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**Conceptualising and historicising the US foreign policy establishment in a racialised class structure**

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“Conceptualising and Historicising the US Foreign Policy Establishment in a Racialised Class Structure”. *Mark Ledwidge/Inderjeet Parmar*

**Abstract:**

In recent years critical scholars of U.S. foreign policy have challenged the mainstream paradigm that fails to account for the racial dimensions of international relations. This article introduces a conceptual and historical analysis of the US foreign policy establishment that posits race and racism at its centre. While alluding to conventional theories of American power such as pluralism and statism, the article also highlights classical Marxism’s failure to acknowledge that US exceptionalism and racism conjoined in a manner that conferred a racial dimension to class politics. The article argues that the U.S. foreign policy establishment has been presided over by an elite or ruling elite; and irrespective of challenges from below, increasing diversity, or the insistence that America is a meritocratic classless society, the U.S establishment is at heart, elitist, racialised and generally Anglo-centric. The article identifies links between the racial dimensions of U.S. foreign policy and the identity profile of the power elite. The paper extends and critiques C. Wright Mills’ definition of the power elite by mapping its racial dimension. Finally the article argues that although the election of Obama represented a more inclusive and cosmopolitan version of the establishment, Obama’s presence has helped to consolidate the status quo as the structural constraints on the executive branch and symbolism associated with the election of the first African-American president has generally silenced the Left and quietly fostered the suggestion that an unconventional identity profile will not necessarily result in the change we can believe in.

Key words: racial identity; cosmopolitanism; foreign policy establishment; Anglo-centric; US power elite

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One of the core concerns of this article and indeed this special issue on Elitism and American Power is to present new insights regarding the character of American power. While IR specialists provide coherent and competent accounts regarding the substance of America's foreign policy, all too often the character and socio-politics of who actually constructs U.S. foreign policy is neglected (Ledwidge, 2013). This article entwines two important but currently marginal strands of foreign affairs scholarship. The article advances and builds on the contention of C. Wright Mills and G. William Domhoff that elitism represents a central pillar of the American polity, and argues that the substance of U.S. foreign policy is impacted by the existence of a racialised class system. As an aside it is important to mention that while ethnicity is mentioned in the article the core emphasise is race and racialization whereby racialization 'refers to a social and political process of inscribing group affinity and difference primarily onto the body...as well as on others markers of lived experience' (Vucetic, 211, 7). In short the article maintains that throughout American history the black

and white paradigm has served as the primary popular marker in regard to defining notions of superior and inferior (Plummer, 2013, 11) as opposed to ethnicity or even class.

This article suggests without having the luxury to untangle them that race and ethnicity actually represent two distinct categories where race is associated with alleged hereditary traits while ethnicity is defined along the axis of culture (Winant et al, 1994,). Thus we maintain that race has played the definitive role in determining “who governs” and who gets to formulate policy within the foreign affairs context. The first section of this article highlights the importance of power as defined in its various guises within the context of American politics. Secondly, the article examines both the strengths and deficiencies of American political culture. Thirdly, the article briefly discusses and critiques the mainstream and marginalised theories of American power. Finally, the article confirms the existence of an American elite class that has for the majority of American history been generally male and WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) but over time has been extended to include *ethnic whites* and white women and now presumably blacks into an ideological value laden political network.

### **What is Power?**

In reality, power, and its exact characteristics is a complex and difficult concept to understand. In regards to American power the ideological foundations of the American creed presents problems for scholars of American political culture, as all too often scholars appear to accept at face value the rhetorical aspects of American exceptionalism. Here the Constitution the Bills of Rights and Liberal Democracy are credited as creating an evolutionary society where merit, individualism, equality and liberty represent the corner stones of American power (Lipset, 1996). One might say that the foremost power of the American Creed is its ability to propagate myths regarding the socio-political dynamics of American society. Given America’s emergence as an immigrant nation primarily populated by Europeans, America has constructed a mainstream American identity that is white. However American society has demonstrated the ability to respond to competitive realignments both from below and above yet still retain Euro-American hegemony (Ledwidge, 2011, Parmar et al, 2014). Disturbingly or not the construction of the premier

American identity and the legitimate parameters of American power were formulated by the Founding Fathers (Ledwidge et al, 6).

