

During the 1980s, Protestant and Catholic clergy and laity passionately opposed U.S. aid to the Nicaraguan contras and the repressive government of El Salvador—and their campaign had an impact on Capitol Hill. But the churches, Waldman notes, have not fired up “the same passion about issues confronting Americans at home,” such as conditions in America’s inner cities. Domestic policy, observes Sister Maureen Fieldler of the Quixote Center, a Catholic social action organization in Maryland, “doesn’t hold the glamour of Central America. You can’t go on a dele-

gation to the inner city.” Some members of the religious Left are involved in helping the inner-city poor—so deeply involved that they simply have no energy left over for political activism.

Secular liberals, Waldman argues, should help the religious Left to raise its voice again. The fact is, she says, that many of liberalism’s central values—“whether help for the downtrodden or support for peace—derive from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Liberals who disdain religion are inadvertently acting like embarrassed adolescents who shun their own parents.”

## FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE

### *Foreign Policy as Social Work*

“Foreign Policy as Social Work” by Michael Mandelbaum, in *Foreign Affairs* (Jan.–Feb. 1996); “In Defense of Mother Teresa: Morality in Foreign Policy” by Stanley Hoffmann, in *Foreign Affairs* (Mar.–Apr. 1996), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y.

The Clinton administration took office in 1993 with a distinctive vision of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy: that its purpose should be to promote American values by saving lives in such places as Bosnia, Somalia, and Haiti. Instead of basing foreign policy on American national interests and spelling out clearly what those interests now are, the administration tried “to turn American foreign policy into a branch of social work,” contends Mandelbaum, a professor at Johns Hopkins’ Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (and a 1992 Clinton supporter).

Three “failed military interventions” in the administration’s first nine months “set the tone and established much of the agenda” for Clinton’s foreign policy, Mandelbaum says. The plan “to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia’s Muslims and bomb the Bosnian Serbs” failed. In Somalia, an effort at nation building was abandoned when 18 U.S. Army Rangers died at the hands of a mob in Mogadishu. Then a U.S. ship carrying military trainers to Haiti turned back in response to demonstrations in Port-au-Prince.

Each of these abortive interventions, Mandelbaum notes, “involved small, poor, weak countries far from the crucial centers that had dominated foreign policy during the Cold War.” The goals were noble, but their connection to U.S. interests was

strained at best. The American public simply would not support them. (The public might, however, have been persuaded to back intervention in Haiti, he says, had it been presented simply as a U.S. “good deed in the neighborhood at manageable cost.”)

Despite occasional administration claims to the contrary, Mandelbaum argues, it remains possible to clearly define America’s national interests after the Cold War: maintain the military balance in Europe and in the Asia-Pacific region, prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, and encourage free trade—“the one [goal] the administration [has] best promoted and explained.”

Hoffmann, a Harvard historian, is also critical of the Clinton administration but disputes Mandelbaum’s central argument. The distinction between interests and values “is largely fallacious,” Hoffmann maintains. A great power has “an ‘interest’ in world order that goes beyond strict national security concerns,” and its “values” largely shape its definition of “order.” Unfortunately, he says, the Clinton administration “has been much too timid in defining and defending a foreign policy based on values and other requirements of world order,” in Haiti and elsewhere.

Some “carefully selected interventions in foreign domestic crises” are justified, Hoffmann contends. When there is a chance of stopping “genocide or war crimes on a colos-

## *The Illusion of Progress*

William Pfaff, a columnist for the *International Herald Tribune*, writing in *World Policy Journal* (Winter 1995–96), criticizes the rhetoric of progress in foreign policy.

National Security Adviser Anthony Lake has said that the United States must struggle against nationalists, “tribalists, terrorists, organized criminals, coup plotters, rogue states, and all those who would return newly free states to the intolerant ways of the past.”

Note that intolerance is of the past. It is the common argument of both Right and Left in Washington that international society is moving toward greater democracy (Freedom House keeping annual account of successes and slippages). Inevitability is imputed to this progress, and a foreign policy of promoting democracy is seen as not only an expression of America’s own values, which it is, but also as practical cooperation with a major historical trend with a security pay-off: political science has “discovered” that democracies do not fight one another. . . .

There is a moral and implicitly theological aspect to this, since in modern times the assumption that man is going someplace—which is to say, he will become better than he is now—has more often than not been the implied corollary to a belief that history is progress. . . .

Fundamental to the Enlightenment’s faith in human progress, as to the Western religious faith it largely replaced, has been a conviction that the forces shaping historical existence are essentially benign. . . . Those who threw themselves into the work of religion, reform, or revolution believed they were cooperating with history’s dominant forces and that eventually there would be a happy ending. . . .

I would myself propose that not only does no evidence exist of man’s collective moral progress but that none is to be expected. That a moral continuity has existed among men and women since the times of the Magdalenian cave painters and the Attic tragedians seems to me cause for a certain confidence. Our ancestors, the classical Greeks, identified humanity’s moral undertakings as Sisyphean—as they remain today, even if in this century we have attempted to deny it.

Some certainly may find in this view a counsel of despair, since if there is a moral constancy among men and women, through time, then the immense sacrifices that have gone into the effort to improve society might seem to have been a waste. I would argue that civilization has indeed progressed, for example, by installing and enlarging certain norms of disinterested international and national behavior (standards of human rights, law, and a structure of international law), but has done so without man’s essential change and without any automaticity in the historical process or security in what has been accomplished. The “retrogression” of the 20th century to barbarism in war and in the practices of totalitarian governments was not in fact retrogression, but discrete phenomena that may recur. Intolerance is not of the past.

sal scale,” there is a “moral duty” to act, and certain “political, economic, and social

breakdowns [are] too dangerous to world order to be ignored.”

## *Isolationism Forever?*

“Early Isolationism Revisited: Neutrality and Beyond in the 1790s” by Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, in *Journal of American Studies* (Aug. 1995), Cambridge Univ. Press, Journals Dept., 40 W. 20th St., New York, N.Y. 10011–4211.

“Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our

peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest,