THE STATIST PERSPECTIVE AND AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

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The United States did not inherit a centralized bureaucratic state from preindustrial and predemocratic times. Moreover, the dispersion of authority through the federal system, the division of sovereignty among branches of the national government, and the close symbiosis between segments of the federal administration and Congressional committees all help to ensure that state power in the twentieth century United States is **fragmented, dispersed, and everywhere permeated by organized societal interests.** The national government... lacks such possible underpinnings of strong state power as a prestigious and status-conscious career civil service with predictable access to key executive posts; authoritative planning agencies; direct executive control over a national central bank; and public ownership of strategic parts of the economy.

Theda Skocpol[1]

INTRODUCTION

It is quite odd that the debate over American exceptionalism has been narrowed down to the issue of why the United States [U.S.] has not developed a strong socialist tradition. The prime figure in this debate, Louis Hartz points to the historically-eminent influence of Lockean liberalism which stifled if not undermined the possible evolution of radical and class-based ideological

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[1] Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analy sis in Current Research," in Peter Evans **et.al.**, eds. **Bringing the State Back In** (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985)-p. 12. Undescoring supplied.

traditions in the U.S.[2] His protagonists have, of course, subjected Hartz to intense critical scrutiny. Those from the Left have particularly been zealous in their criticism asserting that the American political system has had a history marked by conflicts centered around class.[3]

While not disregarding the merits/demerits of this debate, the focussing of the debate over a single thematic issue seems to make them more and more uninteresting as it creates a constricting effect on what is otherwise a very interesting question. Moreover, the debates do some form of intellectual injustice to American exceptionalism as they do not appear to entertain the possiblity of looking at the issue from other theoretical and perhaps more meaningful perspectives. I believe it can be argued that there is more to the issue of exceptionalism than meets the liberal's and the socialist's eyes.

This essay is a preliminary attempt at contributing to the debate over American exceptionalism. But unlike most of those involved in the issue, it does not want to be restricted to just why socialism has no roots in America. Instead, it seeks to approach the issue from another perspective, i.e., culling from the diverse literature that statist scholars have developed and using these to look at why the American state remains weak domestically, this despite the rapid economic, political and even cultural strides it has achieved in this century.

This paper will avail of the "strong-society-weak state" paradigm developed by a number of scholars whose specialization is in investigating and

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[2] Louis Hartz, **The Liberal Tradition in America** (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953).

[3] Eric Foner. "Why there is no socialism in the United States," **History Workshop Journal** (May 1983). Earlier version of this paper was presented at the Conference of the same title, Centre d'Etudes Nord-Amercaine, Haute Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris.

re-investigating the nature of "Third World" strong states.[4] Hopefully, the general sketches presented in this essay will help provide a different insight that can further scholarly inquiry into the American national state.

This essay, however, is merely an exploratory thought piece. An inadequate personal knowledge of American politics has combined well with an equally deficient theoretical understanding of the rich statist literature to assert this self-imposed limitation. At best, this paper should be considered as a working draft from whence further explorations on the American state can be made.

STATIST SCHOLARSHIP AND THE AMERICAN NATIONAL STATE

Short may be its history, statist scholarship has gained considerable headway in establishing an academic tradition in the social sciences. Theda Skocpol's cogent review of statist scholarship shows us the extent to which scholars have tried to validate, critique or even invalidate the Weberian ideal of the state.[5] The statist framework has become a powerful framework in examining not only "First World" states but also their counter parts in the "Third World" as well as the rapidly disappearing "socialist world".

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[4] This paradigm will be elaborated in the next section of this essay. Of course statists have also sought to approach the ques tion of the weak American state from another direction, i.e., looking at the U.S. as a global hegemon and the relationship with its weak domestic state structure. But this will not be my main concern here. See Stephen Krasner. **Defending the National Interest: Raw Materials Investment and U.S. Foreign Policy** (New Jersey: Princeton University Prerss, 1978); see also another of his article, "US Commercial and Monetary Policy: Unravelling the Paradox of External Strength and Internal Weakness," in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., **Between Power and Plenty: Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States** (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 51-87.

[5] Theda Skocpol., "Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research," in **Bringing the State Back In, op.cit**, pp. 4-37.