Right from America's inception the founders were concerned with power as early debates regarding the preferred parameters of the American republic involved debates regarding the founders' factional preferences related to the articulation and the construction of the structural instruments of a federalist form of government that combined elements of both elite and popular democracy (Shubert et al, 2014; Milkis, et al, 2008; Nelson et al, 2010). Despite evidence to the contrary scholars and lay persons buy into the belief that the American political system's structural features such as the Separation of powers, Federalism and the existence of some social and economic mobility demonstrates that America has a fluid social order where power is not concentrated within any institutional structures or social groupings.

### **Identity as Power**

Although individualism is presented a core facet of U.S. society, an individual is also defined by their group identity. Consequently it is important that we acknowledge the importance of group identity in relation to the creation of the socio-political boundaries that determine policy outcomes and provide the basis for individual actors, groups and the institutions they inhabit to make decisions. According to David Mislan, 'Social identity theory is a behavioural approach that places identity at its center...Identity is a powerful tool for understanding foreign policy decision making and international relations' (Mislan, 2013, 17). While, it is true that US foreign policy specialists have addressed the subject of race and U.S. foreign policy one would be hard pressed to argue that race has assumed a central place within IR and or political science or foreign affairs literature. Indeed Vitalis claims that 'white supremacy is not generally discussed either as a historical identity of the American state or an ideological commitment on which the "interdiscipline" of international relations is founded' (Schmidt et al, 205, 106). While historians may have covered more ground in relation to race and foreign affairs given the age of the discipline in the U.S. and it's scope the issue is still relatively marginal within the discipline of history. Suffice to say the realities of American identity politics are still marginal to mainstream literature pertaining to American power (Ledwidge, 2013). This failure contravenes the central narrative of the

Obama phenomenon, which underlines his racial or ethnic differentiation from the previous forty-three presidents as being a key transformative factor that was supposed to culminate in “Change that we could believe in” (Scott-Smith, 2012).

The significance of identity and the group competition that is related to identity politics lies in their use in the construction of ideological categories that can produce hierarchical social groupings that allow for the construction of specific power relations. With that said we should expect to find tangible hierarchical and ideological structures in relation to American politics at home and abroad. Additionally the historical and contemporary evidence shows that persons whose identity profile is noticeably different from the mainstream identity profile such as Obama would be subjected to increased scrutiny and suspicion due to their outsider status (Mazama, 2012; Vucetic, 2011). Thus the intensity of the questions in regard to Obama’s perceived and his actual competence (Singh, 2012) reflects the bias of U.S. society. Indeed even the emergence of the Tea party during Obama’s tenure raises questions regarding the unconscious and conscious bias associated with a president who some see as a threat to the status quo and Euro-Americans’ monopoly on political power (Parmar, et al, 2014). The fact that some Americans perceive the Obama presidency as an anomaly is hardly surprising as throughout American history the mainstream model for American identity has been exemplified by the racial, ethnic and elite, class identity of the Founding Fathers (Shubert, et al, 2014).

Simply put, the Founding Fathers’ British identity provided a hegemonic lens through which a nativist and Anglo-centric identity profile was embedded into the socio-cultural foundations of mainstream American identity (Ledwidge, et al, 2014). To some it is not an accident that despite the increasing diversity within the hierarchical structure of U.S. society, America’s key institutions within government, business and the military have been and are overwhelmingly staffed by Americans whose ancestors came from Europe (Mazama, 2012). The historical evidence indicates that America’s power elite has had a Wasp profile (Parmar, 2012). Of course due to challenges from below from 1900 onwards the American elite class has had an increasing awareness of alternative projections of U.S. foreign policy and has over time become more diversified (Ledwidge, 2013). The debate revolves around how much credence one gives to individual and group agency versus the imposition of rigid ideological but at times seemingly fluid ideological and hierarchical social

