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The Jacksonian Tradition

And American Foreign Policy

Walter Russell Mead

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IN THE LAST five months of World War II, American bombing raids claimed the lives of more than 900,000 Japanese civilians—not counting the casualties from the atomic strikes against Hiroshima and Nagasaki.¹ This is more than twice the total number of combat deaths that the United States has suffered in all its foreign wars combined.²

On one night, that of March 9-10, 1945, 234 Superfortresses dropped 1,167 tons of incendiary bombs over downtown Tokyo; 83,793 Japanese bodies were found in the charred remains—a number greater than the 80,942 combat fatalities that the United States sustained in the Korean and Vietnam Wars combined.

Since the Second World War, the United States has continued to employ devastating force against both civilian and military targets. Out of a pre-war population of 9.49 million, an estimated 1 million North Korean civilians are believed to have died as a result of U.S. actions during the 1950-53 conflict.³ During the same war, 33,870 American soldiers died in combat, meaning that U.S. forces killed approximately thirty North Korean civilians for every American soldier who died in action.

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The United States dropped almost three times as much explosive tonnage in the Vietnam War as was used in the Second World War, and something on the order of 365,000 Vietnamese civilians are believed to have been killed during the period of American involvement.⁴

Regardless of Clausewitz's admonition that "casualty reports . . . are never accurate, seldom truthful, and in most cases deliberately falsified", these numbers are too striking to ignore. They do not, of course, suggest a moral parallel between the behavior of, say, German and Japanese aggressors and American forces seeking to defeat those aggressors in the shortest possible time. German and Japanese forces used the indiscriminate murder of civilians as a routine police tool in occupied territory, and wholesale massacres of civilians often accompanied German and Japanese advances into new territory. The behav-

¹David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War 1929-45* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 847.

²That figure is 441,513. Michael Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference, Volume II* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 1992).

³Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts*, p. 886.

⁴Stanley I. Kutler, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1996), p. 103.

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that they are more military-minded. Currently, the American people support without complaint what is easily the highest military budget in the world. In 1998, the United States spent as much on defense as its NATO allies, South Korea, Japan, the Persian Gulf states, Russia and China combined.⁵ In response to widespread public concern about a decline in military preparedness, the Clinton administration and the Republican Congress are planning substantial increases in military spending in the years to come.

Americans do not merely pay for these forces, they use them. Since the end of the Vietnam War, taken by some as opening a new era of reluctance in the exercise of American power, the United States has deployed combat forces in, or used deadly force over, Cambodia, Iran, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Turkey, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Sudan, Afghanistan, the South China Sea, Liberia, Macedonia, Albania and Yugoslavia. This is a record that no other country comes close to matching.

It is also generally conceded that, with the exception of a handful of elite units in such forces as the British Army, American troops have a stronger "warrior culture" than do the armies of other wealthy countries. Indeed, of all the NATO countries other than Turkey and Greece, only Great Britain today has anything like the American "war lobby" that becomes active in times of national crisis—a political force that under certain circumstances demands war, supports the decisive use of force, and urges political leaders to stop wasting time with negotiations, sanctions and Security Council meetings in order to attack the enemy with all possible strength.

Why is it that U.S. public opinion is often so quick—though sometimes so slow—to support armed intervention abroad? What are the provocations that

energize public opinion (at least some of it) for war—and how, if at all, is this "war lobby" related to the other elements of that opinion? The key to this warlike disposition, and to other important features of American foreign policy, is to be found in what I shall call its Jacksonian Tradition, in honor of the sixth president of the United States.

The School of Andrew Jackson

IT IS a tribute to the general historical amnesia about American politics between the War of 1812 and the Civil War that Andrew Jackson is not more widely counted among the greatest of American presidents. Victor in the Battle of New Orleans—perhaps the most decisive battle in the shaping of the modern world between Trafalgar and Stalingrad—Andrew Jackson laid the foundation of American politics for most of the nineteenth century, and his influence is still felt today. With the ever ready help of the brilliant Martin Van Buren, he took American politics from the era of silk stockings into the smoke-filled room. Every political party since his presidency has drawn on the symbolism, the institutions and the instruments of power that Jackson pioneered.

