fashion, thanks are due to Doug Mitchell, executive editor of the University of Chicago Press, who was receptive to taking on what in years past would have been an “over the transom” manuscript from an author who was too lazy to negotiate a contract beforehand. I am extremely fortunate to have had him as an editor in a relationship that goes back more than two decades. Tim Mennel, who took over the project from Doug, has earned my respect and gratitude, not only for shepherding the manuscript through the review process, but for going well beyond the call in expertly helping to rewrite portions of the introduction. I should also mention two anonymous, and no doubt ill-paid, reviewers who treated the manuscript with undeserved generosity. Their comments, positive and negative, were extremely helpful. Mark Reschke, who copyedited the manuscript, saved me from numerous errors of style and substance. Copyediting is demanding but indispensable work that deserves more recognition than it typically receives.

As always, my wife Carol has been an indispensable source of support and understanding for a project that required frequent and often prolonged disappearances into the study that often produced no obvious results.

No book is perfect. And while I am aware of some points on which the book is likely to be criticized, and to which I would be able to respond, there are certain to be shortcomings that have eluded me. None of this absolves me from its errors of style and substance, all of which are my own.

This book is dedicated to Akira Iriye, who was my mentor at the University of Chicago in the 1970s and has continued to provide me with advice and support throughout my life as a scholar. This is the second book that I have dedicated to him, the first being what one critic benevolently described as a “workmanlike” effort. I would like to think that this volume is more worthy of being dedicated to Akira. But even if it is, it cannot begin to repay the debt that I owe to him.

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INTRODUCTION

This book is a conceptual history of the relationship between globalization and American foreign policy. The abridged version of the story begins in the 1890s when the United States adopted the first of a nearly unbroken succession of globalization-oriented policies and continues through a series of challenges and crises that led, by the end of the twentieth century, to an unprecedented position of global hegemony. In the opening stages of this journey, the United States was in the position of having to adapt to globalization; at midpoint, it became its savior; and as the twenty-first century dawned, the nation was again subordinating itself to a more powerful version of globalization that it had taken great pains to nurture. But whatever the precise relationship at any point in time, throughout this period America's rise to world power was intimately related to the tortuous advance of the globalization process.

With its numerous plot twists and dramatic qualities, this is, by any measure, an extraordinary tale. But it is also the story of a modern foreign policy approach that introduced an unprecedented sweep and complexity to the way that international relations were conceived and carried out. Conspicuously absent from my account, however, is a stock plot device often found in histories of US foreign relations: exceptionalist beliefs. In contrast to a widely held view, a key assertion of this book is that America's climb to global preeminence was *not* animated from the moment of the nation's birth by a deep sense of historical mission, which, if allowed full expression in foreign affairs, was supposed to lead the world to peace, prosperity, and democracy. The stimulus for the nation's ascent to dizzying heights of power, far from emanating from within, was in-

stead of external origin, an inadvertent consequence of the need to keep up with a fast-changing globalizing world that was filled with promise and peril.

I would have preferred to avoid entirely the fraught topic of American exceptionalism were it not for the fact that its tenacious staying power stood in the way of telling the story that I have in mind. Doing so requires that I show that exceptionalism was not doing work in foreign policy at the birth of the nation or in various key episodes of its foreign policy history, which is why I have chosen to start my story in 1776 rather than a century later. However, the chief purpose of the book is not to debunk exceptionalism but, more productively, to make a case for global developments as the source of motivation for policies that led to America's ascendancy. Accordingly, following the preliminary removal of obstructions like Manifest Destiny, once under way this intellectual journey will not stop to visit roadside diversions like the crusading impulse, the cultural urge to refashion the world in America's self-image, secular utopianism, or the alleged tendency of Americans to allow their domestic ideology or popular pressures to dictate their approach to foreign relations.

After one sets aside the idea that a deeply rooted universalizing impulse in the national character has been at work since 1776, it becomes easier to recognize the disruptive impact of the first wave of globalization that inundated the world in the nineteenth century. Whereas a story that plays up ideas inherited from the Founding Fathers would emphasize continuity, my narrative highlights an ideological break in which the nation's initial localist outlook on foreign relations was severed from its eighteenth-century republican roots and reoriented in a global direction. The process of breaking away from the past began after the Civil War in the Gilded Age, an era when a new and enduring appreciation of the nation's place in the world took its place as a prominent feature of the wider culture. Those were the years in which Americans came to appreciate the degree to which the breakneck conversion of their pastoral land into an industrial society was the result of irresistible global forces that had come into being independently of American initiative. Like all other nations overrun by globalization, the United States had been in no position to stave off its enormous power.