filters that function as gatekeepers that determine who enters the corridors of power within America's key institutions. Of course the immense soft power credentials of the American Dream and the American Creed suggest that irrespective of the failings of U.S. society with hard work one's identity should not prevent one from replicating the type of social mobility that is exemplified by the rise of Obama (Scott-Smith, 2012). While the phenomenal success of Obama does not exemplify the options available to most African Americans, American society seems to provide forms of social mobility that is rarely comparable to European or other societies. Nonetheless not all-social groupings have been given equal access to ascend to the lofty heights of American society in regard to the accumulation of wealth and power (Domhoff, 2006; Mills, 2000). To summarise, one's identity can confer both advantages and disadvantages in American's quest for power and legitimacy. Suffice to say identity can assume a form of power, which confers status and which can aid in the accumulation of both political and economic power (Wilson, 1998).

This article argues that race, class and ethnicity have and currently represent symbols of ideological and material power, which help determine who is considered as worthy to construct U.S. foreign policy. Another example of ideological power is the manner in which mainstream US foreign policy scholarship presents a sanitized view of American power (Krenn, 2006; Hunt, 1987; Vucetic, 2011; Plummer, 2013; McCarthy, 2009) whereby the liberal views associated with American internationalism assumes that America's actions are generally benign. Overall the racialised, ethno-centric class and gendered power relations *of American power* are obscured, neglected or overlooked by IR and political scientists to our detriment as it distorts understanding. Alternatively some academics may be less than willing to critically evaluate U.S. foreign policy due to a variety of factors related to their careers and their interactions with government officials or due to their pursuit of funding from powerful think tanks and foundations (Parmar, 2012). Hence scholars must acknowledge that the production of knowledge does not occur within a neutral context and neither do critiques of the commonly held views go unnoticed or occur without consequences. Academics are subject to numerous constraints derived from their inter personal contacts and social mores which can shape and constrain their perceptions of what is considered important or what ideas they are willing to propagate within the public arena.



Unsurprisingly, given the widespread claim that the U.S. is a popular democracy, Elitism does not figure prominently in IR or political science literature. In brief in America the possession of a high socio-political or economic status is deemed to derive from the possession of superior traits evidenced from one's education, wealth or character, all of which conform to the narrative that America is a meritocracy (Shubert et al, 2014). Unfortunately it would appear that most scholars of American politics, IR and American historians have not authored sufficient interdisciplinary texts that address the intersectionality that exists between racial power, Elite theory and the construction and execution of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore the elitist and racial tendencies that operate on an individual, group and institutional level; require further exploration regarding the staffing profiles of the U.S. government, corporations and the foreign policy establishment (Ledwidge, 2011).

### **American Political Culture and Theories of American Power**

This section suggests that our theoretical toolbox pertaining to American power needs to be carefully reassessed. Theoretical analysis does not appear in a vacuum; theories are derived from specific cultural constructs and an attendant set of values and norms. Hence, academics and intellectuals are also subject to erecting their theories on the basis of said values and norms. In brief the foundational myths and related values have been propagated to the extent that it is difficult to disentangle fact from theory. It is also worth noting the tacit implication that America's domestic values are also expressed within its foreign policy (Ledwidge, 2012; Hunt, 1987).

While the substance of U.S. foreign policy is important the people who construct it reflect the power dynamics of American politics (Lang, 2012;Plummer, 1996). Thus it is imperative that the discussion concerning identity is not separated from our discourse on power in order to illuminate the connections between identity and power within the American polity. Whether we are discussing governments or mundane interactions between people at a rudimentary level, power relations help determine outcomes regarding who is given license to act and in relation to who gets what. Indeed Savigny and Marsden indicate in *Doing Political Science and International Relations* the importance of the concept of power in relation to Politics and IR (Savigny et al, 2011, 43). Marsden and Savigny draw on the work

of Steven Lukes and his seminal work, *Power: a Radical View*, which questions Dahl's conception of power (Savigny et al, 2011, 44).

Dahl's mainstream theory presents a base level model that assumes that the most influential group will be able to exercise their power by group 'A having power over (group) B to the extent that A can get B to do something they would not otherwise do' (Savigny et al, 2011, 44). Dahl's thesis reinforces key facets of the American creed and upholds some of America's core ideals such as fair play and the use of legitimate means to win power. Sadly a study of American history would present a less romanticised version of American power that would have to include the coercion and force that has characterised both historical and contemporary events in the USA (Yvette, 1971; Wilson, 1998; Jones et al, 2013).

