

“They Are Children and We Are Men”: “Civilizational Infantilism” and American Political Thought

Brian Danoff
Miami University

Abstract

Uday Mehta has argued that liberal imperialists such as John Stuart Mill used “strategies of exclusion” that rendered certain peoples outside the scope of liberalism’s inclusive promise. Mehta focuses on British political thought, but his ideas can also shed new light on important episodes in American political thought. First, what Mehta calls “the strategy of civilizational infantilism” can frequently be found in the justifications of imperialism offered by American thinkers after the Spanish-American War. Second, George W. Bush justified his own imperial project in Iraq not by appealing to the strategy of civilizational infantilism, but rather by repudiating it. The West Coast Straussians Charles Kesler and Thomas West then sought to refute Bush precisely by reasserting a strategy of exclusion. Kesler’s and West’s critiques of Bush are rooted in the thought of Harry Jaffa, whose own use of a strategy of exclusion has not yet been sufficiently explored.

Uday Mehta has argued that while liberal theorists typically make universal claims about human nature, they at the same time practice “strategies of exclusion” such that certain groups of people are considered to be outside the scope of liberalism’s inclusive promise (Mehta 1990; Mehta 1999).¹ A *liberal* “strategy of exclusion” does not exclude certain people from full political membership on the grounds that they are permanently inferior by nature. Instead, liberal theorists such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill often argue, according to Mehta, that while the “capacities” necessary for self-government are universal, not all human beings have attained “the specific cultural and psychological...preconditions for the actualization of these capacities” (Mehta 1999, 49). For Locke, only those individuals who are rational can be trusted with freedom; while the *capacity* for rationality may be universal, it remains a latent capacity for those who lack a certain level of maturity, education and socialization (Mehta 1999, 51-64). And for Mill, only those nations which have progressed to a certain stage of cultural development are fit for liberty (Mehta 1999, 97-106).

Mehta’s analysis of “liberal strategies of exclusion” focuses on British political thought, but I will argue that Mehta’s ideas can help shed considerable light on American political thought as well. First, I will demonstrate that one of the liberal strategies of exclusion discussed by Mehta—namely, the strategy of “civilizational infantilism”—can frequently be found in the justifications of imperialism offered by American thinkers after the Spanish-American War. For one of the main arguments offered in defense of American control over the Philippines was that

¹ Mehta is by no means the only prominent scholar to explore what one might call liberalism’s exclusions. For instance, as Mehta himself acknowledges, his work has something in common with past feminist scholarship on “the exclusionary implications underlying the liberal distinction between the public sphere of political and commercial concerns and the private sphere of domestic life.” However, Mehta notes that his own work differs from this feminist scholarship insofar as his “primary concern [is] with colonial exclusions that do not usually turn on the public/private distinction” (Mehta 1999, 56, note 24). In my view, Mehta’s analysis of “colonial exclusions” in British liberal thought can also be used to better understand American ideas on imperialism.

“[t]hey are children and we are men in these deep matters of government and justice,” as Woodrow Wilson put it (1902, 731). Next, I will argue that President George W. Bush justified his own arguably imperial project not by appealing to civilizational infantilism, but rather by engaging in a striking reversal of this strategy. For by suggesting that *all* peoples are already “ready” for freedom, Bush (2003b) used what one might call a “strategy of *inclusion*” to defend his foreign policy goals. After examining Bush’s “strategy of inclusion,” I will discuss how the Claremont Institute scholars Charles Kesler and Thomas West sought to refute Bush’s ideas precisely by reasserting a “strategy of exclusion.” According to both Kesler and West, Bush is correct that everyone has the natural *right* to be free, but Bush fails to recognize that not all peoples have developed the habits and the character that are necessary for the *realization* of this natural right (Kesler 2004; West 2004). I will then demonstrate that the “strategy of exclusion” offered by Kesler and West (who are often called “West Coast Straussians”) is rooted in the ideas of their Claremont Institute colleague and teacher, Harry Jaffa.² In his two seminal books on Lincoln, Jaffa insists on the universality of the principle that no one can be rightly ruled over without his or her consent, but Jaffa qualifies this sweeping claim by maintaining that not all peoples at all times are “qualified for the exercise of liberty” (Jaffa 2000, 460). Explicitly citing Mill on the need for “barbarians” to be ruled despotically, Jaffa suggests that under certain circumstances both Southern defenders of slavery, and the slaves themselves, could appropriately be ruled over without their consent for the purpose of educating them for eventual freedom (Jaffa 1959, 340-2). Jaffa thus deploys his own “strategy of exclusion,” in ways that have not been sufficiently explored.

In *Civic Ideals* as well as in a more recent essay, Rogers Smith has expressed admiration for Mehta’s ideas, but he has also argued that Mehta’s analysis of liberalism may be of limited

² For a helpful discussion of West Coast Straussianism, see Zuckert and Zuckert (2006, 239-52).

value for understanding American political thought and development (Smith 1997, 517, note 48; Smith 2010, 63-65). Against Mehta, Smith writes, “[m]y evidence indicates that...ascriptive doctrines” regarding race “have played a larger role in spawning America’s civic inequalities than Lockean concerns about inadequately socialized rationality” (1997, 517, note 48). In the same vein, Smith suggests that defenses of American imperialism at the turn of the twentieth century did contain “liberal and republican elements, but evolutionary racial ideologies [were] especially abundant” (1997, 429). For Smith, then, American political thought has indeed often been exclusionary, but he sees these exclusions as emanating not primarily from liberalism, but rather from a separate illiberal and inegalitarian tradition of “ascriptive hierarchy” (1997, 30). But if my analysis is correct, Mehta’s notion of “liberal strategies of exclusion” provides an even more useful tool for understanding important aspects of American political thought than Smith suggests. As we shall see, Mehta’s analysis of “the strategy of civilizational infantilism” can help us better understand the justifications of American imperialism that were made at the turn of the twentieth century as well as the very different defense that George W. Bush made of his own foreign policy near the beginning of the twenty-first century. Moreover, the concept of civilizational infantilism can help shed a great deal of light on the notable critique of Bush offered by West and Kesler, as well as on the political thought of Harry Jaffa, whose ideas form the intellectual foundation of West Coast Straussianism.³

³ Catherine and Michael Zuckert note that whereas “East Coast Straussianism...has no one dominant voice, nor even one dominant founder, West Coast Straussianism has in Jaffa both its Saint Peter and its Saint Paul” (2006, 239). The Zuckerts also refer to Kesler and West as “substantial West Coasters” (248).

“Civilizational Infantilism” in American Political Thought at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

According to Mehta, one of the most important “liberal strategies of exclusion” that British liberal thinkers employed to defend imperialism is what Mehta calls “civilizational infantilism” (1999, 48). Mehta writes that,

[c]hildhood is a theme that runs through the writings of British liberals on India with unerring constancy.... India is a child for which the empire offers the prospect of legitimate and progressive parentage.... For both the Mills as for Macaulay this point is the basis for the justification of denying democratic rights and representative institutions to Indians, along with various other imperial interdictions (1999, 31-32).