Yet, in dealing with the American national state, statist scholars have always approached as a peculiar entity. The reasons are well-founded. Firstly, the concepts developed by statists to define powerful states do not seem to apply to the American national state.[6] The national state seems not only to have no autonomy from societal actors, its actions have been hindered and constrained by powerful "interest groups" that are deeply-rooted in society. Its structures are weak. It does not have a strategic core of officials who enjoy considerable vitality and "a unified sense of ideological purpose" to effect the projects and visions of a national state.[7] Even its coercive apparatuses are defused; conscription is restricted and the national army is a volunteer army. Moreover the military "shares" the legitimate use of violence with a host of other agencies (e.g., the National Guard) controlled by either the national state or the local states. This may not be necessarily true at the present, as some scholars have pointed to the evolution of a strong institutionally-based form of political conflict.[8] Nevertheless, the image of the American national state, a modern powerful state, continues not to accord well to the idea of a strong state that statists have laid down.

Secondly, in terms of its history, the U.S. is one of a few former colonies which has not only won its independence but has managed to even develop at a rate that superseded her former colonizer, England. American development did not only make it distinctive from its fellow ex-colonial regimes, its industrialization process in particular was marked less by sweeping *and lasting* state intervention. The U.S. did not witness what its fellow post-colonial

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6 **Ibid.**, p.6.

7 Alfred Stepan, **The State and Society: Peru in Comparative Perspectives** (New Jersey: Princeton University Press: 1978), Part 1; and, Hugh Heclo, **Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden**, (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1974).

8 See Benjamin Ginsberg and Martin Shefter, **Politics by Other Means: The Declining Importance of Elections in America** (New York: Basic Books Inc.: 1990). pp. 1-2, 16-31.

societies endured to industrialize and develop. She did not experience what countries like Brazil, Chile, South Korea and the Philippines underwent, i.e., the emergence of developmental-authoritarian states that ascribed to themselves the task of an industrial breakthrough.[9] In short, there was no strong American national sate that spearheaded the industrial take-off, so to speak. Liberal democratic politics, imperfect that it was, remained one of the stable foundations of American economic development.

And lastly, it must be carefully noted that 130 years or so would evolve before real attempts at building a national state were being made.[10] Only the vignettes of this national state could be seen before and during the post-bellum period. There was no national state elite; if ever there were such elites, their ability to exercise the powers of the state was constrained by the compromises they were forced to make with those controlling power in the local state levels.[11]

To what extent then is the statist framework a useful guide in understanding American exceptionalism?

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[9] Peter Evans and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. "The State and Economic Transformation: Towards an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervention," in Peter Evans et al., eds. **Bringing the State Back In, op.cit.** pp. 63-65. On Third World authoritarianism, specifically Latin America, see David Collier, ed., **The New Authoritarianism in Latin America.** (New Jersey: Princeton University Press. 1979).

[10] See for example the exceptional work of Stephen Skowronek, **Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920.** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Take note that Skowronek calls turn-of-the-century U.S.A. a "new American state."

[11] See for example, C. Vann Woodward. **Origins of the New South,** (Louisiana State University and the Little Fund for Southern History, University of Texas. 1971). pp. 350-368, 369-395.

PARADIGMATIC INSIGHTS FROM STATIST STUDIES ON THE "THIRD WORLD"

One major attribute that colonies-turned-nations seem to have in common is the remarkable malleability of their "civil societies" as they relate to their post-colonial national states. This has, of late, come to the attention of certain statists who have come out with initial understandings of the strong "Third World" state and discovered that this strength seems to be built on flaccid underpinnings. These scholars have recognized that states do not develop in a vacuum but in complex social environments which, in one way or the other, affect their formation. They must always be analyzed within the context of a societal formation and development that may have a longer history than the political infrastructure that has come to govern them.

In addition, these scholars argue that in the association between national state and the social community, the latter has exhibited an uncanny way of designing exceptional means to cope with, if not resist, the policies of their respective national states. They are also the modes by which societal forces could penetrate and "capture" portions of the state to suit their interests if not defend them.