Cosmopolitan Americans of the day were acutely aware that the United States was becoming an integral part of an emergent international society. Such people realized that one of the principal implications of membership in this planetary process was that the United States was losing its distinctiveness vis-à-vis Europe, that is, it was actually becoming *less* exceptional. But here is the twist: The turn to political globalism that was to make US foreign policy factually unique was grounded in the growing appreciation of the benefits that came from the nation's membership in a global society whose inhabitants were coming to resemble one another in some fundamental ways. Over time, the importance of membership in this society would grow to the point that its good health came to be considered a vital interest. Thus it was the absence of an exceptionalist impulse as commonly understood that made possible the unfolding of this story line.

Early on, this growing alignment with global trends was neatly fitted into a tradition of isolation from the politics of Europe that dated back to the early days of the republic. But foreign policy broke radically new ground around the time of World War II with the adoption of a muscular globalist stance that, as I plan to argue, made US foreign policy unique in world history. Before that critical point was reached, the main concern of American diplomacy had been to integrate the nation into the worldwide societal network through various forms of cooperation. But when that global web was being ripped apart in the late 1930s, the United States decided first to intervene and then to preserve and revitalize international society throughout the period known as the Cold War. Though this foreign policy revolution was sparked by the events of the 1930s, the necessary cultural fuel was already being produced in the late nineteenth century. Put another way, the trajectory of US foreign relations was redirected by international social history—by external happenings—though that is not to suggest that it was an inevitable consequence of global pressures.

More often than not, this connection with globalization was not explicitly articulated or foregrounded in foreign policy discussions. Once its novelty had worn off, the awareness of globalization was internalized and left to work unobtrusively behind the scenes, not unlike a computer's operating system. Because of this taken-for-granted quality, I will refer to the various processes that are lumped together under the rubric

of globalization as “the background.” The idea of a background will be used in two related senses, the social and the cultural. Society as a background entity has been well explored by sociologists (with the notable exception of its international dimension), while the task of investigating the cultural background has fallen to social theorists and philosophers. For the most part, I refer to the societal background as international society or global society. In one way or another, a concern with international society was a basic component underlying American foreign policy from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Later chapters will shift to a discussion of the role played by the unanticipated appearance of a global cultural background that foreshadowed the transformation of a global society into a global community, a development that was crucial to resolving the Cold War.

This focus on international society gave the history of US foreign relations a creative uniqueness that set it apart from nations that tended to robotically repeat the same old mantras of power. It led the United States to break with assumptions and practices that had been staples of foreign policy for so long that they seemed to enjoy the status of historical laws; in the process, the means and ends of foreign policy were rewritten in a uniquely modern idiom that emphasized the preservation and nurture of a global society. The novel features of this new approach had less to do with a belief in spreading the American dream than with keeping it alive; less with imposing American values on the world than with preserving a way of life that developed countries already enjoyed; less with power politics than with the social conditions that made “great power” status possible in the first place; less with inner drives than with novel external threats; and less with local or regional interests than with global concerns. As great individuals often emerge from great crises, so too with nations.

Of course, whether or not the events I discuss were unique depends on how sharply they stand out in a comparison with the careers of other noteworthy powers. A convincing demonstration of this thesis would have required a lengthy excursion into comparative history and taken me far beyond the limited ambitions of this book, so I will only venture the hypothesis here that a diligent search of the historical record would fail to turn up anything like America’s behavior in the twentieth century. With a nod to the historical mind-set that tends to see nothing new

under the sun, one can always find some similarities, for example, by comparing the United States to the classical Roman republic, Periclean Athens, or imperial Britain. Fascinating (though ultimately incongruous) affinities with the present can be uncovered in the study of many distant historical phenomena. But history, and especially modern history, is also about novelty and discontinuity, and, especially in recent centuries, radical discontinuity.

A word of caution is in order here because making a claim for the singularity of American policy brings with it a danger of drawing too much attention to national peculiarities at the expense of an appreciation of the globalized age in which we happen to live. Treating American foreign policy as a great departure makes sense only when one sees it in the context of the profound rupture that first revealed itself in the nineteenth century as it became clear what the Industrial Revolution was doing to the world. The history of US foreign relations is closely tied to the growing appreciation of that literally earth-shaking historical transition. While many experts in foreign relations continue to talk about power relationships as if they were historical constants, I have long been persuaded that international relations in the latter-day world have diverged profoundly from traditional patterns.