More than that, he brought the American people into the political arena. Restricted state franchises with high property qualifications meant that in 1820 many American states had higher property qualifications for voters than did boroughs for the British House of Commons. With Jackson's presidency, universal male suffrage became the basis of American politics and political values.

⁵William S. Cohen, *Report on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense: A Report to the United States Congress by the Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, March 1999).

For foreigners and for some Americans, the Jacksonian tradition is the least impressive in American politics. It is the most deplored abroad, the most denounced at home. Jacksonian chairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee are the despair of high-minded people everywhere, as they hold up adhesion to the Kyoto Protocols, starve the UN and the IMF, cut foreign aid, and ban the use of U.S. funds for population control programs abroad. When spokesmen for other schools of thought speak about the "problems" of American foreign policy, the persistence and power of the Jacksonian school are high on their list. While some of this fashionable despair may be overdone and is perhaps a reflection of different class interests and values, it is true that Jacksonians often figure as the most obstructionist of the schools, as the least likely to support Wilsonian initiatives for a better world, to understand Jeffersonian calls for patient diplomacy in difficult situations, or to accept Hamiltonian trade strategies. Yet without Jacksonians, the United States would be a much weaker power.

A principal explanation of why Jacksonian politics are so poorly understood is that Jacksonianism is less an intellectual or political movement than an expression of the social, cultural and religious values of a large portion of the American public. And it is doubly obscure because it happens to be rooted in one of the portions of the public least represented in the media and the professoriat. Jacksonian America is a folk community with a strong sense of common values and common destiny: though periodically led by intellectually brilliant men—like Andrew Jackson himself—it is neither an ideology nor a self-conscious movement with a clear historical direction or political table of organization. Nevertheless, Jacksonian America has produced—and looks set to continue to produce—one

political leader and movement after another, and it is likely to continue to enjoy major influence over both foreign and domestic policy in the United States for the foreseeable future.

The Evolution of a Community

IT IS NOT fashionable today to think of the American nation as a folk community bound together by deep cultural and ethnic ties. Believers in a multicultural America attack this idea from one direction, but conservatives too have a tendency to talk about the United States as a nation based on ideology rather than ethnicity. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, among others, has said that the United States is unlike other nations because it is based on an idea rather than on a community of national experience. The continuing and growing vitality of the Jacksonian tradition is, for better or worse, living proof that she is at least partly wrong.

If Jeffersonianism is the book-ideology of the United States, Jacksonian populism is its folk-ideology. Historically, American populism has been based less on the ideas of the Enlightenment than on the community values and sense of identity among the British colonizers who first settled this country. In particular, as David Hackett Fischer has shown, Jacksonian populism can be originally identified with a subgroup among these settlers, the so-called "Scots-Irish", who settled the back country regions of the Carolinas and Virginia, and who went on to settle much of the Old West—West Virginia, Kentucky, parts of Indiana and Illinois—and the southern and south central states of Tennessee, Missouri, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas. Jacksonian populism today has moved beyond its original ethnic and geographical limits. Like country music, another

Most progressive, right thinking intellectuals in mid-century America believed that the future of American populism lay in a social democratic movement based on urban immigrants. Social activists like Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger consciously sought to use cultural forms like folk songs to ease the transition from the old individualistic folk world to the collective new one that they believed was the wave of the future; they celebrated unions and other strange, European ideas in down home country twangs so that, in the bitter words of Hiram Evans, "There is a steady flood of alien ideas being spread over the country, always carefully disguised as American."

