

# Monsters to Destroy? The Rhetorical Legacy of John Quincy Adams' July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1821 Oration

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*This essay examines how the John Quincy Adams's foreign policy maxim of "we do not go in search of monsters to destroy" has been appropriated in contemporary foreign policy, including the recent 2016 presidential campaign, arguing his aphorism are authorizing words that validate and ratify the positions of pundits, politicians, and policy-makers of not only critics of U.S. foreign policy, but those who defend it. Mapping Quincy Adams's aphorism allows us to explore the boundaries and direction of America's role in the world and how it impacts America's exceptionalist ethos.*

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Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger observed in his sweeping history of international relations, *Diplomacy*, American foreign policy and its accompanying rhetoric has always had at its heart a tension between those who would argue that "America serves its values best by perfecting democracy at home, thereby acting as a beacon for the rest of mankind"<sup>1</sup> with those that maintain "America's values impose on it an obligation to crusade for them around the world."<sup>2</sup> These two divergent approaches to U.S. foreign policy, known as the mission of exemplar and the mission of intervention, flow from a similar belief composition in America's exceptionalism.<sup>3</sup> American exceptionalism structures the arguments over what its role in the world should be.<sup>4</sup> The tension Kissinger noted stems from U.S. foreign policy makers largely diverging and debating as to how the United States should *enact* its exceptionalist credo. Exemplarists and interventionists offer different visions for how the United States demonstrates, maintains, and strengthens America's exceptionalism. This clash between exemplarist and interventionist voices is at its apex when the United States undergoes a transition from one era to another in foreign relations (e.g. World War II to the

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 17.

<sup>2</sup>Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 17.

<sup>3</sup>See Jason A. Edwards, *Navigating the Post-Cold War World: President Clinton's Foreign Policy Rhetoric* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008); Paul E. McCartney, *Power and Progress: American National Identity, the War of 1898, and the Rise of American Imperialism* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Trevor B. McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam: Foreign Policy Since 1974* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Siobahn McEvoy-Levy, *American Exceptionalism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Public Diplomacy at the End of the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave, 2003); Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776* (New York: Mariner Books, 1998); Frederick C. Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Edwards, *Navigating the Post-Cold War World*, 9-14.

Cold War) or a major foreign policy decision emerges (e.g. the League of Nations debate) that needs to be decided.<sup>5</sup>

In contemporary American foreign policy, interventionist voices have been the loudest concerning the direction of U.S. international relations. These voices are not shy about invoking and appropriating the words and deeds of great interventionists such as Presidents Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Reagan as sources of rhetorical invention to support their arguments for U.S. global leadership. Exemplarist voices have largely been drowned out by the drum-beat of the interventionists and do not have a reservoir of voices they can invoke, save for one: John Quincy Adams (JQA).

The words of John Quincy Adams, specifically a portion of his July 4, 1821 oration, continue to provide rhetorical support for arguments exemplarists make concerning U.S. foreign policy. For the July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1821 holiday, Secretary of State Adams was invited by the citizens of Washington D.C. to address them in an oration. Adams took this rhetorical opportunity to answer critics of the Monroe Administration's foreign policy. Quincy Adams spoke forcefully about what U.S. foreign policy doctrine should be. In his most famous passage, Adams stated:

Whenever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will her heart, her benedictions, and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own. She will commend the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example. She well knows that by once enlisting under other banners than her own, were they even the banners of foreign independence, she would involve herself beyond the power of extrication, in all the wars of interest and intrigue, of individual avarice, envy, and ambition, which assume the colors and usurp the standard of freedom. The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from *liberty to force*.... She might become the dictatress of the world. She would be no longer the ruler of her own spirit....

[America's] glory is not *dominion*, but *liberty*. Her march is the march of the mind. She has a spear and a shield: but the motto upon her shield is, *Freedom, Independence, Peace*. This has been her Declaration: this has been, as far as her necessary intercourse with the rest of mankind would permit, her practice.<sup>6</sup>

The key idea in this passage was that the United States does not interfere and become involved in the affairs of other states. It would not, to paraphrase Jefferson's first inaugural, engage in "entangling alliances" with Europe or other states. If America did its destiny would move from "liberty to force", becoming "dictatress of the world," and possibly losing its democratic soul. It would be involved in affairs that would "beyond the powers of extrication." As such, America's true power to influence in the affairs of the world lay with it sounding the horn of democracy, but only engaging in activities to perfect its own example and be a model for others to emulate.

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<sup>5</sup>See McCrisken, *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam*; McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State*; Karl K. Schonberg, *Pursuing the National Interest: Foreign Policy Debates in Twentieth Century American Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>6</sup>John Quincy Adams, *An Address Delivered at the Request of a Commission at the Citizens of Washington; On the Occasion of Reading the Declaration of Independence, on the Fourth of July 1821* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Fourth of July Archive Collection), 32.