This strategy of “civilizational infantilism” is evident in John Stuart Mill’s claim, in the introduction to *On Liberty*, that his theory of liberty is not applicable to children, nor is it applicable to

those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage.... Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one (Mill 1991, 14-15).

In the same vein, Mill argues in *Considerations on Representative Government* that, “[t]here are...conditions of society in which a vigorous despotism is in itself the best mode of government for training the people in what is specifically wanted to render them capable of a higher civilization” (quoted in Mehta 1999, 106). According to this liberal strategy of exclusion, while some peoples are currently childlike, the capacity for self-government that exists latent within them can be gradually developed if they are placed under the tutelary rule of a more advanced civilization. Imperial domination will one day come to an end with the completion of

the pedagogical task of developing the “backward” nation into one that can exercise self-rule in a responsible fashion (Mehta 1999, 70, 100-2).

As we have seen, Rogers Smith has argued that the “Lockean concerns about inadequately socialized rationality” that are discussed by Mehta played a smaller role than “ascriptive doctrines” in the fostering of “civic inequalities” in America. Smith might be right about the relative weight of these different sets of exclusionary ideas when one looks at American political thought as a whole; however, I would note that the Millian “strategy of civilizational infantilism” discussed by Mehta played a highly significant role in the efforts of American intellectuals and policymakers to justify imperialism in the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam after the Spanish-American War.

For instance, Albert Beveridge, who was probably the most fervent defender of American imperialism in the Senate, declared that, “we must never forget that in dealing with the Filipinos we deal with children” (Beveridge 1900).⁴ Beveridge insisted that it was the “duty” of the United States to bring “civilization” to the Philippines, and he warned against “apply[ing] academic notions of self-government to these children.” In the same speech, Beveridge again used the metaphor of childhood when he maintained that, “[s]elf-government is no base and common thing to be bestowed on the merely audacious. It is the degree which crowns the graduate of liberty, not the name of liberty’s infant class, who have not yet mastered the alphabet of freedom.”

It must be noted, though, that even as Beveridge cast the Filipinos as children, he did not always stress, as Mill usually did, that imperial rule would one day end, once the backward

⁴ Smith discusses this same speech by Beveridge, but he does not highlight, as I do, the elements of “civilizational infantilism” that are found in it (Smith 1997, 430-1). Beveridge would later give the keynote address at the 1912 convention that nominated Theodore Roosevelt as the Progressive Party’s candidate for President.

nation has matured to the point where it is capable of self-government. For immediately after implying that the Filipinos would one day “graduate” from the school of American despotism, once they have “mastered the alphabet of freedom,” Beveridge (1900) declared: “Savage blood, Oriental blood, Malay blood, Spanish example—are these the elements of self-government?” If the people of the Philippines need to be ruled over without their consent due to their “blood,” then it would follow that they would *never* be ready for liberty.

Beveridge’s ideas were thus a rather incoherent mix of arguments. For on the one hand, Beveridge maintained, in Millian fashion, that through a kind of pedagogical despotism, the Filipinos could be trained for eventual freedom. Hence, Beveridge (1900) said that, “American administration” in the Philippines is aimed at “developing them gradually toward self-government.” On the other hand, Beveridge contradicts himself by making the ascriptive argument that the “blood” of the Filipinos makes it impossible for them to ever gain freedom. As Beveridge (1900) put it: “What alchemy will change the Oriental quality of their blood and set the self-governing currents of the American pouring through their Malay veins?” Given his claim here that only a magical process of “alchemy” could render the people of the Philippines fit for self-rule, it is logical for Beveridge to insist near the opening of his speech that, “The Philippines are ours *forever*” rather than temporarily (emphasis added). Without pausing to consider the potential tension between the two arguments, then, Beveridge used both what Mehta would call a liberal strategy of exclusion—a strategy that said that Filipinos were not yet fit for freedom, but one day could be if they are subjected to the tutelary power of the Americans—and at the same time an illiberal strategy of exclusion, according to which the “blood” of the Filipinos renders them incapable of freedom, presumably forever. In short, Beveridge invoked both what Mehta

calls “civilizational infantilism” *and* what Smith calls “ascriptive doctrines” in order to defend American control over the Philippines.

Theodore Roosevelt offered a similar combination of arguments in his famous speech on “The Strenuous Life.” After discussing Puerto Rico and Cuba, Roosevelt declared: “The Philippines offer a yet graver problem. Their population includes half-caste and native Christians, warlike Moslems, and wild pagans. Many of their people are utterly unfit for self-government, and show no signs of becoming fit. Others may in time become fit but at present can only take part in self-government under a wise supervision, at once firm and beneficent” (1902, 17-18). By suggesting that some Filipinos “may in time” become capable of self-rule if subjected to American imperial power, Roosevelt makes an argument consistent with Mill’s claim in *Considerations on Representative Government* that backward nations require “a government of leading strings,” a government which is “only admissible as a means of gradually training the people to walk alone” (1991, 234). On the other hand, Roosevelt also makes the entirely illiberal argument that at least some people in the Philippines may *never* be capable of self-rule, no matter how much education they receive.

While both Beveridge and Roosevelt made both liberal *and* illiberal arguments to defend imperialism, it is interesting to note that Woodrow Wilson—whose ideas on the Philippines are not discussed by Smith in *Civic Ideals*—defended imperialism while abjuring illiberal arguments based on “blood.” To be sure, Wilson was by no means an anti-racist, as indicated, *inter alia*, by his willingness to segregate federal workers and by his notorious enthusiasm for the film “Birth of a Nation” (Fairclough 2001, 83). It is thus somewhat surprising that in his defense of imperialism after the Spanish-American War, Wilson relies solely on the liberal exclusionary

strategy of “civilizational infantilism” rather than on explicitly illiberal arguments pertaining to ascribed characteristics that are inherited and beyond change.

Just as Mill insisted that civilized nations should despotically rule childlike nations for pedagogical purposes, so, too, did Wilson declare that the people of the Philippines “must obey as those who are in tutelage. They are children and we are men in these deep matters of government and justice” (1902, 731). And just as Mill insisted that despotism is a “legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement,” Wilson similarly insisted that American domination of the Philippines is “intended for their good and not for our aggrandizement” (1908, 53). Wilson argues that the Filipinos were no more ready for self-government than the French people were in 1789—namely, not at all (1902, 727). Wilson thus excoriated those in America “who have for the past two years been demanding...that we give the Philippines independence and self-government now, at once, out of hand.” The only “independence” they could be granted would be that “of a rudderless boat adrift.” As for “self-government,” he asked, “How is that ‘given’? *Can* it be given? Is it not gained, earned, graduated into from the hard school of life” (1902, 731)? According to Wilson, the Philippines could not yet have self-rule, for “liberty is the privilege of maturity, of self-control [and] of self-mastery....” (1902, 728).