No one disputes that the industrial way of life is radically novel. This comports with our understanding of the major transitions that humankind has passed through since the emergence of *Homo sapiens* as a species: the passage from hunter-gather Paleolithic existence to an agricultural style of life, which was the foundation of early civilizations, and the shift from an agricultural society to the industrial system that lies at the heart of modern civilization. If societies have changed so radically as a result of these upheavals, why not international relations as well? To me it is obvious that no serious overview of US foreign relations can afford to ignore the most important development of modern world history. US foreign policy was unique, as I hope to show, but its journey could not have been undertaken without being situated in this new global environment.

Notwithstanding my belief in the groundbreaking features of American policy, I have refrained from calling it exceptional. My characterization of American foreign relations, with 1940 as the point of no return, will emphasize the historical singularity of policies whose formulation,

implementation, and consequences were prompted by an unprecedented commitment to maintaining an international society that had developed independently of American initiative. American exceptionalism, by contrast, suggests a redemptive compulsion to export American views and values to an unreformed world.

By focusing on the relationship with international society, my goal is to bring closer together two disciplinary approaches, the sociocultural and the political, that have tended to go their separate ways without demonstrating much appreciation of what the other has to offer. Unfortunately, the path I have chosen to travel toward this destination bypasses many important social and political elements of US foreign relations. Portraying the decisions to act as the bulwark of world society in such general terms runs the risk of making it appear that policies evolved smoothly and naturally when in reality they were the result of problematic personal and political choices by those who believed in international society, often in the face of determined opposition from many others who did not. The political side of my story will pass over many important debates, within the government and in the private sector, which had an important bearing on what happened. Nongovernmental relations, already the subject of an enormous literature, will be neglected to an even greater extent. Doing history in this way is akin to simplifying fractions in math, where the general relationship is clarified by throwing out most of the vital particulars.

In extenuation, this book was conceived as a conceptual history that focuses on the influence of foundational worldviews or axioms that straddle the line between culture and ideology. By conceptual, I mean that it proceeds from a single overarching idea—America's response to globalization—that works itself out in complicated ways that would only be obscured in a fact-laden narrative history of US foreign relations. Structuring the account in this way was a calculated decision on my part. For that reason, I am keenly aware that this book oversimplifies a history whose intricacies many skillful historians have taken great pains to explore. But had I done otherwise the pace of the argument would have slowed to an unproductive crawl. Thus, making sense of my story requires that the reader be familiar, at least in broad outline, with the history of US foreign relations. Those who crave an in-depth understanding

of excluded events and themes will have to look elsewhere to the work of historians who have mined the documents and archival sources with a thoroughness that I could never hope to equal.

But that in turn points to the virtues of my account. Regrettably, one downside of scholarly productiveness is that our stockpile of data is now so vast that it threatens to overtax our ways of processing it. We are, according to one historian, “snowed under by an avalanche of information, much of it unassimilable into a coherent national narrative.”¹ But while facts may rule in history, interpretation continues to reign as sovereign. If only to impose order and coherence on an unruly realm of facts, a reliance on interpretation is unavoidable. Hence this book is probably best viewed as another way of telling the story—and, one hopes, a better way than the interpretive schemas currently in use. However, to identify it as an interpretation, or a history stingy with the facts, does not mean that it is factitious, for it is fully consistent with the details that other historians work with—more so, actually, because it incorporates more categories of facts than are found in traditional narratives of foreign relations.

Though its basic idea is quite simple, nevertheless I would maintain that it is a more complex way of framing a story that is impossibly intricate and beyond my ability, or that of any historian, to fully explain. The complexity in this case comes from trying to tie together national and global narratives, but also to connect political, social, and cultural aspects of foreign relations that have come to resemble separate and often warring disciplinary kingdoms. The point is that more convincing explanations of foreign relations require that the connections between politics and society be brought together in ways that reflect their intricate relationship in real life. I am not an absolutist when it comes to historical explanations—a historian certain of the truth is deceiving himself—but I am certain of the inexhaustible complexity of history. So while this narrative is hardly the whole story, its conceptual design makes possible a more textured account than the deceptively smooth tales that we have been telling ourselves.

.....

Herewith the plan of this book. Chapter 1 looks at exceptionalism prior to the Civil War and argues that the republican ideology of the Found-

ing Fathers provided neither means, motive, nor opportunity to create a foreign policy aimed at implementing the export of American ideals. If anything, the antebellum period saw republican ideas shrink in importance and in geographical scope vis-à-vis foreign relations. Chapter 2 introduces a development crucial to my argument, the advent of globalization. It argues that opinion elites, whose members would become the makers of foreign policy, realized that the United States would need to adapt to this powerful new global reality rather than vice versa. It also shows how the idea of exceptionalism was challenged by an awareness of America's wide-ranging inferiority to Europe. In the end, however, various schemes of accommodation to international society, all of them based on the assumption of a deep compatibility between domestic and international trends, were devised. The third chapter discusses American foreign policy at the *fin de siècle* in the light of this new understanding of the desirability of adaptation, the principal political expressions of which were imperialism and dollar diplomacy. The underlying theme of these precursory policies was the longing for recognition as a great power by emphasizing America's role as a senior partner in abetting the globalization process.