The derivations of power of these civil societies can be considered as myriad in themselves. As mentioned above, the most conspicuous is their relatively longer histories as compared to the national states that politically enclosed them.[12] Most post-colonial societies have a heritage that predates the construction of the nation-state; some were parts of old empires, others were kingdoms. Their inclusion into the global economy under the aegis of

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[12] Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in Clifford Geerrtz, ed., **Old Societies and New States.** (New York: The Free Press, 1963), p. 154.

their respective colonial powers, did not wholly eliminate the heritage of the "older civilizations" from whence these societies were first organized. This historical characteristic of most post-colonial states becomes the basis for a *long-duree* that develops its own dyanmism; one that is even autonomous from the national state. This trait is transmitted historically in varied ways: from fables to written narratives, from ballads to other forms of group associate, from rites to abiding material symbols of identification.[13]

Moreover, the lengthly histories of these civil communities are strengthened by the variety of relationships that served as a social bond that keep their peoples together. These links may exist outside of the state and could also infiltrate and profoundly disperse themselves in state institutions and thus undermine state capacities. The social seal that bonds these web- like relations derives itself mainly from what scholars refer to as "primordial ties" like ethnicity and religion that develop, in turn, a remarkable pliancy, contrary to the assertions of modernization theorists.[14] In the face of severe dislocation brought about by changes in the political economies of nation-states, these pre-modern ties may play the role of social glues to keep people and communities together amidst the difficulties they encounter.

In certain societies these ties may even have undergone reinvigoration. In others, they may have been stifled but remain subliminally persistent only to burst at certain conjunctural points especially when society goes through a significant change.[15] These ties also provide the standards by which people and communities appraise both themselves and other arrangement outside

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[13] See Fernand Braudel. **On History**. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 25-54. For a long societal memory, Paul Connerton, **How Societies Remember**.(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 6-40.

[14] Geertz, **op.cit.**

[15] See for example, Michael Adas. **Prophets of Rebellion: Millenarian Protest against the European Colonial Order**. (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 114.

them. They constitute one, if not *the* criterion with which people and communities relate to such structures as the national state as an entity external to them. They also function as the social guideposts through which society penetrates the state to promote if not defend its own interests.[16] This "power" of post-colonial societies is said to be most manifest at the local levels of the state structure. It is at these layers that the national state is most liable to the penetration of social forces. Local "trenches" under the control of societal forces can act as influential factors in undermining the "national capacities" of states.[17]

While this societal filtering through of the state may be regarded as an apt description of certain "Third World" states, it appears that their stronger counterparts may not also be immune to this phenomenon. Scholars who have initially regarded certain authoritarian states as strong states have, in the light of the democratization processes that engulfed them in the eighties, began to re-think their positions.[18] The works of Vivienne Shue and Joel Migdal have singularly been most instructive in terms of determining the nature of social relations in levels below the national state that have the power to control the latter.

Shue argues that "web-like social relationships" fasten peasant communities together and are sources of community defense against the impositions of the Chinese state. And as one goes down the different layers of

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[16] See for example James C. Scott. **Weapons of the Weak: The Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance.** (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 340-350.

[17] See Merliee Grindle. **Bureaucrats, Politicians and Peasants in Mexico: A Case Study of Public Policy.** (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 160.

[18] For example, see Alfred Stepan, ed., **Authoritarian Brazil: Origins, Policies and Future.** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). Over a decade later most of the authors involved in the book began to reconsider their positions. See Alfred Stepan, ed., **Democratizing Brazil: Problems of Transition and Consolidation.** (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univesity Press, 1989), pp. xi-xiv, 45; 47-51.

the state structure, one finds the increasing influence of these relations. The State finds itself hampered by these relations and thus discovers a limit to its capacity to exact consent and compliance to its programs. In the end, the state is forced to scale down its own demands to suit that of these communities. Ultimately, the success or failure of the Chinese state's national projects depended on how the intended goals of these projects harmonize with the interests of these social relations.[19]

Migdal found the same web-like social relations permeating what was initially thought of as a strong state in Nasserite Egypt. He discerened that the national state's maintenance counted on the success or failure of its relations with local and regional "strongmen" who constitute the real sources of power and influence in civil society. The efforts of national state actors to break up the hold of these strongmen have largely failed forcing state leaders to enter into political compromises with them in order to achieve a modicum of success in their national administration.[20]

The bid of national state actors to eliminate these "strong societies" either through coercion or through education have not led to their thorough eradication. Shue refers to instances where Chinese leaders were forced to compromise with this "social intertextuality," suggesting the only alternative for the current Dengist state to ensure full success of socialism would be to obliterate these relationships. But, at the same time, to resort to coercion would risk the severe de-legitimization of the state. Migdal's book comparably suggests that destroying the strongmen's power base only created the occasion

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[19] Vivienne Shue, **Reach of the State: Sketches of the Chinese Body Politic.** (Stanford.: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 132-152.