In contrast to both Beveridge and Roosevelt, who sometimes made the illiberal suggestion that the fixed characteristics of the Filipinos might very well make them *forever* unfit for freedom, Wilson consistently maintained that eventually the Philippines “shall have” self-government. This day will come “when our work there is done and they are ready. But when will our work there be done, and how shall we know when they are ready” (1902, 727)? Wilson does not give a clear answer, and he suggests that it could take quite a long time, insofar as he

explicitly compares the people of the Philippines to the once-childlike people of the United States. In *Constitutional Government*, Wilson maintains that self-government was only possible in the United States because the forefathers of the colonists experienced a lengthy “political childhood during which law was law without choice of their own.” By being “subjects of kings,” the ancestors of the colonists gradually gained the “self-control of political maturity” and were thus eventually made fit for republican self-rule. “Self-government” he writes, “is not a mere form of institutions” but rather “a form of character” which cannot be gained “without long discipline” (1908, 52). Self-rule will one day be possible for the Philippines, but only after “a long apprenticeship of obedience” (1908, 53).

In short, by arguing that the people of the Philippines were “children” who “for their own good” need “tutelage” until they are “ready” for “self-government,” Wilson used what Mehta calls the strategy of “civilizational infantilism” in its pure form. As we have seen, Beveridge and Theodore Roosevelt also invoked this “liberal strategy of exclusion,” but they simultaneously used blatantly illiberal strategies of exclusion as well. In his comments on Mehta, Smith focuses on Mehta’s discussion of Locke and does not mention the Millian strategy of “civilizational infantilism” (Smith 1997, 517, note 48; Smith 2010, 63-65). However, the evidence I have presented suggests that the strategy of “civilizational infantilism” was a central part of the defense of imperialism that was made by American intellectuals, and this strategy was of particular importance in the case of Woodrow Wilson.

George W. Bush and Iraq: The Demise of “Civilizational Infantilism”?

A little more than one hundred years after Wilson insisted that the people of the Philippines would be capable of self-government only “when our work there is done and they are ready,” President George W. Bush (2003b) lamented that, “[t]ime after time, observers have

questioned whether this country, or that people, or this group, are ‘ready’ for democracy—as if freedom were a prize you win for meeting our own Western standards of progress.” Whereas Beveridge (1900) claimed that “the Declaration [of Independence] applies only to people capable of self-government,” Bush (2003b) said that, “[i]t is not realism to suppose that one-fifth of humanity is unsuited to liberty. It is pessimism and condescension, and we should have none of it.” And, in contrast to Wilson’s claim that some people are “children” when it comes to “deep matters of government and justice” and thus lack the “maturity” to exercise self-rule, Bush (2003b) declared to his audience at the National Endowment for Democracy: “I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free.”

When considered in the light of Mehta’s analysis of liberal strategies of exclusion, Bush’s sweeping claim that everyone has not just the “right” but also the “ability” to be free is particularly striking. As Mehta notes, it is a liberal commonplace to suggest that all people everywhere have the right or capacity to be free. According to Mehta,

The universalistic reach of liberalism derives from the capacities that it identifies with human nature and from the presumption, which it encourages, that these capacities are sufficient and not merely necessary for an individual’s political inclusion. It encourages this presumption by giving a specifically political significance to human *nature*. With all people being born equal, free, and rational, birth...becomes the moment of an assured political identity (1999, 49).

But if liberalism declares that all people are born equal, free, and rational, these universal claims are then qualified, through an implicit or explicit claim that the realization of freedom and rationality requires certain “cultural and psychological conditions” (Mehta 1999, 49). As Mehta puts it, “[t]he distinction between universal capacities and the conditions for their actualization points to a space in which the liberal theorist can, as it were, raise the ante for political inclusion” (Mehta 1999, 49). What is so notable about Bush’s speech is that he steadfastly refuses to “raise the ante” for inclusion, since he insists that *all* peoples are ready for democracy; to suggest

otherwise, he maintains, is to engage in “pessimism and condescension,” if not outright bigotry. Forcefully rejecting the idea that “millions of men and women and children” are “condemned by history or culture to live in despotism,” Bush (2003b) justifies his foreign policy not by employing a strategy of exclusion, but rather a strategy of *inclusion*. Those who oppose his foreign policy, Bush suggested, might very well be guilty of believing that Muslims or Arabs are somehow excluded from the promise of liberal-democratic ideals.

This same argument had actually been articulated three months earlier, by National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice. In her August 7, 2003 speech to the National Association of Black Journalists, Rice (2003) declared:

Knowing what we know about the difficulties of our own history, let us always be humble in singing freedom’s praises. But let our voice not waver in speaking out on the side of people seeking freedom. And let us never indulge the condescending voices who allege that some people are not interested in freedom *or aren’t ready for freedom’s responsibilities*. That view was wrong in 1963 in Birmingham and it is wrong in 2003 in Baghdad. The desire for freedom transcends race, religion and culture.... The people of the Middle East are not exempt from this desire. We have an opportunity—and an obligation—to help them turn desire into reality (emphasis added).

Rice here clearly attempts to repudiate the notion of “civilizational infantilism,” for she suggests not only that all people “desire” freedom, but, more provocatively, that all people are “ready for freedom’s responsibilities.” In contrast to the British liberals discussed by Mehta, Rice does not “up the ante for inclusion,” for she abjures the notion that some peoples lack the psychological or cultural prerequisites for the responsible handling of freedom.

In her 2003 speech, Rice said more explicitly what Bush said implicitly: namely, that those who are skeptical about the prospects for democracy in the Middle East are succumbing to bigotry, just as American whites who once told African-Americans that they were not “ready” for freedom were bigots. Whether or not this is a fair comparison, Rice’s words can remind us of something beyond dispute: namely, that something very much like the strategy of “civilizational

infantilism” was invoked in the United States not only by defenders of imperialism after the Spanish-American War, but also by those who sought to justify racial subordination within the United States. For instance, shortly before Woodrow Wilson wrote of the Filipinos that “they are children and we are men in matters of governance,” he used similar language when discussing the condition of emancipated slaves after the Civil War. In this essay, “The Reconstruction of the Southern States,” Wilson wrote that a

very perilous state of affairs had been created in the South by the sudden and absolute emancipation of the negroes.... Here was a vast ‘laboring, landless, homeless class’, once slaves, now free; unpracticed in liberty, unschooled in self-control; never sobered by the discipline of self-support, never established in any habit of prudence; ... sick of work, covetous of pleasure, *a host of dusky children untimely put out of school* (1901, 6, emphasis added).

Wilson then goes on to describe the Black Codes which sought to put “new restraints” on African-Americans throughout the South, and Wilson freely admits that “in many cases” these laws “went the length of a veritable ‘involuntary servitude.’” Convinced as he was that the former slaves were “children” whose premature emancipation rendered them “a danger to themselves as well as to those whom they once served,” Wilson suggests that the Black Codes were eminently reasonable (1901, 6). Wilson thus used the strategy of “civilizational infantilism” not only to defend American subjugation of the Philippines, but also the domination of African-Americans that took place in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Given the history of the ways in which the idea of civilizational infantilism was applied by American thinkers such as Wilson, there is certainly something to admire in the efforts made by Bush and Rice to reject this “strategy of exclusion.” The claims that *all* peoples yearn for freedom and are ready for its responsible exercise are claims that have considerable moral appeal, especially when contrasted with Wilson’s claims about the allegedly childlike condition of Filipinos and African-Americans.