Conversely, the work of Bachrach and Baratz suggests that 'personal or group power is manifest to the extent that a person or group - consciously or unconsciously - creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts' (Savigny, 2011, 45). It is evident that U.S. foreign policy is relatively shielded from public scrutiny by drawing on the narratives of national security, expertise and patriotism in order to insulate foreign policy from the electorate who are assumed to lack the ability to understand foreign affairs. Aside from notions of expertise, one can argue that throughout U.S. history the architects of foreign affairs have demonstrated differential behaviour by prioritising the interests of Western or white nations in accordance with stated or unstated notions of race (Vucetic, 2011; Plummer, 1996; Parmar et al, 2014). It is evident that in the case of African Americans' efforts to point out the racial dynamics of U.S. foreign policy (between 1900 and 1968, at least), the U.S. government sought to neutralise and or modify their criticism regarding the racial dimensions of U.S. foreign policy (Ledwidge, 2012). It is apparent then that part of American power is the unique way in which the real and imagined libertarian aspects of American society are used to mask the structural and group inequalities that have been an enduring factor of America's political history (Wilson, 1995). Still it is also true that America has promoted political reforms as a means of maintaining political stability and absorbing soft-core critics of the status quo like Obama into the ranks of the establishment.

### **Theories of American Power**

One could argue that theories such as pluralism and statism are prioritised over Marxism or elitism, while theories of race are virtually ignored in regard to foreign affairs analysis (Jones et al, 2006;Chowdhry et al, 2005;Long, et al, 2005). Given that pluralists maintain that power in the United States is diffuse and that any organised group has the potential to pursue or meet their interests; it has been argued that entry into the foreign policy establishment is based on merit, derived from expertise, intellect, and one's educational background. Indeed pluralists would argue 'that in the U.S. competitive groups are presented with broadly equal opportunities to vie for their interests.... In short, pluralists would contend that 'racial and ethnic factors ... [would] ... play no role at all in the distributive process, either positive or negative...Pluralism would predict that one group would not dominate foreign policy' (Ledwidge, 2012, 16). However pluralists' depiction of American society does not acknowledge the lasting tradition of racial power in regard to the treatment of non-white nations and the historic racialized staffing profile of the foreign policy establishment.

An alternative approach assumes that the American state apparatus is responsible for determining U.S. foreign policy. Statists argue that the state's strategic position in regard to the domestic and international arenas provides it with sufficient power to bend foreign and domestic issues to its own agenda. In brief 'The special position of the state in foreign policy consists....in the formal and informal obligations that the President and State Department in particular, are charged with to further the 'national interest.' The President and State Department are highly insulated... 'From specific societal pressures,' and therefore...enjoy a high level of autonomy in establishing goals and promoting policies for their realisation' (Parmar, 1995, 76). Statist Theory maintains the preferences of state actors are central to determining both outcomes and the character and by extension the substance of U.S. foreign policy. The fact that the offices of the presidency and the State Department do not have a tradition of racial diversification reflects the fact that Euro-American power elite has dominated the state apparatus (King, 1997).

While America's core interests are always a pertinent factor, one could argue that concepts such as the Anglosphere and Western racial supremacy were employed as ideological tools designed to limit and discourage military conflicts between white nations. It has been suggested that the termination of Native Americans, Slavery and the internment of

Japanese Americans in WWII and Truman's use of two atomic bombs on Japan; and the scorched earth tactics employed during the Vietnam War illustrates how racism facilitates non-whites becoming the recipients of more aggressive action within the domestic and international context (Krenn, 2006; Hunt, 1987; McCarthy, 2009). It would be instructive to reflect on the ethno-cultural, religious and racial dynamics of the War on Terror. One could argue the Bush administration's use and defence of torture and prolonged imprisonment at Guantanamo Bay and the massive loss of civilian lives in the respective populations as exemplifying a history of employing repressive military tactics against people of colour. Likewise the Obama administration's proliferation of drone technology and his foreign policy in regard to the Muslim world is still interpreted by some authors of maintaining a less overt but evident cultural, civilizational and racial bias (Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam, 2015).