WHAT CAME next surprised almost everyone. The tables turned, and Evans' Americans "americanized" the immigrants rather than the other way around. In what is still a largely unheralded triumph of the melting pot, Northern immigrants gradually assimilated the values of Jacksonian individualism. Each generation of new Americans was less "social" and more individualistic than the preceding one. American Catholics, once among the world's most orthodox, remained Catholic in religious allegiance but were increasingly individualistic in terms of psychology and behavior ("I respect the Pope, but I have to follow my own conscience"). Ties to the countries of emigration steadily weakened, and the tendency to marry outside the group strengthened.

Outwardly, most immigrant groups completed an apparent assimilation to American material culture within a couple of generations of their arrival. A second type of assimilation—an inward assimilation to and adaptation of the core cultural and psychological structure of the native population—took longer, but as third, fourth and fifth generation immigrant

families were exposed to the economic and social realities of American life, they were increasingly "americanized" on the inside as well as without.

This immense and complex process was accelerated by social changes that took place after 1945. Physically, the old neighborhoods broke up, and the Northern industrial working class, along with the refugees from the dying American family farm, moved into the suburbs to form a new populist mix. As increasing numbers of the descendants of immigrants moved into the Jacksonian Sunbelt, the pace of assimilation grew. The suburban homeowner with his or her federally subsidized mortgage replaced the homesteading farmer (on free federal land) as the central pillar of American populism. Richard Nixon, with his two-pronged appeal to white Southerners and the "Joe Six-pack" voters of the North, was the first national politician to recognize the power of this newly energized current in American life.

Urban, immigrant America may have softened some of the rough edges of Jacksonian America, but the descendants of the great wave of European immigration sound more like Andrew Jackson from decade to decade. Rugged frontier individualism has proven to be contagious; each successive generation descended from the great turn of the century immigration has been more Jacksonian than its predecessor. The social and economic solidarity rooted in European peasant communities has been overmastered by the individualism of the frontier. The descendants of European working-class Marxists now quote Adam Smith; Joe Six-pack thinks of the welfare state as an expensive burden, not part of the natural moral order. Intellectuals have made this transition as thoroughly as anyone else. The children and grandchildren of trade unionists and Trotskyites now talk about the importance of liberal soci-

time; Ronald Reagan was seventy. Most movie stars lose their appeal with age; those whose appeal stems from their ability to portray and embody Jacksonian values—like John Wayne—only become more revered.

The second principle of the code is equality. Among those members of the folk community who do pull their weight, there is an absolute equality of dignity and right. No one has a right to tell the self-reliant Jacksonian what to say, do or think. Any infringement on equality will be met with defiance and resistance. Male or female, the Jacksonian is, and insists on remaining, independent of church, state, social hierarchy, political parties and labor unions. Jacksonians may choose to accept authority of a leader or movement or faith, but will never yield to an imposed authority. The young are independent of the old: "free, white and twenty-one" is an old Jacksonian expression; the color line has softened, but otherwise the sentiment is as true as it ever was.

The third principle is individualism. The Jacksonian does not just have the right to self-fulfillment—he or she has a duty to seek it. Mrs. Fanny Trollope (mother of novelist Anthony Trollope) had the misfortune to leave her native Britain to spend two years in the United States. Next to her revulsion at the twin American habits of chewing tobacco in public places and missing spittoons with the finished product, she most despised the passion for equality she found everywhere she looked. "The theory of equality", Mrs. Trollope observed,

may be very daintily discussed by English gentlemen in a London dining-room, when the servant, having placed a fresh bottle of cool wine on the table, respectfully shuts the door, and leaves them to their walnuts and their wisdom; but it will be found less palatable when it presents itself in the shape of a hard, greasy paw, and is claimed in accents that breathe less of freedom

than of onions and whiskey. Strong, indeed, must be the love of equality in an English breast if it can survive a tour through the Union.⁶

In Jacksonian America, everyone must find his or her way: each individual must choose a faith, or no faith, and code of conduct based on conscience and reason. The Jacksonian feels perfectly free to strike off in an entirely new religious direction. "I sincerely believe", wrote poor Mrs. Trollope, "that if a fire-worshiper, or an Indian Brahmin, were to come to the United States, prepared to preach and pray in English, he would not be long without a 'very respectable congregation.'" She didn't know the half of it.