That said, it should be remembered that Bush and Rice rejected civilizational infantilism in order to defend a foreign policy in Iraq that many would label imperialistic.⁵ In other words, while the Bush administration's argument that all people are ready for democracy is, of course, very different from the argument of Wilson that some peoples are *not* ready, both arguments were used in the service of a similar goal: namely, to justify the invasion and occupation of another nation. While Wilson essentially argued that America must invade and occupy the Philippines because it was not yet capable of self-rule, Bush essentially argued that America must invade and occupy Iraq because it *was* ready for self-rule.⁶ This means that at different moments in American political history, a strategy of exclusion *and* a strategy of inclusion have been used to defend ideas and policies that many would call imperialistic.

Stephen Skowronek (2006) has demonstrated that sometimes in American political thought, ideas that were developed with one purpose in mind become "reassociated" such that the ideas are then deployed for very different—and sometimes even opposing—purposes. For

⁵ The literature addressing the question of whether or not the Bush Doctrine and the war in Iraq can properly be described using the term "imperialism" is, of course, too vast to be surveyed fully here. As David C. Hendrickson observed, ever since "President Bush's West Point address in June 2002, hardly a day has passed without a news item, essay, or book announcing, denouncing, or contesting the existence of an American Empire" (2005, 2). Hendrickson's own thesis is that "the Bush doctrine is indeed an imperial program," and this bodes ill for the United States, as "imperial aspirations produce national decline...in both the material and moral realms" (2). Not only did many of Bush's critics, such as Hendrickson, Edward Rhodes (2003), and John Judis (2004) use the term "imperialism" as they attacked Bush's policies; in addition, there were also admirers of Bush's decision to invade Iraq who openly embraced the idea of American imperialism, such as Michael Ignatieff (2003). Bruce Cumings noted that Bush's "preemptive doctrine post 9-11 embodies phrases and nuances that had been the stock in trade of right-wing pundits such as William Kristol and Charles Krauthammer, who have long called for a new American imperialism" (2003, 360).

⁶ Of course, promoting democracy was not the sole justification offered by the Bush administration for the war in Iraq. At the beginning of the war, Bush (2003a) declared that the goals were "to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people." Once weapons of mass destruction were not found, the Bush administration began to place greater stress on democratization as a rationale for the war. Some might claim that Bush's emphasis on democratization was designed to cover up other motives such as a desire to control Iraq's oil. While this claim might have some truth to it, I still find it useful to assume that Bush's arguments about democratization were offered sincerely; operating with this assumption, one is then in a position to critically assess Bush's arguments on their own terms.

example, Skowronek notes that whereas John Calhoun's idea of the "concurrent majority" initially had as its purpose the defense of Southern, pro-slavery interests, the idea became reassociated in the twentieth century when it was used by scholars such as Lani Guinier to try to advance African-American voting rights (2006, 386). Whereas Skowronek shows us that the same idea can be used for two very different purposes, the case of Wilson, Bush, and "civilizational infantilism" reveals a corollary to Skowronek's thesis: namely, ideas that *oppose* one another can both be used for *similar* purposes, for whereas Wilson used a strategy of exclusion to justify imperialism, Bush did so by using an antithetical strategy of inclusion.

Why did Wilson use a strategy of exclusion to justify military invasion and occupation, whereas Bush used a strategy of inclusion? Rogers Smith's understanding of American political development can help provide an answer. According to Smith, political actors "can be expected to advance distinct, often novel blends of the ideas available to them to define purposes and win support in their varying and evolving political contexts" (2010, 78). Keeping Smith's point in mind, one can observe that at the turn of the twentieth century, the idea of "civilizational infantilism" was still readily available to American political actors who sought to win support for the occupation of the Philippines.⁷ By the early twenty-first century, however, the idea that some nations are childlike or backward was not genuinely available to American elites, for such claims would have been widely denounced as racist. In contrast, the idea that Iraq needed to be invaded and occupied precisely because its people—like all peoples everywhere—are ready for democratic self-rule was an idea that could potentially help win support for Bush's military

⁷ When intellectuals such as Wilson used the language of childhood to defend imperialism in the Philippines, they not only followed in the footsteps of British defenders of imperialism such as John Stuart Mill; they also followed in the footsteps of American authors who referred to Indian peoples as childlike. For example, eight years before Mill declared in *On Liberty* that neither "barbarians" nor "children" were capable of liberty, the American historian Francis Parkman similarly wrote in his 1851 book *The Conspiracy of Pontiac* that, "[b]arbarism is to civilization, as childhood is to maturity." Parkman is quoted in Rogin (1975, 6).

measures in Iraq, in part because Bush presented this idea in anti-racist and anti-ethnocentric terms.⁸

Moreover, given that Bush was not claiming that the United States intended to exert direct control over Iraq for an indefinite period of time, it would not have been particularly helpful for him to argue that some nations are so childlike that they need the long-term tutelage of the United States. After the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, sovereignty was formally given back to Iraq in June of 2004. Of course, U.S. troops remained until the end of 2011, after which the U.S. still maintained an enormous embassy in Baghdad with a staff numbering in the thousands (Vlahos 2012). But despite the continued American presence, Bush was able to maintain after June of 2004 that the U.S. was no longer ruling over the country. The exclusionary strategy of civilizational infantilism was once helpful for elites who sought to *openly* control other nations for many years. In contrast, the inclusive claim that all peoples have the capacity to be free fits better with neo-imperialistic policies which may sometimes involve military invasion and a period of occupation, but which also include more indirect forms of control.

Some might argue that while Bush's "strategy of inclusion" at first appears to be fundamentally different from Wilson's "strategy of exclusion" in its logic, there is actually an underlying similarity not only between the purposes of the two ideas, but also between the ideas themselves, insofar as both strategies involve the claim that American imperial policies are ultimately aimed at promoting democracy. For when Wilson claimed that the Philippines would have "self-government...when our work there is done and they are ready," he was making the argument that American imperialism was (ultimately) aimed at spreading democracy, by training

⁸ Of course, one possible answer to the question of why Bush argued, in contrast to Wilson, that all peoples are already "ready" for democracy is simply that Bush may have sincerely believed this to be the case. However, even if we assume the sincerity of Bush's arguments against "civilizational infantilism," one can also assume that like other elected leaders, Bush sought to craft a rhetorical strategy that could help foster popular support for his policies.

and disciplining backwards nations so that they could one day be capable of self-rule. Similarly, when Bush suggested that the invasion and occupation of Iraq was aimed at helping Iraqis realize the democratic government that all peoples already had the “ability” to achieve, he was again arguing that imperial policies were aimed at advancing democracy. In this sense, both Wilson and Bush were building, each in his own way, on John L. O’Sullivan’s notion that it is America’s “manifest destiny” to expand the reach of liberty.⁹

While it may be the case that both Wilson’s “strategy of exclusion” and Bush’s “strategy of inclusion” involve the claim that American military might is aimed (at least in the long run) at promoting democratic self-rule, there remains an important conceptual difference between Wilson’s exclusionary argument that some nations are too childlike to engage in self-rule, on the one hand, and Bush’s inclusive claim that we should cease to question whether certain nations are “ready for democracy,” on the other. Indeed, as we shall see, some of Bush’s conservative critics took issue precisely with Bush’s inclusive arguments.