[20] Joel S. Midgal. **Strong Societies, Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capacities in the Third World.** (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 33-41.

for new centers to grow within the national state that ultimately became threats to state leaders themselves.[21] In both counts, the national state is weakened and its capacity to exer cise autnomous state power undermined.

RECONSIDERATIONS OF THE AMERICAN NATIONAL STATE

To what extent can the "strong society-weak state" model help explain the exceptional character of the American national state? A broad historical sketch of the American polity may just provide us with a tentative answer.

Two major factors comprised the historical roots of the evolution of the American political system. First, there was the fact that there was no homogenous American colony to speak of. What became known as the "United States of America" was a tenuous coalition of settler-based "nations" and communities organized under the British imperial mantle. While as far back as the 1600s, these "nations" were already a part in the evolving English world maritime trade, the Crown's half-hearted opinion on the idea of overseas growth and the attitude of private expansionists that self-government was the most fitting in the colonies of the Empire, occasioned for the latter to evolve autonomously from the center.[22]

Second, as the frontier of Europe, the colonies geographic "emptiness" of the land became the source of appeal for a mishmash of alienated and

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21 Shue, Migdal, op.cit.

22 See Kenneth R. Andrews, **Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British Empire, 1480- 1630.** (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 11-17. On the eve of the revolution, part of the Boston trade was illegally conducted with the French. See Walter LaFeber. **The American Age: United State Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad since 1750.** (New York: W.W. Norton Co., 1989), p. 15.

suppressed sectors of European society from the religious, political and even to criminal rebels who endeavored to find a way out of the chaotic politics of Europe.[23] These "pilgrims" and other settlers recreated their lost utopia, built new utopians, or just created a haven for the repressed in America. And one of the strongest social links that they maintained were what Clifford Geertz calls "primordial ties," i.e., bonds such as ethnicity and religion. These became the gauge of how people would relate to each other socially and also politically; and one outcome of course was the emergence of a popular preference for a political organization that stressed localized sovereignty.

The geographic magnitude of this frontier also sustained the autonomous character of these settler communities qua local states. Whatever social, political, or cultural idea and ideal that was transported from Europe could further, if necessary, escape the reaches of the state (or states). People could just simply leave and re-establish their communities elsewhere in the empty horizons of the West. All these paved the way for the colonies to develop a certain autonomy to develop and sustain "indigenous" political and cultural processes, most of which were implants carried over by immigrants escaping state repression in Europe or seeking to re-establish their communal distinctiveness by recreating their memory in the "new land" of opportunity. As social historian Michael Zuckerman puts it:

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[23] See for example, Christopher Lasch, **The World of Nations: Reflections on American History, Politics and Culture.** (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1973), pp. 56-59. The world of the colonials have been the subject of interest by social historians. Among the more fascinating works are John Demos, **A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony.** (New York: Oxford University, 1970), and, Rhys Isaac, **The Transformation of Virginia: Community, Religion and Authority, 1740-1790.** (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), The resilient effects of religion as a social bond is shown in Paul Johnson. **A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837,** (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

> To the time of the American Revolution itself, each colony maintained its primary economic and cultural relations with England rather than with other colonies; and **each had also a separate sense of its own Americanness.** Few provincials felt a sense of common fate with Americans in other provinces, and no comprehensive conception of American singularity ever achieved wide currency before the final crisis (i.e., the Revolution). **Thus although it would be possible to trace the emergence in the eighteenth century of a sense of communal identity in the more densely settled areas of the British American colonies, the people who arrived at such a notion of self-awareness had come to think of themselves as Pennsylvanians or Virginians rather than as Americans.**[24]

Despite a "national" revolution, the process of state formation in the Weberian sense was never fully completed nor consolidated. American civil society's heterogeneity persisted even as the new "nation" was emerging. The revolution was, therefore, not a national revolution in the strictest sense of the phrase; rather, it was literally and metaphorically a revolution of smaller nation-states.[25] The federalist system that emerged from the struggle continued to abide by and reflect the pre-eminence of local sovereignty and this feature was to be legitimized by one of the most decentralized constitutions of the world today.[26]

These historical features of the American "nation" created under the foundations of a "strong society" (or "strong societies?") determined the

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[24] Michael Zuckerman, "Identity in British America: Unease in Eden," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden. **Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World**, 1500-1800. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 156-157. Underscoring mine.