Despite this individualism, the Jacksonian code also mandates acceptance of certain social mores and principles. Loyalty to family, raising children "right", sexual decency (heterosexual monogamy—which can be serial) and honesty within the community are virtues that commend themselves to the Jacksonian spirit. Children of both sexes can be wild, but both women and men must be strong. Corporal punishment is customary and common; Jacksonians find objections to this time honored and (they feel) effective method of discipline outlandish and absurd. Although women should be more discreet, both sexes can sow wild oats before marriage. After it, to enjoy the esteem of their community a couple must be seen to put their children's welfare ahead of personal gratification.

The fourth pillar in the Jacksonian honor code struck Mrs. Trollope and others as more dishonorable than honorable, yet it persists nevertheless. Let us call it financial *esprit*. While the Jacksonian believes in hard work, he or she also believes that credit is a right and that

⁶Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans: Volume I* (London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832).

would not arrest, prosecutors would not try, juries would not convict.

This tells us something very important: throughout most of American history and to a large extent even today, equal rights emerge from and depend on this popular culture of equality and honor rather than flow out of abstract principles or written documents. The many social and legal disabilities still suffered in practice by unpopular minorities demonstrate that the courts and the statute books still enjoy only a limited ability to protect equal rights in the teeth of popular feeling and culture.

Even so, Jacksonian values play a major role in African-American culture. If anything, that role has increased with the expanded presence of African Americans in all military ranks. The often blighted social landscape of the inner city has in some cases recreated the atmosphere and practices of American frontier life. In many ways the gang culture of some inner cities resembles the social atmosphere of the Jacksonian South, as well as the hard drinking, womanizing, violent male culture of the Mississippi in the days of Davy Crockett and Mark Twain. Bragging about one's physical and sexual prowess, the willingness to avenge disrespect with deadly force, a touchy insistence that one is as good as anybody else: once over his shock at the urban landscape and the racial issue, Billy the Kid would find himself surprisingly at home in such an environment.

The degree to which African-American society resembles Jacksonian culture remains one of the crucial and largely overlooked elements in American life. Despite historical experiences that would have completely alienated many ethnic minorities around the world, American black popular culture remains profoundly—and, in times of danger, fiercely—patriotic. From the Revolution onward, African Americans have sought more to participate in America's wars

rather than to abstain from them, and the strength of personal and military honor codes in African-American culture today remains a critical factor in assuring the continued strength of American military forces into the twenty-first century.

The underlying cultural unity between African Americans and Anglo-Jacksonian America shaped the course and ensured the success of the modern Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King and his followers exhibited exemplary personal courage, their rhetoric was deeply rooted in Protestant Christianity, and the rights they asked for were precisely those that Jacksonian America values most for itself. Further, they scrupulously avoided the violent tactics that would have triggered an unstoppable Jacksonian response.

Although cultures change slowly and many individuals lag behind, the bulk of American Jacksonian opinion has increasingly moved to recognize the right of code-honoring members of minority groups to receive the rights and protections due to members of the folk community. This new and, one hopes, growing feeling of respect and tolerance emphatically does not extend to those, minorities or not, who are not seen as code-honoring Americans. Those who violate or reject the code—criminals, irresponsible parents, drug addicts—have not benefited from the softening of the Jacksonian color line.

The Politics of the Culture

JACKSONIAN foreign policy is related to Jacksonian values and goals in domestic policy. For Jacksonians, the prime goal of the American people is not the commercial and industrial policy sought by Hamiltonians, nor the administrative excellence in support of moral values that Wilsonians seek, nor Jeffersonian liberty.

out with the bath water. Stories about welfare abusers in limousines and foreign aid swindles generate more anger among Jacksonians than do stories of \$600 hammers at the Pentagon.