Strategies of Exclusion and the West Coast Straussians

We have seen that whereas American intellectuals such as Wilson sought to justify the invasion and domination of the Philippines at the start of the twentieth century through a “liberal strategy of exclusion,” the American invasion and occupation of Iraq at the beginning of the twenty-first century was defended by Bush through a very different strategy of inclusion. In a striking critique of Bush’s foreign policy views, scholars associated with the Claremont Institute praised Bush for his embrace of natural rights thinking, but they maintained that Bush went seriously astray when he argued that the Iraqis (and all other peoples) were ready to fully

⁹ For a thoughtful analysis of the concept of “manifest destiny” and its enduring influence on American foreign policy, see Gomez (2012).

exercise their natural rights. In short, these Claremont scholars, who are also known as West Coast Straussians, tried to reassert what Mehta calls “the strategy of exclusion.”¹⁰

The West Coast Straussian critique of Bush’s foreign policy was expressed clearly by Charles Kesler in a 2004 essay on “Democracy and the Bush Doctrine.” As we have seen, Mehta argues that liberal thinkers begin with universalist claims, but then end up qualifying these claims in a way that excludes certain categories of people. This is precisely how Kesler (2004) proceeds in his critique of Bush. Kesler begins by praising universalism: “Bush’s revival of natural or human rights as the foundation of political morality is welcome, and should be taken seriously.” But Kesler then argues that Bush has failed to understand the preconditions that are necessary for the actualization of natural rights. As Kesler puts it, there is in Bush’s thought “a certain ambiguity or confusion between the natural *right* to be free and the *capacity* to be free. The two are not quite the same.” According to Kesler, while it is true “that every human being has, by nature, a right to be free,” it is also the case that, “[t]he human right to be free...does not guarantee the human capacity to be free.” This is because the “natural potential for human freedom” can be “made actual” only if that potential is “awakened by practice and habit.”

Kesler here provides a perfect illustration of Mehta’s claim that liberal theorists “raise the ante for political inclusion” by making a “distinction between universal capacities,” on the

¹⁰ While I think it is illuminating to apply Mehta’s concept of “strategies of exclusion” to the thought of West and Kesler, I want to here depart in one respect from the way in which Mehta uses this concept. For when Mehta discusses various “strategies of exclusion,” he often seems to assume the worst regarding the motives of the thinkers who use these strategies. That is, Mehta implies that British liberals made claims about the “cultural and psychological... preconditions” of freedom because they were trying to find some way to justify imperialism (1999, 49). In contrast, it is my assumption that when West, Kessler (and also Jaffa) make exclusionary arguments, they do so not because they seek to justify domination, but rather because they sincerely believe that certain kinds of practical experience and certain kinds of character traits are necessary for the responsible exercise of democratic self-rule. Of course, to say that we should reject any assumption that the exclusionary arguments of Kesler, West, and Jaffa are motivated by a desire to justify oppression is not at all the same thing as saying that we must agree with these arguments. Clearly, exclusionary ideas can still be contested even if one does not make negative assumptions about the motives behind these ideas.

one hand, and the “conditions for their actualization,” on the other. Kesler makes precisely this theoretical move, for he suggests that while Iraqis have the same natural rights that all human beings have, they lack the habits, the experience, and thus the character that are necessary for them to realize the potential for self-government that is inherent in all people. “Accordingly,” Kesler (2004) writes, “the founders would have been cautious, to say the least, about America’s ability to transform Iraqis into good democrats.” Uncowed by Bush’s claim that it is “cultural condescension” to raise questions about whether or not a particular nation is suited for democracy, Kesler writes that we must ask “whether some cultures and religions are less compatible with freedom and democracy than others.” Kesler thus reasserts a “strategy of exclusion” in order to criticize what he calls Bush’s “easy-going account of democracy,” an account which grossly “underestimates the difficulty of converting whole societies in the Middle East into functioning democracies.”

Thomas West, another prominent West Coast Straussian, joined with Kesler in rejecting the Bush administration’s stated goal of promoting democracy in Iraq. “It appears,” West wrote in a 2004 article, “that Iraq lacks the elementary preconditions of constitutional democracy. I mean the minimal democratic virtues of personal self-restraint and feisty self-assertion in defense of liberty, along with a widespread belief in the moral and/or religious obligation of everyone to respect the equal rights of others to life, liberty (including the free exercise of religion), and property” (West 2004). West’s argument about the Iraqis builds on arguments that he made in his 1997 book, *Vindicating the Founders*. In that work, West argues that while it is an eternal truth that “[a]ll human beings have a right to be free,” it is also the case that “the wrong habits and beliefs can make a particular people, at a particular time, incapable of freedom” (1997, 160).

As we have seen, Condoleeza Rice suggested in 2003 that “the condescending voices who [today] allege that some people...aren’t ready for freedom’s responsibilities” are echoing earlier claims that African-Americans were unfit for democratic citizenship. And, indeed, West’s claim that the Iraqis are not yet ready for constitutional democracy has an exact parallel in West’s argument in *Vindicating the Founders* that it may have been prudent to deny free African-Americans the rights of citizens, including the right to vote, in the years before the Civil War. For according to West, the exclusion of free blacks from citizenship in the antebellum period was consistent with the view of the Founders that “liberty would survive only if the citizens possessed the right habits and beliefs. In general that meant, first, an enlightened understanding of the equal rights of all; second, an appropriate degree of courage or self-assertion on behalf of those rights; third, moderation or self-restraint, including respect for the rights of others.” Because they “generally lacked, or were thought to lack, these qualities” the denial of citizenship to free blacks in the antebellum period may very well have been justifiable, West suggests. According to West, “[s]laves had little reason to develop habits of hard work, self-restraint, or respect for property,” and so it was reasonable—or at least not necessarily an expression of racial animus—to deprive free blacks of full political membership (1997, 26). West, then, uses a liberal strategy of exclusion to argue that despite the eternal and universal right to be free, neither blacks before the Civil War nor Iraqis after the fall of Saddam Hussein were ready to live as free democratic citizens.¹¹

¹¹ I do not mean to suggest that West would defend the denial of full citizenship to African-Americans in 1963 Birmingham, which is the specific time and place that Rice refers to in her 2003 speech. While West thinks that it was arguably prudent to deny full citizenship to free blacks in the antebellum period on the grounds that they then lacked the character traits necessary for freedom, he notes that “[a]fter the Civil War, when the decision was finally made to accept blacks as full citizens, the Founders’ principles provided the theoretical foundation” (1997, 28). West would no doubt argue that the suppression of the African-American vote in the Jim Crow South was an unjust violation of the post-Civil War Constitution. But if West would be in agreement with Rice about the specific case of Birmingham in

It is interesting to note that while both West and the British liberals discussed by Mehta deploy a similar strategy of exclusion, the British liberals did so in order to defend imperialism, whereas West does so in order to *oppose* what he sees as the imperial vision of Bush's neo-conservative supporters.¹² According to West (2004), Bush's foreign policy ideas can be linked to those of William Kristol and Robert Kagan, who argued in favor of what they called "benevolent hegemony." West suggests that Kristol and Kagan are foolishly advocating "a benign American imperialism," a foreign policy which seeks to use America's tremendous military might in order to bring about "democratic reform of the rest of the world." West argues that Kristol and Kagan are wrong to abandon the wisdom of John Adams, who warned against going "abroad in search of monsters to destroy." For West, the U.S. should use force when threatened, but it should not engage in a "vain attempt to establish democracy in places like Iraq that have lived for millennia under one despotism after another."