Pulitzer Prize winning historian Samuel Flagg Bemis maintained Adams' July 4<sup>th</sup> oration was a landmark document in the history of American foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> Arthur Whitaker explained his address stands as one of the "few really striking speeches ever made on Independence Day, one of the most sensational ever made by an American Secretary of State on any occasion."<sup>8</sup> H.W. Brands described Adams' July 4<sup>th</sup> oration, particularly his phrase the United States "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy," to be the "most succinct and compelling exemplarist statement ever."<sup>9</sup> In essence, the specific passage above captured the fundamental principle of U.S. foreign policy conduct in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly, an examination of JQA's July 4<sup>th</sup> oration is warranted, but in this paper I am concerned with the legacy of his words, particularly for America's contemporary political era, including the recent 2016 presidential campaign. Quincy Adams' words have been invoked and appropriated by various academics, politicians, pundits, and policy makers, as they search for rhetorical support in attempting to fight against and/or keeping the U.S. away from tackling proverbial "monsters."

In this paper, I unpack this contemporary legacy asserting John Quincy Adams is an *authorizing figure* within the realm of American foreign policy rhetoric. More specifically, the passage that was quoted earlier in which the U.S. "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy" are *authorizing words* that pundits, policymakers, and politicians appropriate to use as support and legitimate their discussions of U.S. international relations. I argue these words serve a sanctioning function for those that invoke them. By sanctioning I mean rhetors use the words of JQA to validate and ratify specific arguments, while inviting audiences to see the wisdom of their ideas for contemporary foreign policy. This sanctioning function is primarily what Bruce Gronbeck calls a genetic argument. A genetic argument is where "a rhetor can return to the originary moment of some part of civic life to essentialize it, asking for a recommitment to a presumably primal but presently ignored value or mindset."<sup>10</sup> When rhetors use Adams words as a source of rhetorical invention they argue, on the one hand, against the dominant interventionist foreign policy paradigm and return to the 19<sup>th</sup> century foreign policy exemplarism of non-interference with other states. On the other hand, JQA's aphorism is used to reinforce an interventionist position. According to their logic, Quincy Adams' advice is not relevant for a contemporary era and should be ignored because of modern global dangers. His dictum becomes rhetorical fodder for camps on both sides of the debate over America's role in the world. Mapping how John Quincy Adams' authorizing words and his memory has been used can provide a deeper understanding of where U.S. foreign policy is heading, what the specific advocates of said policy want to do, and the possible implications for America's role in the world.

Before I delve deeper into analyzing JQA's aphorism let me discuss why I believe this article is a good fit for the *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric*. In the first issue of *JCR*, Brett Lunceford asked the question "Must We All Be Rhetorical Historians?"<sup>11</sup> Lunceford argued most rhetoric journals focused on articles they thought would have long shelf-lives. Thus, the focus in these

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<sup>7</sup>Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 356.

<sup>8</sup>Arthur Preston Whitaker, *The United States and the Independence of Latin America, 1800-1830* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962), 350.

<sup>9</sup>H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

<sup>10</sup>Bruce Gronbeck, "The Rhetorics of the Past: History, Argument, and Collective Memory," In *Doing Rhetorical History*, ed. Kathleen Turner (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 55.

<sup>11</sup> Brett Lunceford, "Must We All Be Rhetorical Historians: On Relevance and Timeliness in Rhetorical Scholarship," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 1 (2011): 1-9.

journals has become on analyzing important historical figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. or Abraham Lincoln or changes to rhetorical theory. Both of which are certainly important to the discipline of rhetoric, but Lunceford expressed frustration with the publishing process because of the lengthy turnaround time. Moreover, any essay that focused on contemporary affairs would be published long after the event had taken place, thereby diminishing the potential impact this essay could have. Therefore, Lunceford helped launch *JCR* whose mission was to combine the rigors of academic inquiry but have the timeliness of journalism.

In the following issue, Michael Tumolo responded to Lunceford's article with a discussion of useful rhetorical history.<sup>12</sup> Tumolo asserted that history is an important component for timely and relevant scholarship. In a contemporary setting, a rhetorical historical perspective of ideas and events allows for more in-depth understanding, evaluation, and action within the present. One of the primary ways this perspective can be found is through the study of collective memory. Rhetorical studies of collective memory demonstrate directly how history influences the present and future decisions. Moreover, it offers a contextual framework for how we can debate different ideas and events. I would suggest collective memory studies perform the ultimate goal of rhetorical scholarship, which as Barry Brummett has argued, is to "teach people how to experience their rhetorical environments more richly."<sup>13</sup>