The profoundly populist world-view of Jacksonian Americans contributes to one of the most important elements in their politics: the belief that while problems are complicated, solutions are simple. False idols are many; the True God is One. Jacksonians believe that Gordian Knots are there to be cut. In public controversies, the side that is always giving you reasons why something can't be done, and is endlessly telling you that the popular view isn't sufficiently "sophisticated" or "nuanced"—that is the side that doesn't want you to know what it is doing, and it is not to be trusted. If politicians have honest intentions, they will tell you straight up what they plan to do. If it's a good idea, you will like it as soon as they explain the whole package. For most of the other schools, "complex" is a positive term when applied either to policies or to situations; for Jacksonians it is a negative. Ronald Reagan brilliantly exploited this. As in the case of Andrew Jackson himself, Reagan's own intuitive approach to the world led him to beliefs and policies that appealed to Jacksonian opinion right from the start.

Jacksonian Foreign Policy

THOSE WHO LIKE to cast American foreign policy as an unhealthy mix of ignorance, isolationism and trigger-happy cowboy diplomacy are often thinking about the Jacksonian populist tradition. That tradition is stronger among the mass of ordinary people than it is among the elite. It is more strongly entrenched in the heartland than on either of the two coasts. It has been historically associated with white Protestant males of the lower and middle classes—today the least

fashionable element in the American political mix.

Although there are many learned and thoughtful Jacksonians, including those who have made distinguished careers in public service, it is certainly true that the Jacksonian philosophy is embraced by many people who know very little about the wider world. With them it is an instinct rather than an ideology—a culturally shaped set of beliefs and emotions rather than a set of ideas. But ideas and policy proposals that resonate with Jacksonian core values and instincts enjoy wide support and can usually find influential supporters in the policy process.

So influential is Jacksonian opinion in the formation of American foreign policy that anyone lacking a feel for it will find much of American foreign policy baffling and opaque. Foreigners in particular have alternately overestimated and underestimated American determination because they failed to grasp the structure of Jacksonian opinion and influence. Yet Jacksonian views on foreign affairs are relatively straightforward and, once they are understood, American foreign policy becomes much less mysterious.

To begin with, although the other schools often congratulate themselves on their superior sophistication and appreciation for complexity, Jacksonianism provides the basis in American life for what many scholars and practitioners would consider the most sophisticated of all approaches to foreign affairs: realism. In this it stands with Jeffersonianism, while being deeply suspicious of the "global meliorist" elements found, in different forms, in both Wilsonian and Hamiltonian foreign policy ideas. Often, Jeffersonians and Jacksonians will stand together in opposition to humanitarian interventions, or interventions made in support of Wilsonian or Hamiltonian world order initiatives. However, while Jeffersonians espouse a minimalist realism under which

the nation's oil supply struck a chord with Jacksonian opinion. That opinion—which has not forgotten the oil shortages and price hikes of the 1970s—clearly considers stability of the oil supply a vital national interest and is prepared to fight to defend it. The atrocity propaganda about alleged Iraqi barbarisms in Kuwait did not inspire Jacksonians to war, and neither did legalistic arguments about U.S. obligations under the UN Charter to defend a member state from aggression. Those are useful arguments to screw Wilsonian courage to the sticking place, but they mean little for Jacksonians. Had there been no UN Charter and had Kuwait been even more corrupt and repressive that it is, Jacksonian opinion would still have supported the Gulf War. It would have supported a full-scale war with Iran over the 1980 hostage crisis, and it will take an equally hawkish stance toward any future threat to perceived U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf region.

In the absence of a clearly defined threat to the national interest, Jacksonian opinion is much less aggressive. It has not, for example, been enthusiastic about the U.S. intervention in the case of Bosnia. There the evidence of unspeakable atrocities was much greater than in Kuwait, and the legal case for intervention was as strong. Yet Jacksonian opinion saw no threat to the interests, as it understood them, of the United States, and Wilsonians were the only segment of the population that was actively eager for war.