Chapter 4 tries to take a fresh look at Wilsonianism—the poster child for those who believe that American foreign policy is afflicted by exceptionalist idealism—by continuing to focus on international society. The thrust of the argument is that Wilsonianism, contrary to its reputation, was a freakish, ill-conceived, one-off episode in the history of US foreign relations. The signature theme of the Wilsonian project, Wilson's promotion of the League of Nations, was a historical cul-de-sac, the practical terminus of one strand of American thinking about international relations, and not an especially American strand, at that. Wilson was still a great president. But, over the long term, his most important contributions lay in other directions, none of them notably idealistic—for example, keeping alive liberal ideas such as free trade and forewarning his audiences about the threats to liberal globalization arising from revolutionary changes in warfare.

Chapter 5 addresses the 1920s, which remain an underappreciated period, especially in light of the continuing influence that this decade's policy assumptions would continue to exert on American policy through

the remainder of the century and beyond. The foreign policies of this Republican decade are best understood as a continuation and amplification of policies that had been articulated immediately prior to the Great War, principally the reliance placed on international cooperation and commercial and cultural exchanges. There was one huge change, however: the United States now held the chair in the club of great powers. Undergirding the various foreign policy mutations of the decade was the axiomatic belief that international society, with the Great War behind it, was constitutionally robust and required no drastic political involvement by the United States for it to be restored to good health.

The turning point at which the United States made the choice to preserve and sustain a globalized international environment that might otherwise collapse is discussed in chapter 6. It shows that the nature of the threat facing the country in World War II was more diffuse and shot through with uncertainty than the self-assured postwar consensus would have it. Many intelligent isolationists who challenged the realist position also doubted that such a thing as international society even existed or, if it did, that it mattered very much for American security. But that did not mean that there was no threat, for an appreciation of the dangerous consequences of the collapse of international society rested on more solid empirical ground than did ill-defined and highly arguable forecasts of the military dangers facing the country. The debate was put to rest only by participation in a war whose aims were defined as the rescue and repair of the political and economic organs of a critically injured global society. In the process, the political and the social came together in unprecedented ways, ushering in an era in which the United States became not only a global power but a historically unparalleled one as well.

Chapter 7 approaches the Cold War as a singular episode in the history of foreign relations in the way it was perceived, fought, and resolved. The methodological predicament at the heart of the United States–Soviet rivalry was the impossibility of finding a political or military way of resolving the conflict. Because all conceivable power solutions led to dead ends, the most likely outcome appeared to be an indefinite continuation of the status quo. However, power did play a critical role in the Cold War, if only negatively, by averting a third world war, thus opening

a space for economic and cultural forces to step in and make possible what politics could not achieve. This peaceful resolution of the struggle was in marked contrast to a long history of international relations in which major transitions of power have been midwived by war.

How ideology and culture influenced the outcome of the Cold War in ways far more important than normally conceded is the subject of chapter 8. Here, I distinguish between ideology and culture to show how background processes affected the outcome of the Cold War. Over-simplified, the argument is that government policies were ideological in nature, and hence political, even those policies that were advertised as being nonpolitical. As a result, they could have only minor impacts on the outcome of the Cold War. Only cultural processes that lay beyond the range of political manipulation, whose anatomy is briefly discussed, could do more. As it happened, the dawning of a global culture created a background that opened up the possibility of significant political change.

Chapter 9 takes up the topic of change in the international cultural background, better known as Americanization or the formation of a global culture, and argues that these nonpolitical phenomena were crucial to the resolution of the Cold War. Americanization, however, needs to be understood as a catalyst that gave new life to the globalization process and should not be mistaken for the larger process. The chapter also reintroduces individual agency as an important part of the story in the person of Mikhail Gorbachev, whose understanding of the changes in international society led him to make decisions that were crucial to ending the Cold War in a peaceful manner. This emphasis on the operation of intercultural processes raises a basic question: is the Cold War better understood in terms of conflict or as an instance of politically aided acculturation?

Chapter 10 attempts to sort out how best to explain the first two post-Cold War decades. The outlook prevailing at the time was that American exceptionalism was at its apogee. My view is that the military dominance of the United States was an institutional residue of the Cold War, that the policies of the so-called war on terror were a historical outlier, and that the social and cultural foundations of the extraordinary influence enjoyed by the United States were at any rate beginning to erode. The