[25] The term here referring to the coalition of states which fought the British with the temporal agreement that their resistance would not in any way undermine their respective autonomies. As Isaac Kramnick put it: "For many Americans, the Confederation was considered merely a temporary expedient required to wage war against Britain which would fade away with the coming of peace." See his introduction in James Madison, et al. **The Federalist Papers** (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 18.

[26] The case of Rhode Island is most classic. See Patric T. Conley, **Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island's Constitutional Development, 1776-1841.** (Providence: Rhode Island Historical

conduct of American politics for at least another 130 years or so. The fragility of the American nation-state was such that one can argue the existence of two nations up to the civil war (i.e., the north and the south) or even contend that what was then the "U.S.A." was a combination of smaller nation-states delicately merged by weak national institutions.[27] The sectional cleavages and other forms of political conflicts in the development of American politics reflected this local strength especially when it came into contact and confrontation with efforts by "nationalist" elites to unite the country and establish a consolidated national state.[28]

The American national state then was a structure that was thoroughly penetrated, influenced and even determined by the disparate social forces of this "strong society." National politics at least up to the turn of the century was identified by the clashes of "sectional sub-cultures," conflicts between "community and society," and disputes between "ethnocultural groups."[29]

Society, 1977), pp. 107-142. It was not that the American "Founding Fathers" did not seek to establish an "American nation"; it was just that their idea of it was premised on local state supremacy. For the majority of them, U.S. was to be a union of independent states. The replication of the Lockean individualist ideology in this "bourgeois fragment" of the Empire fused the ethnic ties and the sense of brotherhood engendered by religion glued the union culturally.

[27] Describing the civil war, Benedict Anderson cannot help but notice how pliant the national ties of the country were. He argues, "Even in the USA, the affective bonds of nationalism were elastic enough, combined with the rapid expansion of the Western frontier and contradictions generated between the North and South to precipitate a war of secession in almost a century after the declaration of independence." Benedict Anderson, **Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism** (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 50-65.

[28] See for example the effects of sectionalism on political development in Richard F. Bensel, **Sectionalism and American Political Development, 1880-1980.** (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

[29] Walter Dean Burnham, **The Current Crisis in American Politics,** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 96-100.

The instruments of these conflicts were the political parties. Unlike the parties in Europe and even in the "Third World" (especially the communist parties still seizing power), U.S. parties were/are distinct for the insignificant role played by class-based ideologies in their politics. And as Shefter has convincingly shown us, the parties were likewise not so much organizations fighting for a national purpose and aiming to "seize" power with a national agenda in mind, but rather, were political machines administered on the basis of a patronage system reflecting the diverse localist desires, aspirations and interests of these social forces. The absence of an ideology among the major parties, or rather the vagueness of their ideological positions, made it relatively easier for patronage to function. But it also undermined whatever potential there was for members and leaders of these parties to formulate and implement an agenda leading to the formation of a national state.[30]

The parties, in effect, functioned as the regional and local strongmen that maintained the strength of the web-like societal relations alluded to by Shue and Migdal. While the parties did aspire for control of national offices and were the prime examples of sectional and cross-sectional coalitions and alignments, they remained implanted to their "localized" interests. State leaders, even if they occupied a position that theoretically and officially represented the interests of the nation-state, discovered themselves compromising with these "strongmen." They, therefore, found their national projects constantly eroded by localists demands.

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[30] See Martin Shefter, "Party, Bureaucracy and Political Changes in the United States," in Louis Maisel and Joseph Cooper, eds, **Political Parties: Development and Decay.** (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1978), pp. 211-257. See also his "Trade Unions and Political Machines: The Organization and Disorganization of the American Working Class in the Later Nineteenth Century: in Ira Katznelson and Aristide Zolberg, **Working Class Formation: Nineteenth Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States** (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 197-278, A comparative study of European and American political parties can be found in Martin Shefter. "Patronage and Its Opponents: A Theory and Some European Cases," Western Societies Program, Occasional Papers No. 8, Cornell University, May 1977, pp. 5, 85- 88.

These attributes of the American party system helps us understand why the reform movements – the so-called percursors of a national aspiration and imagination – were forced to establish their presence outside of the parties. This also explains why the movements from the Progressive era and perhaps even up to the present had to fight the party machines. These movements were not merely struggles against corruption and patronage; they may also be seen as the purveyors and proponents of a stronger national state that could govern the nation and not just bow to the fancies of sectional, ethnic, class, etc. forces which the parties represented.[31]

Thus, from the independence period, and all throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, American politics was a radical "aberration" to the Weberian notion of a nation-state. Statist scholars seeking a Weberian state in America will have to confront this prolematique whose solution still remains elusive as ever.