It is clear that in general the foreign policy establishment has possessed an upper class accent and has had a geographical identity that incorporated rich or networked White males from the East coast (Mills, 2000). The construction of US foreign policy has generally been shielded from the mechanisms of popular democracy (Singh, 2003, 274; Dumbrell, 1990, 53); which has ensured from the government's perspective that the institutional mechanisms of the executive branch have kept US foreign policy under the tutelage of an educated elite. While it is good that some scholars acknowledge the existence of an East coast establishment we need to assess whether the identity profile of the establishment has helped to create sound and effective foreign policies.

### **Elitism**

Elite theory is a significant but under-utilised model of American power that is advanced by Louis Schubert, Thomas Dye and Harmon Zeigler in the *Irony of Democracy an Uncommon Introduction to American Politics*. Schubert et al maintain that America is and has always been an elitist society (ibid, 2014, 1) but they argue that 'elite theory is not a normative endorsement of elite rule, nor is it an automatic dismissal of it' (ibid, 2014, 1). The Founding Fathers, who were elites themselves, constructed a society that was inherently elitist. Dye also briefly acknowledges the existence of class and racial lines in the founders' new political experiment. Schubert et al indicate that the elite can be found at the head of key

institutions and perform the function of participating 'in the decisions that allocate resources for society'.... The irony of Democracy...[also]... recognises that the American brand of elitism is fluid and provides for the 'circulation of elites...[via the inclusion]...of talented and ambitious individuals from the lower strata into the elite' (ibid, 2014, 50). The fluidity of the system also allows the elites to absorb new social groups and helps to contextualise the rise of Obama. While Dye et al present an accurate depiction of the elite class they don't clearly indicate that elitism lends itself to creating major power inequalities that can result in the construction of ethnocentric and narrow foreign policies.

### **The Power Elite**

For writers such as G. William Domhoff and C. Wright Mills, the insistence that American society is a meritocracy contravenes their own theories of American power.

While the debate regarding the existence of a power elite is contentious, its premise is sound. However it is important that contemporary scholars reassess the established boundaries of the power elite. At base level Mills argued that 'no one...can be truly powerful unless he has access to the command of major institutions' (Mills, 2000, 9). Mills also indicated that entry into the power elite is determined via acceptance into the social circles of the elite and due to the possession of the required traits (Mills, 2000). Mills pointed out that the elite are of 'similar social type [which facilitates]...their easy intermingling'. Given the historic and contemporary practices of drawing from a limited socio-political and ideological group to staff the foreign policy establishment, then the racial and ethnic composition of the establishment is bound to be limited. That is the politicians, corporate executives and military personnel that comprise and define the boundaries of the elite reflect the cultural, ethnic and racial biases of U.S. society. Hence it is imperative that we recognise that America's power elite has also been organised along racial and ethnic lines. Taken from other another perspective, the power elite, while not completely homogeneous, has conceivably operated in regard to relatively narrowly defined ethno-centric group interests (Wilson, 1998). Domhoff is more explicit in outlining the group basis and potential group benefits bestowed on the power elite as he states;

*'the ability of a class to prevail begins in one of the four major networks – economic, political, military and religious- which can be turned into a strong organizational base for wielding power'(Domhoff, 2006, 12).*

Clearly the foreign policy establishment has defined its actions as protecting American interests; however its central position as a hub that straddles business interests both domestic and foreign, and the military industrial complex, inevitably provide major opportunities for its members to obtain wealth, power and prestige. Once viewed in-group terms any group or groups, which succeed in maintaining a hegemonic hold on the aforementioned institutions, would seek to or by default impede the entry of outsiders. Given that 'Elites in the United States are drawn disproportionately from wealthy, educated...and socially prestigiously employed, and socially prominent elements of society' (Schubert et al, 2014, 3) then Euro-Americans would be over-represented in the elite class and one would expect the existence of both racial and class bias in the foreign policy establishment. The evidence indicates that 'historically...[American]... elites were overwhelmingly European American (or white), Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, and male although it is clear today that the demographic diversity of the elite is changing significantly' (ibid, 2014, 3). Of course the level of real diversification within the establishment is not as significant, as Schubert and Dye maintain.