We thus have here an instance of what Skowronek calls the reassociation of ideas and purposes. For if nineteenth century British liberals and West both argued that some foreign peoples are currently unable to realize the human capacity for self-government, they used this same idea for different ends. Whereas the British liberals argued that England *must* rule over allegedly "backward" nations in order to render them capable of one day living freely, West argues that because some peoples are not yet capable of living freely, the U.S. should simply leave them alone, given how arduous it would be to try to instill in them the habits and beliefs necessary for liberty. To be more precise, West (2004) believes that these nations should be left alone unless they pose a threat to America's national security; according to West, the destruction

1963, West clearly advocates an idea that Rice says she rejects—namely, the idea that there are certain peoples in certain times and places who "aren't ready for freedom's responsibilities," as Rice put it.

¹² As Catherine and Michael Zuckert note, "[c]ontrary to what is often said about Straussians in American politics, the West Coasters are not aligned with the neoconservatives but with traditional (especially western) conservatives and Republicans" (Zuckert and Zuckert 2006, 252).

of the Baathist regime in Iraq was, in fact, perfectly justifiable—not because the United States should seek to spread democracy, but because of what West calls “Saddam Hussein’s decade-long series of attempts to kill Americans, using either his own forces or surrogates.” West thus supported the basic American decision to overthrow Hussein, but he argued that rather than engage in a “vain attempt to establish democracy,” the United States should simply “help Iraqis to set up a government which is likely to have at least some stability and decency, and which is unlikely to turn against America in the near future.” West thus revives what Mehta calls the “liberal strategy of exclusion,” but he does so while *rejecting* the idea that it is the duty of more advanced nations to paternalistically rule over those which are not (yet) ready for self-government.

One might object that it is wrong-headed to apply Mehta’s ideas on *liberal* strategies of exclusion to Claremont Institute scholars such as West, insofar as these scholars are staunch conservatives rather than liberals. It is certainly the case that the West Coast Straussians are avowed enemies of contemporary American liberalism, which they view as a destructive ideology rooted in the political thought of Woodrow Wilson and other Progressive Era thinkers. However, the reason that the West Coast Straussians excoriate contemporary liberalism is that they believe that it has followed in the footsteps of Progressivism by abandoning the social compact theory of Locke and of founders such as Jefferson (Pestritto 2005; Pestritto and West 2007; Kesler 2012, xi-xix, 31-35). The West Coast Straussians may be conservatives insofar as they reject contemporary American liberalism, but they are classical liberals, of a sort, insofar as they celebrate the natural rights liberalism of Locke and the American founders. And, as I have shown, within the natural rights liberalism of the West Coast Straussians one can discern the same kind of liberal strategy of exclusion that Mehta has found in British liberalism. Indeed, the

West Coast Straussians deploy this liberal strategy of exclusion in a very frank manner. According to Mehta, the claim made by British liberals that freedom can only be realized if certain “preconditions” are met is a claim that is “*concealed behind* the endorsement of [liberalism’s] universal capacities” (1999, 49, emphasis added). While the West Coast Straussians also qualify their universalism by invoking preconditions for the exercise of liberty, they do nothing to “conceal” this theoretical move; instead, they openly proclaim that the universal capacity for self-government cannot be actualized by those who lack rationality or who lack the proper sort of character.

Excluding slaves and enslavers: the political thought of Harry Jaffa

The “strategy of exclusion” found in the thought of Kesler and West can also be discerned in the thought of their teacher, Harry Jaffa. Indeed, with Jaffa we see another striking example of the dynamic described by Mehta according to which liberal theorists initially make universal claims about the capacity to be free, but then qualify these claims by arguing that this capacity for freedom cannot be realized by all peoples at all times. To be sure, throughout *Crisis of the House Divided* Jaffa defends Lincoln’s principle—a principle rooted in Jefferson and Locke—that no person has a right to rule over another person without his or her consent. Jaffa celebrates Lincoln’s conviction that, “The relation of master and slave was a total violation of self-government; to justify despotism was of necessity to condemn self-government, and to justify self-government was of necessity to condemn despotism” (1959, 31). And yet, a close reading of *Crisis* reveals that Jaffa himself is willing to justify despotism under certain conditions, and he does so by explicitly citing Mill. In a passage that is worth quoting at length, Jaffa writes:

We have already quoted from John Stuart Mill’s essay, “On Liberty,” published in 1859, to the effect that “despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with

barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.” It must, we believe, be conceded that the justice of despotism is not absolutely and unequivocally refuted by Lincoln’s argument. For it follows as a necessary implication of the Declaration itself that, in Mill’s words, “Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion.” In other words, in a world that is duped and befuddled by the obscurantism practiced upon their peoples and upon themselves by, e.g., feudal kings and nobles, or in a world in which the souls of savage peoples are locked within the dark night of primeval barbarism, self-government of the people is inconceivable. But the right of revolution announced in the Declaration, the right to use force against those who would deny us the security of our natural rights to life and liberty, is obviously applicable against corrupt or degraded peoples as well as against rulers of this description. The right to revolution is a right to use violence against anyone who would deny us the enjoyment of our rights. From this viewpoint an enlightened minority has the same right to use force against a brutal majority as an enlightened majority has against a brutal king. And, if the minority or majority which is brutalized cannot be exiled, it must be ruled despotically until such time as it can justly be admitted to a share in government. *And this argument, be it noted, although it lends color to the enslavement of the Negroes in the South, equally justified the destruction of the Confederacy by war and the institution of reconstruction governments which certainly ruled arbitrarily* (emphasis added). The South, in denying the equal natural rights of the Negro, not only denied the foundation of its own rights; it denied as well its own *competence to exercise these rights* (1959, 340, emphasis in the original).¹³

Jaffa’s suggestion that the Millian argument about the preconditions of liberty “lends color to the enslavement of the Negroes in the South” appears to mean that for Jaffa, the slaves were at least for an initial time period among those groups of people for whom “self-government” was “inconceivable.” Indeed, Jaffa writes that, “it must be conceded that Negroes did come from an ‘inferior civilization,’ that is, from a civilization in which there was no recognition of the universal equal rights of man” (1959, 339). Jaffa seems to agree with Lincoln that the founders