EXCEPTIONALISM AND STATIST STUDIES ON THE UNITED STATES: A BRIEF REVIEW

A broad historical review of works by a number of American statist scholars shows that the "strong society-weak state" may be a paradigm worthy of consideration in determining the American national state. For one of the most highlighted conclusions of these scholars is the extent of societal penetration on the national state. Charles Bright's essay on the 19th century alludes to the weakness of the national state. To wit:

> Politicians and party managers, competing for offices and influence in the state, reproduced economic, social, and cultural antagonisms as politics and fought each other

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[31] The rise or fall of reform movements, however, indicate that the machines can fight back. See the classic case of an interminable conflict between party machine and reform movement in New York City in Martin Shefter, **Political Crisis, Fiscal Crisis: The Collapse and Revival of New York City,** (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. xxii-xxiii, 194-216.

> to a stalemate. As combination of democratic mobilizations and economic struggles for advantage in the political arena produced, by 1830, an impasse in federal statemaking which progressively weakneed the federal appratus and gave rise to a crisis-prone political order.[32]

Re-examining early 20th century politics, Stephen Skowronek likewise points to the dilemmas of national state leaders in conceiving, much more implementing, a state project with national (i.e., federal) dimensions mainly because of the power of local political actors represented by the party system.[33]

This "lack of autonomy" was not exclusively of the 19th and 20th century but even extended to periods like the New Deal, where it was assumed that the change in the national governmental structures e.g., the increased powers of the presidency was supposed to signal the emergence of a powerful national state. The New Deal period remained founded on a coalition of different societal actors.[34] While some important state agencies developed the capacity to exert "national" projects autonomous of the demands of societal interests, these agencies only did so in response to society-based cleavages and in fact later became the arena themselves of conflict among societal forces.[35] New Deal regulatory measures could not just be regarded as indications of state

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[32] Charles C. Bright, "The State in the United States During the Nineteenth Century," in **Statemaking and Social Movements: Essays in History and Theory**, Charles Bright and Susan Harding (eds.). (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), p. 122. Underscoring supplied.

[33] Skowronek, **op.cit.**, pp. 3-19; 39-162.

[34] Theda Skocpol and Edwin Amenta. "Did Capitalists Shape Social Security?" **American Sociological Review**, 50, pp. 572-575. The continued influence of societal actors at the local state level is analyzed by Shefter in **Political Crisis, Fiscal Crisis: The Collapse and Revival of New York City, op.cit.**

[35] See Michael Goldfield, "Worker Insurgency, Radical Organization and the New Deal Labor Legislation," **American Political Science Review**, Vol. 83 (December 1989), pp. 1257-2182.

autonomy as the agencies that implemented them were themselves tied up to "interest groups" and constituencies in society that helped shape up these measures.[36]

Finally, a cursory look at mid-20th century American politics reveals that the state continued to be bedevilled with considerable stress by the so-called "new politics movement". While these movements eventually became organizationally peripheral (organizations like, say, the Black Panther has waned after the 60s for example), what they introduced to the political system have become a major part of the political language, customs and mores of influential segments of contemporary America.[37] Others have also specified the abiding presence of lower class insurgencies and other social forces (e.g., the women's movement) that hound the national state in the present century.[38]

Contemporary scholarlship has strongly argued the decline of societal actors like political parties and the refocusing of political combat to the variegated apparatuses of the national state. Yet, the argument in favor of a "strong society" is still being acknowledged in terms of the enduring leverage that it has on the national state. In their examination of the national security state and the domestic welfare state, Ginsberg and Shefter recognize that institutional combat – while reflective of state actors making use of the resources of the national state to advance their interests – remains still dependent on and reflec tive of the needs of powerful social actors.[39]

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[36] Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., **The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980.** (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989). See in particular the essays of Steve Fraser and Thomas Ferguson.

[37] Also referred to as the "new radicalism." See Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "The Failure and Success of the New Radicalism," **The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-180.** op.cit. pp.212-237.

[38] See for example, Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, **Poor People's Movements: Why they Succeed, How they Fail.** ((New York: Random House, 1977), pp. 1-37.

[39] Ibid.