### **The WASP Paradigm**

While the racial identity of members of the foreign policy establishment has been duly noted, historically America's power elite have had a strong but at times seemingly unassuming ethnic component which Huntington calls the 'Anglo-Protestant core' (Huntington, 2004, 59) which has shaped its agenda and worldview alongside concerns over race. The significance of the WASP is highlighted by Srdjan Vucetic who identifies the cultural and linguistic dominance of the Anglo-sphere 'centred first on London and then on Washington DC. The Anglo-sphere has dominated international politics of the world for the past 200 years...its agents – companies, empires, states, nations – colonised and industrialised large swathes of the planet and moved millions of its inhabitants often by force' (Vucetic, 2011, 3). Rather than just being white, the establishment has favoured Britain and France over Germany and has executed a racial and ethnic worldview of foreign affairs (Vucetic, 2011). While demographic changes have given rise to other ethno-racial

groups' ideas, WASP imperatives have generally been legitimised as representing the "national interest" (Parmar et al, 2009).

While whiteness was/is important, being an ideological card carrying WASP has been an essential facet to ensure entry into the political class, while there is no evidence that the foreign policy establishment has actively sought to recruit African-Americans and non-whites. Where non-whites have been granted entry into the establishment, their political views mirror the views of the established order (Ledwidge, 2014). Still it would be inaccurate to assume that WASPs have completely dominated both the construction and execution of U.S. foreign policy, as during the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a cosmopolitan ideal challenged Anglo-Saxon model dominance and led to the ascendancy of a more inclusive model of American power and legitimised the adoption of a multi-ethnic American identity.

Suffice it to say discussions of the establishment do at times acknowledge the class or gender dynamics of the US establishment but Euro-American hegemony status is validated by U.S. history (Wellman, 1977; Hacker, 1992; Ledwidge, 2009). A white skin *in addition to WASP attributes* have legitimised Euro-American dominance over America's key institutions (Cross, 1987; Ture, 1992). Hence racial identity has served as informal entry criteria regarding the identity profile of the individuals recruited into the foreign policy establishment. Given the racial biases of American society the racial composition of the foreign policy establishment has reflected the realities of America's racial politics. Hence it is logical to characterise the foreign policy establishment, as being a racialized power elite whose relative influence is determined by events and historic currents. Here the racialized state model of American power argues that despite the election of Obama, WASPs are still a predominant force in US politics and that a WASP elite has dominated U.S. society, in government and in the private sector in America; in addition the U.S. state has advanced racialized foreign policies. Thus America's foreign policy should be assessed in regard to racial bias (Ledwidge, 2012, 18). This theory sees African Americans in particular as a racialized colony whereby the dominant Euro-American culture has consciously or unconsciously stifled their entry into the corridors of power, which includes the foreign policy establishment (Ledwidge et al, 2014, 5). Indeed, Wilson maintains that 'white America strictly and stringently controls entry and naturalisation of outsiders within its

boundaries' (Wilson, 1998, 142). Although the election of Obama seems to refute the idea of entrenched racial power within the U.S. government, from a liberal standpoint the incorporation of select non-whites provides numerous benefits in relation to U.S. soft power. At best the level of scrutiny of, and death threats aimed at, Obama and the acute criticisms of his foreign policy and his stalwart supporters indicate that his tenure as president speaks to partial acceptance and the rejection of an African American head of state.

## **Marxism**

*The Marxist Theory* presents an economic account of history, which contends that socio-political conflicts stem from class conflict. In general Marxists of all persuasions claim that the prime site of conflict is over the 'ownership and control over the means of production and the distribution of the fruits of the productive process' (Parmar, 1995, 11). Given that Marxist analysis supports a revolutionary struggle Marxism has understandably garnered an enduring tradition of suspicion amongst state actors. Another problem regarding Marxism is the failure to present its full compliment of ideas, such as Marx's view that the ruling class utilises both ideas and culture to promote the production of a false reading of the concealed power dynamics of the alleged class war, and the maintenance of a false consciousness amongst the exploited classes. Here scholars must acknowledge that Marxist theory is not limited to the work of Marx only but is an expansive and adaptive theory of power.