In World War I it took the Zimmermann Telegram and the repeated sinking of American ships to convince Jacksonian opinion that war was necessary. In World War II, neither the Rape of Nanking nor the atrocities of Nazi rule in Europe drew the United States into the war. The attack on Pearl Harbor did.

To engage Jacksonians in support of the Cold War it was necessary to convince them that Moscow was engaged in

a far-reaching and systematic campaign for world domination, and that this campaign would succeed unless the United States engaged in a long-term defensive effort with the help of allies around the world. That involved a certain overstatement of both Soviet intentions and capabilities, but that is beside the present point. Once Jacksonian opinion was convinced that the Soviet threat was real and that the Cold War was necessary, it stayed convinced. Populist American opinion accepted the burdens it imposed and worried only that the government would fail to prosecute the Cold War with the necessary vigor. No one should mistake the importance of this strong and constant support. Despite the frequent complaints by commentators and policymakers that the American people are "isolationist" and "uninterested in foreign affairs", they have made and will make enormous financial and personal sacrifices if convinced that these are in the nation's vital interests.

This mass popular patriotism, and the martial spirit behind it, gives the United States immense advantages in international affairs. After two world wars, no European nation has shown the same willingness to pay the price in blood and treasure for a global presence. Most of the "developed" nations find it difficult to maintain large, high-quality fighting forces. Not all of the martial patriotism in the United States comes out of the world of Jacksonian populism, but without that tradition, the United States would be hard pressed to maintain the kind of international military presence it now has.

Pessimism

WHILE in many respects Jacksonian Americans have an optimistic outlook, there is a large and important sense in which they are pessimistic. Whatever

through Britain, to all the corrupt movements and elites of the Old World, is relentlessly plotting to destroy American liberty is an old but still potent one. The Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Bilderbergers, the Bavarian Illuminati, the Rothschilds, the Rockefellers: these names and others echo through a large and shadowy world of conspiracy theories and class resentment. Should seriously bad economic times come, there is always the potential that, with effective leadership, the paranoid element in the Jacksonian world could ride popular anger and panic into power.

Honor

ANOTHER ASPECT of Jacksonian foreign policy is the aforementioned deep sense of national honor and a corresponding need to live up to—in actuality and in the eyes of others—the demands of an honor code. The political importance of this code should not be underestimated; Americans are capable of going to war over issues of national honor. The War of 1812 is an example of Jacksonian sentiment forcing a war out of resentment over continual national humiliations at the hand of Britain. (Those who suffered directly from British interference with American shipping, the merchants, were totally against the war.) At the end of the twentieth century, it is national honor, more than any vital strategic interest, that would require the United States to fulfill its promises to protect Taiwan from invasion.

The perception of national honor as a vital interest has always been a wedge issue driving Jacksonians and Jeffersonians apart. The Jeffersonian peace policy in the Napoleonic Wars became impossible as the War Hawks grew stronger. The same pattern recurred in the Carter administration,

where gathering Jacksonian fury and impatience at Carter's Jeffersonian approaches to the Soviet Union, Panama, Iran and Nicaragua ignited a reaction that forced the President to reverse his basic policy orientation and ended by driving him from office. What Jeffersonian diplomacy welcomes as measures to head off war often look to Jacksonians like pusillanimous weakness.

Once the United States extends a security guarantee or makes a promise, we are required to honor that promise come what may. Jacksonian opinion, which in the nature of things had little faith that South Vietnam could build democracy or that there was anything concrete there of interest to the average American, was steadfast in support of the war—though not of the strategy—because we had given our word to defend South Vietnam. During this year's war in Kosovo, Jacksonian opinion was resolutely against it to begin with. However, once U.S. honor was engaged, Jacksonians began to urge a stronger warfighting strategy including the use of ground troops. It is a bad thing to fight an unnecessary war, but it is inexcusable and dishonorable to lose one once it has begun.