Confronted with this issue of a strong civil society, statists have dis-aggregated the national state to prove that a some state autonomous action was possible.[40] But as Skocpol admits, these autonomous actions did not last long. No sooner had they exerted their strength when they were enveloped by political forces that were based outside of the state structure. Thus

> [s]ubsequent state planning efforts, especially those that implied redistribution of economic, racial or social class power were then circumscribed and destroyed by established farming interests.[41]

CONCLUSION

The debate over American exceptionalism continues to this very day. But it appears that it seems to have missed a singular point, i.e., that those interested in the study of exceptionalism may just find it worthy to explore different and perhaps fresher approach to the issue. This paper suggests that scholarly investigation on American exceptionalism may be able to take advantage of the growing literature of the statist tradition, especially that branch of statism which focuses on "bringing society back in" and giving it equal importance as that of the state. Statist studies may very well yield more interesting insights into the issue of exceptionalism and perhaps rescue it from the narrowed confines imposed by an increasingly sterile and, perhaps even meaningless, debate over the presence and/or absence of socialism in America.

[40] See Margaret Weir and Theda Skocpol in **Bringing the State Back In, op.cit.** pp. 141-148; and, Theda Skocpol and John Ikenberry. "The Political Formation of the American Welfare State in Historical and Comparative Perspectives." **Comparative Social Research,** Vol. 6, (1983), pp. 87-141.

[41] **Bringing the State Back In, op.cit.,** p. 14. The study cited was Theda Skocpol and Kenneth Finegold, "State Capacity and Economic Intervention in the Early New Deal," **Political Science Quarterly,** (1982) Vol. 97, No. 2. (See also Theda Skocpol. "The Limits of the New Deal System and the Roots of Contemporary Welfare Dilemmas," in Margaret Weir et.al., eds. **The Politics of Social Policy in the United States** (New Jersey: Princeton Univer sity Press, 1988), pp. 211-293.

Yet there is also a need to qualify my point in introducing the statist perspective in the study of perfectionalism. Statist scholarship in the U.S. has been generally uncomfortable with dealing with the American national states. The reasons for this I have already cited above and needs no reiteration here.

One notices that much of the country/society-comparisons that seem to underlie the debate over American exceptionalism have been focused on correlating the U.S. and Europe. There are no indications of scholarly courage to explore comparatively the post-colonial experiences of the U.S. and other post-colonial societies countries – most of which are typologized under the rubric "Third World" – in order to perhaps better understand the issues sorrounding the exceptionalism debate.[42]

It is easy to understand why there may be some discomfort in veering away from the U.S.-Europe comparison and trying a U.S. "Third World" approach. After all, enormous differences between these societies exist. A simple comparison of their economies, political status, and their roles in the world economy can easily lead scholars to argue that the comparison may not just be a meaningful one.[43] But th U.S.-Europe comparison has already become too familiar an exercise, that it faces the danger of losing much of its intellectual vitality. This is not to deny that no meaningful efforts have been made by statist scholars to introduce new wisdom on this comparison.[44] But overall, they tend to just reiterate the general argument that the U.S. has a weak national state

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[42] See, for example, Barrington Moore, **The Social Origins of Dictatorships and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World** (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), pp. 111-155; 159- 161; 174-227; and 341-410.

[43] The exception, of course, are the East Asian states that have earned the label "newly-industrialized countries" (NICs). For a discussion of the distinction between the NICs and the rest of the "Third World", especially Latin America, see Frederic Deyo, ed. **New Asian Industrialism** (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 11-22.

[44] See Margaret Weir and Theda Skocpol, "State Structures and the Possibilities of Keynesian Responses to the Great Depression in Sweden, Britain and the United States," in **Bringing the State Back In, op.cit.,** pp. 132-148.

while European counterparts have just the opposite. The overall result here is for scholarly interest to decline as the comparison becomes part of conventional lore.

Searching for new insights into the debate over American exceptionalism, therfore, necessitates opening new avenues for comparison. It is hightime that the issue shift away from the growing sterility resulting from the unproductive debates over why socialism never found roots in the United States. After all with the events occurring in Eastern Europe, it appears that the socialist model has ceased to become such an "inspiration" to those taking the radical side of the debates. Likewise, the recent phenomenon of "institutional combat" is indicative of the growing import of the national state and its agencies in the development of American politics. Approaching exceptionalism from a particular statist perspective that compares the U.S.-"Third World" may just yield the insights which can hopefully sustain the intellectual vitality of American exceptionalism and thus assist in developing new lines of analysis on this question.