¹³ Earlier in the book, Jaffa compares Mill’s claim about the legitimacy of despotic rule over barbarians to Stephen Douglas’s assertion that “any race of men” that “have shown themselves so degraded, by ignorance, superstition, cruelty, and barbarism, as to be utterly incapable of governing themselves...must...be governed by others” (Douglas quoted in Jaffa 1959, 32). Jaffa does not challenge Douglas’s basic claim, but he criticizes Douglas for neglecting Mill’s caveat that despotism over barbarians is only legitimate if “the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.” According to Jaffa, for Douglas the chief end of slavery is *not* the improvement of the slaves; instead, the end is simply to promote the “material self-interest” of the white community, as this is for Douglas the sole criterion which should determine whether slavery is “voted up or voted down” (1959, 35).

were therefore correct that “tolerating slavery” was in their day an unfortunate “necessity,” due in part to “the actual condition of degradation of their slaves,” which itself was “partly an inheritance from Africa and partly the consequence of the brutalization of slavery” (1959, 341). According to Jaffa, “the enslavement of Negroes” was thus “‘just’ in a qualified sense, so long as they were being prepared for freedom....” Jaffa goes so far as to suggest that even the “original enslavement” of Africans by white Americans should not be considered a “crime,” since “the final fruit of the African slave trade was...the possession by Africans of the infinitely precious doctrine of equal human rights” (1959, 342).¹⁴ Jaffa thus follows Mill in arguing that barbarians—who, for Jaffa, are those who deny or fail to understand the reality of equal natural rights—can rightfully be dominated, as long as the goal is to enlighten them and thereby make them ready for eventual self-government.

As indicated in the last two sentences of the long passage quoted above, Jaffa believes that once the Southern slaveholders turned away from the founding principle that all human beings have “equal natural rights,” they became as barbaric as their slaves once were. Jaffa thus reminds us that liberal strategies of exclusion can not only be used in an effort to legitimate racial subordination, but such strategies can also be used to exclude those who seek to *impose* racial hierarchies. “The whites said the negroes were deficient in civilized qualities,” writes Jaffa, “but, by Lincoln’s definition, the whites who denied the Declaration were in a curious respect *also* uncivilized” (1959, 338-39, emphasis added). For Jaffa, then, both the slaves and their Declaration-denying enslavers were for a period of time fit only for despotism rather than

¹⁴ Jaffa’s reluctance to call the “original enslavement” of Africans a “crime” was not shared by Jefferson. In his original draft of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson (1776) not only uses the terms “piratical warfare,” “assemblage of horrors,” and “execrable commerce” to describe the slave trade, but he also uses the very word “crime” when he suggests that King George’s incitement of slave rebellions is tantamount to “paying off former crimes committed against the *liberties* of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the *lives* of another.”

self-rule. Until they could be taught to understand and embrace the truth of equal natural rights, the tyranny of slavery was an unfortunate “necessity” for the former group, and the tyranny of the Reconstruction governments was equally justifiable for the latter group.

Jaffa’s use of Mill is rather surprising, given that Jaffa is a defender of natural rights, whereas Mill never repudiated the famous claim of his utilitarian predecessor, Jeremy Bentham, that the notion of “natural and imprescriptible rights” is “nonsense upon stilts” (Bentham 1843, 501). Indeed, the passage from *On Liberty* quoted by Jaffa precedes a paragraph in which Mill emphasizes that his argument is based on “utility” rather than on “the idea of abstract right” (Mill 1991, 15). But, just as West can disagree with Woodrow Wilson about natural rights but agree with him on the centrality of “character” as a prerequisite for democratic citizenship, so, too, does Jaffa agree with Mill that “barbarians” must sometimes be ruled without their consent in order to educate them, even though Jaffa celebrates the concept of natural rights whereas Mill sets it aside.

Forty years after he published *Crisis of the House Divided*, Jaffa again invoked Mill’s “strategy of exclusion” in *A New Birth of Freedom*. Michael Zuckert (2009) has noted a number of differences between the arguments found in *Crisis*, on the one hand, and *New Birth*, on the other. For instance, Jaffa argued in *Crisis* that it is not quite the whole truth to say, as Lincoln did, that no one has the right to rule over anyone else without his or her consent; for Jaffa, the real truth of the matter is that “some men are so superior to other men that they might, in theory, justly rule them without the other men’s consent” (1959, 431). However, those who are truly great, such as Lincoln, renounce their natural right to despotically rule over others, in order to preserve and promote self-government. As Zuckert points out, this argument about the natural *superiority* of the man of great virtue does not appear—at least not explicitly—in *New Birth*

(Zuckert 2009, 217).¹⁵ However, I would note that in another respect, the two books are entirely consistent with one another, for Jaffa repeats in the later work his earlier argument that despite the universal truth that all have natural rights, some groups of people are so *inferior*—not by nature, but due to a “corrupted” or “degraded” or “primeval” condition—that it is just as well as prudent for them to be ruled over without their consent, until they are ready to handle the challenges and responsibilities of freedom.

After again directly quoting Mill’s claim that “barbarians” are fit only for “despotism” until they “have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion,” Jaffa suggests in *New Birth* that, “[r]ecognition of the law of reason and nature, condensed into the proposition that all men are created equal, is the necessary condition for being capable of improvement through free and equal discussion” (2000, 421). For Jaffa, then, those who deny or fail to understand that “all men are created equal” do not need to be treated as equals by those who *do* comprehend this eternal truth. As Jaffa puts it, “Civil societies are not formed by or with barbarians or savages. When the latter come into contact with the civilized in such a way that there must be a relationship of ruling and being ruled, the civilized may have to govern the uncivilized without their consent” (2000, 422).

According to Mehta, Mill’s notion of “civilizational infantilism” has “a distinguished pedigree and in the liberal tradition originates in Locke’s characterization of tutelage as a necessary stage through which children must be trained before they acquire the reason requisite for expressing contractual consent” (1999, 32). In *New Birth*, Jaffa clearly rearticulates this link

¹⁵ According to Zuckert’s provocative argument, a close reading of *New Birth* reveals that Jaffa likely does, in fact, still think that “the equality principle” of the Declaration is not “rationally true.” However, Zuckert thinks that Jaffa now finds it prudent to conceal this view, out of the conviction that it is better for the American regime if its citizens maintain their “ancient faith” that no one has a right to rule over others without their consent (2009, 222).

between the Lockean and the Millian arguments discussed by Mehta when Jaffa writes that although civilized peoples may despotically rule uncivilized peoples,

[t]he uncivilized may not, however, be governed as if they were an inferior species, existing only for the convenience of the superior. The civilized must recognize the humanity of the uncivilized and the equal rights inherent in that humanity, in the same sense that adults recognize the humanity of children prior to their reaching the “age of consent.” Properly understood, the age of consent, like the state of nature, is not merely chronological, but represents the intelligence and maturity that makes possible a valid contract between two rational beings (2000, 422).