In its short history, *JCR* has published several essays that used history to provide, if nothing else, important contexts for a discussion of contemporary issues. For example, Thomas Benson's article on "The Rhetoric of Civility" was an in-depth study in the calls for greater civility after the shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords.<sup>14</sup> Benson used Cicero and examples from America's political past to a long historical vocabulary of political invective. Calls for greater civility and incivility in public discourse are nothing new and Benson's article helps ground that perspective. Benson's study on civility, with its historical grounding, seem particularly relevant in the era of President Trump. Additionally, in his essay on President Obama and the rhetoric of empathy, Erik Leake noted Presidents Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush were quite successful in their uses of empathy on the campaign trail.<sup>15</sup> While short, Leake's historical discussion of Carter and Bush's use of empathy grounds his study providing an important historical context for this topic in presidential rhetoric. Finally, Christopher House examined the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia.<sup>16</sup> House maintains the JCM is a counter museum whereby examining the memory of Jim Crow visitors can become active-participants in larger dialogue on the issue of race. Considering the controversy over police shootings of unarmed black men, the Black Lives Matter movement, and other issues surrounding race, House's essay can be viewed as an important contribution to this contemporary issue.

I submit this essay is a useful form of rhetorical history that is appropriate for a contemporary era. Considering Donald Trump's words actions on immigration, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Paris Climate Accords, NATO, different trade deals like NAFTA, and a whole range of foreign policy issues there are considerable questions about America's global leadership. My discussion

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Tumolo, "On Useful Rhetorical History," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 1 (2011): 55-62.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Brummett, "Rhetorical Theory as Heuristic and Moral: A Pedagogical Justification," *Communication Education* 33 (1984): 103.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Benson, "The Rhetoric of Civility: Power, Authenticity, and Democracy," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 1 (2011): 22-30.

<sup>15</sup> Erik Leake, "Empathizer-in-Chief: The Promotion and Performance of Empathy in the Speeches of Barack Obama," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 6 (2016): 1-14.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher A. House, "Remembering Jim Crow in the Age of Trump: An Analysis of the Rhetorical Functions of the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia," *Journal of Contemporary Rhetoric* 7 (2017): 1-18.

of how the aphorism “monsters to destroy” has been used over the last 20 years offers parameters on a historical debate concerning America’s role in the world that has raged for generations. Understanding what this debate is and what the stakes potentially are is vital for Americans having an informed and vigorous discussion about what America’s role has been, where it is, and where it should go in the future.

To that end I cite journal articles, books, speeches, and newspaper articles from those who quote JQA’s July 4<sup>th</sup> oration to illustrate how it has functioned in foreign policy circles since the end of the Cold War, particularly since 9/11. I examine this period because it is the most contemporary transitional period in U.S. foreign policy that brought with it many important events for our international relations (e.g. 9/11, the interventions into Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan, Bush’s preemption strategy, etc.). In conducting this analysis, I examined each item that referenced JQA’s Fourth of July oration looking for different patterns on how they appropriated Adams’s wisdom. In what follows, the cited items are representative examples of the overall themes found in my analysis. In the next section, I offer a more extensive discussion of collective memory and the authorizing figure.

### **Collective Memory and the Authorizing Figure**

Collective memory is an oft cited topic within rhetorical studies. John Bodnar suggested collective memory is “a body of beliefs about the past that help a public or society understand both its past and present, and by implication its future.”<sup>17</sup> Collective memory is a particular way to understand the past. It involves an interpretation of history that can be widely ratified by the general public. This interpretation is important because it helps us understand the past, how that past influences the present, and how it may contribute to our future.<sup>18</sup> By nature, people evoke an understanding of history that is selective and partial. These selective and partial memories are managed in certain ways for strategic purposes.

Collective memory can come in various forms such as myths, metaphors, and the specific use of history. Sarah Spring noted the use of history is a means to garner authority.<sup>19</sup> Pundits, politicians, and policymakers often use specific historical events and figures because they resonate more than others, such as World War II, the Holocaust, Vietnam and other events to lend greater authority to their specific policy positions.<sup>20</sup> As Mary Stuckey put it, “certain events, like certain people and certain places, become symbols for actions and policy positions, these metaphors help to order political reality.”<sup>21</sup> The use of these historical events and/or persons provides argumentative data for the rhetor’s larger position, while also giving legitimacy to that specific person’s discourse. For example, American presidents often invoke the memory of Abraham Lincoln to discuss issues

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<sup>17</sup>John Bodnar, “Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland,” In *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 76.

<sup>18</sup>Jill A. Edy, “Journalistic Uses of Collective Memory,” *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999): 71-85.

<sup>19</sup>Sarah Spring, “The Uses of History: Deliberative Analogy and Victor Davis Hanson,” *Contemporary and Debate* 28 (2007): 91-115.