Reputation is as important in international life as it is to the individual honor of Jacksonians. Honor in the Jacksonian imagination is not simply what one feels oneself to be on the inside; it is also a question of the respect and dignity one commands in the world at large. Jacksonian opinion is sympathetic to the idea that our reputation—whether for fair dealing or cheating, toughness or weakness—will shape the way that others treat us. Therefore, at stake in a given crisis is not simply whether we satisfy our own ideas of what is due our honor. Our behavior and the resolution that we obtain must enhance our reputation—our prestige—in the world at large.

By contrast, although the Germans committed bestial crimes against civilians and POWs (especially Soviet POWs), their behavior toward the armed forces of the United States was more in accordance with American ideas about military honor. Indeed, General Erwin Rommel is considered something of a military hero among American Jacksonians: an honorable enemy. Still, if the Germans avoided exposure to the utmost fury of an aroused American people at war, they were nevertheless subjected to the full, ferocious scope of the violence that a fully aroused American public opinion will sustain—and even insist upon.

For the first Jacksonian rule of war is that wars must be fought with all available force. The use of limited force is deeply repugnant. Jacksonians see war as a switch that is either “on” or “off.” They do not like the idea of violence on a dimmer switch. Either the stakes are important enough to fight for—in which case you should fight with everything you have—or they are not, in which case you should mind your own business and stay home. To engage in a limited war is one of the costliest political decisions an American president can make—neither Truman nor Johnson survived it.

The second key concept in Jacksonian thought about war is that the strategic and tactical objective of American forces is to impose our will on the enemy with as few American casualties as possible. The Jacksonian code of military honor does not turn war into sport. It is a deadly and earnest business. This is not the chivalry of a medieval joust, or of the orderly battlefields of eighteenth-century Europe. One does not take risks with soldiers’ lives to give a “fair fight.” Some sectors of opinion in the United States and abroad were both shocked and appalled during the Gulf and Kosovo wars over the way in which American forces attacked the enemy from

the air without engaging in much ground combat. The “turkey shoot” quality of the closing moments of the war against Iraq created a particularly painful impression. Jacksonians dismiss such thoughts out of hand. It is the obvious duty of American leaders to crush the forces arrayed against us as quickly, thoroughly and professionally as possible.

Jacksonian opinion takes a broad view of the permissible targets in war. Again reflecting a very old cultural heritage, Jacksonians believe that the enemy’s will to fight is a legitimate target of war, even if this involves American forces in attacks on civilian lives, establishments and property. The colonial wars, the Revolution and the Indian wars all give ample evidence of this view, and General William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea showed the degree to which the targeting of civilian morale through systematic violence and destruction could, to widespread popular applause, become an acknowledged warfighting strategy, even when fighting one’s own rebellious kindred.

Probably as a result of frontier warfare, Jacksonian opinion came to believe that it was breaking the spirit of the enemy nation, rather than the fighting power of the enemy’s armies, that was the chief object of warfare. It was not enough to defeat a tribe in battle; one had to “pacify” the tribe, to convince it utterly that resistance was and always would be futile and destructive. For this to happen, the war had to go to the enemy’s home. The villages had to be burned, food supplies destroyed, civilians had to be killed. From the tiniest child to the most revered of the elderly sages, everyone in the enemy nation had to understand that further armed resistance to the will of the American people—whatever that might be—was simply not an option.

With the development of air power and, later, of nuclear weapons, this long-

defeated foes. Not always disinterestedly, GIs in Europe were passing out chocolate bars, cigarettes and nylon stockings before the guns fell silent. The bitter racial antagonism that colored the Pacific War rapidly faded after it. Neither in Japan nor in Germany did American occupiers behave like the Soviet occupation forces in eastern Germany, where looting, rape and murder were still widespread months after the surrender.