Later in the same chapter, Jaffa again invokes the language of childhood when he writes: “But as we have seen John Stuart Mill suggest (in agreement with the Declaration), it is in the interest of civilized mankind that barbarians become qualified for freedom, rather than being fixed in their dependence for the same reason it is in the interest of parents that their children grow up” (2000, 460).

While Jaffa here follows Mill in arguing that barbarians and children must be ruled paternalistically, a difference is that Jaffa stresses, unlike Mill, that peoples can not only progress to a higher stage of development, but they can also sometimes degenerate, moving from a civilized condition to one of barbarism. As Jaffa put it in an essay first published in 1964, Mill was correct “that moral qualifications” are “necessary as a basis for the exercise of liberty,” but Mill “fail[ed] to discern that barbarism lurked as a potentiality of modern society no less than of the Dark Ages” (1965, 183). Jaffa here refers to Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia to make his point, but, as we have seen, in *Crisis* he makes clear his view that white Southerners descended into barbarism once they began to deny the Declaration’s claim that “all men are created equal” (Jaffa 1959, 340).¹⁶

¹⁶ This argument reappears in *New Birth*, when Jaffa (2000) argues that at the time of the Founding, Southern whites were “civilized” because even though they tolerated slavery as a necessity, they always “recognize[d] the Negro’s humanity” (295). This recognition disappeared in the 1850s, though, as Jefferson Davis now referred to African-Americans as “‘the degenerate sons of Ham,’ . . . and the dominant

Because Jaffa believes that neither childlike persons nor childlike peoples possess the rationality required for self-government, Jaffa actually ends up finding more common ground with John Calhoun than one might initially assume, given that Calhoun is presented as Lincoln's great intellectual nemesis in *New Birth*. Jaffa writes that we can, in fact, "discriminate, as Calhoun says we must, between the different levels of government appropriate for the different levels of civilization" (2000, 422). As we have seen, Jaffa actually *agrees* with Calhoun that the slaves, at least for a certain time period, were barbarians who were not fit for self-government. Jaffa breaks sharply with Calhoun, though, in insisting that Southerners who denied the truths of the Declaration were *also* barbarians. Jaffa also breaks from Calhoun insofar as Jaffa insists (following Mill) that barbarians can eventually be made ready for liberty. For while Calhoun did sometimes suggest that slavery was a kind of school that "improved" the slaves to a certain degree both "morally and intellectually," he did not view slavery, Jaffa notes, as "a school from which the slaves were ever to graduate" (Calhoun 2009, 602; Jaffa 2000, 420).¹⁷ In Jaffa's view, African-Americans *did* eventually achieve, in large part through participation in their churches, what Calhoun thought they could never attain—namely, what Jaffa calls "the political capacity for freedom" (2000, 162).

It is precisely the "political capacity for freedom" which Kesler and West declared to be lacking in Iraqis. These two scholars reiterate Jaffa's "strategy of exclusion" by suggesting that while all human beings everywhere have the right to be free, some peoples are currently incapable of exercising this right. As Jaffa puts it in a passage that resonates with the critique of Bush that was made a few years later by Kesler and West: "no sane person has ever argued that

opinion in the South was [now] that slavery was a positive good" (288). By Jaffa's definition, white Southerners in the 1850's were thus no longer civilized.

¹⁷ Another way to sum up the difference between Jaffa and Calhoun is to say that for Calhoun, there is no universal right to self-government; for Jaffa, there *is* such a right, although not all people are in a condition to exercise it.

any people would or could enjoy the equal rights to life, liberty, or property...without regard to their intellectual or moral condition” (Jaffa 2000, 423).

Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to demonstrate that Mehta’s ideas on “liberal strategies of exclusion” can provide us with a crucial tool for understanding important episodes in American political thought. As we have seen, the notion of “civilizational infantilism” was central to Wilson’s defense of imperialism after the Spanish-American War. The significance of the strategy of civilizational infantilism for American political thought was evident again in 2003, when Bush’s defense of his foreign policy proceeded in part through a denunciation of this strategy. And, we have seen that “liberal strategies of exclusion” remain alive and well in the thought of the West Coast Straussians who criticized Bush’s foreign policy, in a manner that is consistent with Jaffa’s thought in his two masterworks on Lincoln.

Is the West Coast Straussians’ continued use of “liberal strategies of exclusion” something to be praised, or something to be condemned? In my view, any claim that an entire group of people lacks the capacity for democratic citizenship (either due to their alleged nature or due to their alleged moral condition) is a claim that must be looked upon with suspicion, as such claims often simply work to rationalize unjust relations of domination.¹⁸ That said, the

¹⁸ In their important contribution to the literature on Mill and imperialism, Chiu and Taylor (2011) suggest that Mill genuinely hoped that imperial rulers would try to gradually cultivate democratic institutions, and he hoped that these democratic institutions would, in turn, cultivate democratic virtues in the people, thereby rendering imperialism unnecessary; Mill’s defense of imperial rule was thus only a defense of a despotism that sought to ultimately be “self-extinguishing.” Chiu and Taylor might very well be right that Mill defended imperialism because he believed that it would, over the long term, lead to democratization; nevertheless, his ideas could still provide intellectual aid and comfort to imperialists who sought to dominate India for less noble reasons, and who never intended to abandon their power. This is a general problem with arguments rooted in the idea of “civilizational infantilism.” For even if those who make these arguments truly believe that the imperial power should engage in democratic education and then one day depart, the arguments can be appropriated by imperialists who simply intend to dominate their subjects in perpetuity.

Claremont Institute thinkers were surely correct that Bush's assertion that all peoples have "the ability...to be free" was far too facile, insofar as it suggested that we need not think much about the habits, beliefs, or mores that may be needed to "make democracy work," to use Putnam's phrase (Putnam 1993).¹⁹ We must interrogate any sweeping claim that some civilizations or peoples are currently too infantile or irrational to engage in self-government; at the same time, though, we should remember, as William Galston (1991) has stressed, that liberal societies require certain virtues to be fully successful. Indeed, Bush himself acknowledged as much when he turned his attention from democracy abroad to democracy in America. For in his Second Inaugural Address, Bush (2005) declared that, "[i]n America's ideal of freedom, the public interest depends on private character—on integrity, and tolerance toward others, and the rule of conscience in our own lives. Self-government relies, in the end, on the governing of the self." Bush's language here is reminiscent of Wilson's argument that self-government requires a citizenry marked by "self-possession, self-mastery, the habit of order and peace and common counsel, and a reverence for law" (Wilson 1908, 52). Bush was correct that we should be wary of claims that certain peoples are not "ready" for democracy; at the same time, Bush was also probably correct that self-government works best with citizens who possess the virtues that both he and Wilson outlined. In short, the claim that certain character traits are necessary for a successful democracy is a claim that can be put to dangerous uses; nevertheless, those who care about the fate of self-government both at home and abroad must not abandon the quest to better understand the virtues that may be required for a healthy and stable democracy.

¹⁹ The most profound study of the ways in which "the whole moral and intellectual state of a people" crucially affects its ability to sustain "a democratic republic" remains Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1966, 287). Studies of democratization which draw on Tocqueville's insights include Putnam (1993) and Craiutu and Gellar (2009).

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