Marxism's relevance is augmented by the fact that the economic exploitation of African-Americans could be explained via a class as opposed to a racial analysis, as Marxism contends that *the capitalist class controls the state. Given 'African-Americans' inferior economic or class status, Marxists would predict that their role in relation to foreign policy decisions would be minimal'* (Ledwidge, 2013, 18). Marxism's contention that class not race is the central feature of African American oppression is controversial and contrary to most African American scholars organic analyses of American power.

## **Marxist Class Analysis vs. Race**

The debate regarding the (either or) predominance of race versus class has some merit but often obscures the fact that both conceptualisations present important critiques of



American power that provide theorists' with the means to decode the inequalities that exist in the USA. It is clear that the increased diversification of the power elite occurred as a consequence of the rise of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and the ideological requirements of the Cold War. Hence Jews, women and ethnic whites were incorporated into the foreign policy establishment. Still whilst the massive strides of African-Americans' struggle to assert their human rights brought notable successes (politically, culturally, socially and economically), it has not succeed in creating a level playing field for African-Americans (King et al, 2011). Still paradoxically William Julius Wilson (writing in 1978) pointed to *The Declining Significance of Race*.

### **The Wilson Conundrum**

Wilson's controversial thesis argued that 'after World War II... economic class gradually became more important than race in determining the individual life chances of African American's' (Wilson, 2012, 185). Despite outward appearances Wilson's argument is nuanced as he argues in his preface that he does not 'subscribe to the view that racial problems are necessarily derived from the more fundamental economic class problems' (Wilson 2012, ix). One might surmise the apparent triumphs of the 1960s might have encouraged Wilson's optimism. Still even today Wilson's notion that in America 'one's economic class position determines in major measure one's life chances' (Wilson, 2012, ix) is not without merit. Nor could anyone deny that since the 1960s the African-American community has become more stratified in relation to class. Nonetheless the problem with the Marxists' and Wilson's contentions regarding the primacy of class is that Euro-Americans have been and still possess superordinate status as America's elite class. Even after the post 1960s legal reforms, the structural power of the white majority within and without government was able to negate or failed to facilitate the redistribution of wealth which has culminated in a sizable portion of the African-American population assuming the position of a racial underclass (Jones, 2013). Although class is a factor in relation to the contemporary status of African-Americans, the historical legacy of white privilege is central to the marginal status of blacks in the construction of U.S... [Politics and including U.S.] ...foreign policy' (Ledwidge, 2013, 174). From a rational perspective, African Americans' exclusion from the power elite cannot in the American context be disentangled from the ideological and institutional power of American race relations. Ultimately, Marxism fails to acknowledge

that race is a primary determinant of blacks' individual and group position in the socio-politics of America and the western world's power paradigm. While it is important that scholars acknowledge the recent improvements in the staffing of the establishment, the inclusion of small numbers of non-whites does not equate to the ending of white privilege as increased diversification can provide the appearance of equality whilst still maintaining the racial status quo.

### **The Case for Improvements**

Although African-Americans have been active in foreign affairs since 1900, their entry into the foreign policy establishment has been limited, but has improved in regards to cabinet positions in recent years. For example Bill Clinton appointed nine African-Americans (in 8 years), while G. W. Bush appointed Colin Powell as the first African American Secretary of State and Condi Rice as the first African American National Security Adviser, who also served as Secretary of State. Significantly President Bush appointed six African-Americans to top positions in his cabinet over eight years. However the first African American president has come under fire for failing to emulate his predecessors.