In both Germany and Japan, the United States had originally envisioned a harsh occupation strategy with masses of war crimes trials and strict economic controls—somewhat akin to the original Radical Republican program in the post-Civil War South. But in all three cases, the victorious Americans quickly lost the appetite for vengeance against all but the most egregious offenders against the code. Whatever was said in the heat of battle, even the most Radical Reconstructionists envisioned the South's ultimate return to its old political status and rights. In the same way, soon after the shooting stopped in World War II, American public opinion simply assumed that the ultimate goal was for Germany and Japan to resume their places in the community of nations.

Not everybody qualifies for such lenient treatment under the code. In particular, repeat offenders will suffer increasingly severe penalties. Although many Americans were revolted by the harsh and greedy peace forced on Mexico (Grant felt that the Civil War was in part God's punishment for American crimes against Mexico), Santa Anna's long record of perfidy and cruelty built popular support both for the Mexican War and the peace. The pattern of frontier warfare, in which factions in a particular tribe might renew hostilities in violation of an agreement, helped solidify the Jacksonian belief that there was no point in making or keeping treaties with "savages."

In the international conflicts of the twentieth century, it is noteworthy that there have been no major populist backlashes calling for harsher treatment of defeated enemies. But when foreign enemies lack the good taste to surrender, Jacksonian opinion carries grudges that last for decades. Some of the roots of anti-China feeling in the United States today date back to mistreatment of American prisoners during the Korean War. U.S. food and energy aid to North Korea, indeed any engagement with that defiant regime at all, remains profoundly unpopular for the same reason. The mullahs of Iran, the assassins of Libya and Fidel Castro have never been forgiven by Jacksonian opinion for their crimes against and defiance of the United States. Neither will they be, until they acknowledge their sins.

In the case of the Cold War, the failure of the Soviet Union to make a formal surrender, or for the conflict to end in any way that could be marked as V-USSR Day, has greatly complicated American policy toward post-Cold War Russia. The Soviet Union lost the Cold War absolutely and unconditionally, and Russia has suffered economic and social devastation comparable to that sustained by any losing power in the great wars of the century. But because it never surrendered, Jacksonian opinion never quite shifted into magnanimity mode. Wilsonians, Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians all favored reconstruction support and aid; but without Jacksonian concurrence the American effort was sharply limited. Advice was doled out with a free and generous hand, but aid was extended more grudgingly.

This is far from a complete account of Jacksonian values and beliefs as they affect the United States. In economic as well as defense policy, for example, Jacksonian ideas are both influential and unique. Convinced that the prime purpose of government is to defend the living standards

Southerners whose grandfathers burned crosses against the Catholic Church now work very well with Catholics on all kinds of social, cultural and even religious endeavors, so we are seeing a steady erosion of the racial barriers. Even on issues of modernist art, Jacksonian America is moving. The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, once widely denounced by Jacksonians for its failure to include figurative sculptures, has now become one of the most visited and revered sites in the capital. On Memorial Day, thousands of leather-clad representatives of the Jacksonian culture visit it on their Harley-Davidsons, many of them accompanied by their wives riding pillion.

Jacksonian America performs an additional service: it makes a major, if unheralded, contribution to America's vaunted "soft power." It is not simply the Jeffersonian commitment to liberty and equality, the Wilsonian record of benevolence, anti-colonialism and support for

democracy, or even the commercial success resulting from Hamiltonian policies that attracts people to the United States. Perhaps beyond all these it is the spectacle of a country that is good for average people to live in: where ordinary people can and do express themselves culturally, economically and spiritually without any inhibition. The consumer lifestyle—and the consequences of federal policy to enrich the middle class and make it a class of homeowners and automobile drivers—of the United States wins the country many admirers abroad. For the first time in human history, millions of ordinary people have enough money in their pockets and time on their hands to support a popular culture that has more resources than the high culture of the aristocracy and elite. This culture is what hundreds of millions of foreigners love most about the United States, and its dissemination makes scores of millions of foreigners feel somehow connected to or even part of the



Memorial Day, on the way to the Vietnam Wall.

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