As the chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus said, she is 'concerned that President Obama has not yet appointed African-Americans to his second-term Cabinet'... Attorney General Eric Holder, appointed in Obama's first term, remains the Obama administration's only black Cabinet-level appointee. According to a recent Politics365 analysis, that's the fewest by any president over the last 38 years' (<http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/287437-black-caucus-concerned-about-few-blacks-in-cabinet#ixzz2PETBXD8o>). Whilst the emergence of Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and the election of Obama are indicative of African-Americans being incorporated into the establishment, the inclusion of African-Americans or other ethnic groups does not guarantee any real changes in U.S. foreign policy.

For example the Obama presidency has not introduced any major departures from Bush's foreign policy which lends credence to the Singh and Lynch thesis that prophesied limited changes after the Bush presidency (Singh et al, 2008); in addition there is no evidence that the ethnic and racial identities of Powell, Rice or Obama had any major impact on the alleged Clash of Civilisations associated with the war on terror. Although the rise of Obama

was coined as the new face of American power (Scott-Smith, 2012) that would facilitate the rebuilding of American Soft Power, it is hard to affirm such claims (Parmar et al, 2010). At this time neither Obama's identity nor his opposition to the war on Iraq or his cosmopolitanism have produced any real departures from the political status quo.

### **The Power Elite or Structural Impediments**

However the lack of change could be explained as a consequence of structural impediments. Also in regard to political appointments Obama's choices signalled continuity not change as he picked Joseph Biden as his vice president and Hillary Clinton as his secretary of state, both part of the Washington and foreign affairs establishment. One can also argue that the absence of change is compounded by the separation of powers and structural impediments as while a president can institute changes within the executive branch there are numerous factors that can stifle their ability to promote real and substantial changes (Ledwidge, 2014, 69). 'This is important as it points to the agency versus structure debate which in this case suggests that the possibility for sea changes between the Bush and Obama administration where compounded by the Bush legacy' (Ledwidge, 2014, 69). Simpler still Obama could have bought into the bi-partisan logic of the foreign affairs power elite, which despite party politics tends to execute foreign policy in a similar fashion.

In summary, it has been argued in *Obama and the World*, that Obama has not distanced his administration from the mainstream foreign affairs establishment both in relation to race or ethnicity or ideology (Ledwidge, 2014, 69). On a personal level it is possible that Obama is open to status anxiety. Here the public questions concerning Obama's racial and religious identity and his alleged allegiance to the causes of people of colour might have constrained any internal desires to promote real change within the domestic and the international context. Alternatively the astounding claims of Samuel Yette who wrote *The Choice*, might have some resonance in relation to Obama and the establishment's appropriation of talented blacks as Yette argued that the American system had three core objectives when appointing black talent '(1) to provide colour credibility wherever such credibility was crucial to selling an otherwise invalid product; (2) to neutralise such talent by taking it from potentially radical stations.... and placing it officially on the side of the establishment' (Yette, 1971, 43).

To conclude, the character of the American polity does limit the ability of presidents to secure major changes. In addition Obama's race may have made it harder to change U.S. foreign policy due to subtle and overt pressure to prove him-self worthy of the presidency. On the other hand it might be prudent to resist attributing Obama's relative conservatism solely to race.

Rather than assuming that Obama has sold out to the establishment it could be more instructive to argue that he has bought into the ideological assumptions and core practices of the foreign policy power elite. Note that Obama's ambition and his pragmatism may have influenced him to uphold the practices of the power elite. That is despite the conjecture concerning demographic changes, the establishment has a deeply embedded ideological framework that still defines the political parameters of America's national security framework. Therefore the change in the complexion of the president does not equate to cultural or political change as the ideological foundations of the power elite maintain their centrality as the organising principles of the establishment.

Parmar sums it up quite well by stating quite bluntly that, 'Obama's administration could fairly be labelled a hybrid Bush-Clinton third term' (Parmar, et al, 2014, 70). Given the structural and ideological power of the establishment and the national security power elite, the likelihood of any dramatic change in the latter part of the Obama's presidency is unrealistic. While one gives credit to the power elite and the executive branch for incorporating new ethnic or racial groups into government circles it has not really altered its worldview or its ideological moorings. The core precepts of U.S. foreign policy appear to extend beyond any particular administration and are not subject to major changes whether it is becomes more or less racially diverse.

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