<sup>20</sup>See Benjamin R. Bates, “Circulation of the World War II/Holocaust analogy in the 1999 Kosovo Intervention: Articulating a Vocabulary of International Conflict,” *The Journal of Language and Politics* 8 (2009): 28-51; George N. Dionisopoulos & Steven R. Goldzwig, “The Meaning of Vietnam: Political Rhetoric as Revisionists Cultural History,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 61-79; David Hoagland Noon, “Operation Enduring Analogy: World War II, The War on Terror, and the Uses of Historical Memory,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7 (2004): 339-366.

<sup>21</sup>Mary E. Stuckey, “Remembering the Future: Rhetorical Echoes of World War II and Vietnam in George Bush’s Speech on the Gulf War,” *Communication Studies* 43 (1992): 249.

of equality within the United States. Specifically, President Obama has used Lincoln's memory and his words to suggest that equality of opportunity is not secured unless the results of our rights are equalized among individuals.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Ronald Reagan used the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. to argue against the need for more civil rights legislation because he maintained that King's dream had already been achieved.<sup>23</sup> Lara Brown argued when political figures, particular American presidents, reference historical heroes, such as their predecessors, they invite comparisons, offer justifications, and provide gravitas to those making arguments about contemporary policy and principles.<sup>24</sup> These historical heroes serve as a source of authority and data for rhetors to use for their own purposes. Donald Rice called this kind of discourse the "rhetoric of the authorizing figure."<sup>25</sup> To define the parameters and purposes of this form of collective memory, Rice demonstrated how Cuban president Fidel Castro invoked the memory of Cuban hero Jose Marti to foment the Cuban Revolution. Although Rice's study focused on Cuban politics, the basic functions of the authorizing figure are equally applicable to American political discourse.

Authorizing figures perform three different functions. One function is that s/he can define and unify movements. The rhetor using the authorizing figure distinguishes what the movement is and what it is not. Castro used the memory of Marti early on to define and unify his revolutionary moment. For Castro, Marti "functioned as a kind of catalyst that helped to bring the principles and ideals of the struggle into focus."<sup>26</sup> Referencing Marti served to define and unify Cubans behind his cause, while bolstering his revolutionary credentials.

Second, authorizing figures are used to sanction interpretations and events. These figures validate and ratify policy choices and principles, which can be controversial. Sanctioning demonstrates the orator and the authorizing figure are doing similar work, despite major differences in the circumstances they face. The sanctioning function gives the appearance of a seamless transition from one era to the next. The core principles and/or policies of the past are no different than in the present. It offers the idea that if the authorizing figure were alive that s/he would not only approve of the rhetor's ideas, but enact similar ones. Castro used Marti to endorse his implementation of his Marxist economic policies, Marxist viewpoints, support his policy of military ventures into third-world nations, and the development of social internationalism. Marti's words and actions served as precedents that Castro drew upon to lend authority to his political worldview and policies.

Finally, authorizing figures are used to legitimate future goals. Once Castro was entrenched in power, he mixed Marti's vision of Cuba's future with his own interpretation of what Cuba should look like. Marti's "anti-Americanism" was transformed into Castro's future goal to battle all "imperialism." Castro appropriated Marti to legitimate what he thought Cuba could strive for in the future.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Jason R. Jividen, *Claiming Lincoln: Progressivism, Equality, and the Battle for Lincoln's Legacy in Presidential Rhetoric* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 171.

<sup>23</sup>Denise M. Bostdorff and Steven R. Goldzwig, "History, Collective Memory, and Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr: Reagan's Rhetorical Legacy," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (2005): 661-690.

<sup>24</sup>Lara M. Brown, "The Greats and the Great Debate: President William J. Clinton's Use of Presidential Exemplars," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37 (2007): 124-38.

<sup>25</sup>Donald E. Rice, *The Rhetoric of the Authorizing Figure: Fidel Castro and Jose Marti* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992); Jason A. Edwards, "Sanctioning Foreign Policy: The Rhetorical Uses of Harry Truman," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39 (2009): 454-472.

<sup>26</sup>Rice, *The Rhetoric of the Authorizing Figure*, 61.

<sup>27</sup>Rice, *The Rhetoric of the Authorizing Figure*, 126

In contemporary American foreign policy discourse, authorizing figures consist primarily of interventionists such as Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy, and Ronald Reagan.<sup>28</sup> Their memories are invoked to support and/or negate a policy or principle that is being debated or implemented. John Quincy Adams is the most prominent exemplarist voice consistently mentioned and sanctioning different foreign policy principles, doctrines, and policies. Invoking JQA assists in establishing their interpretation of foreign policy events, policies, and principles. In this next section, I outline the contours of JQA's authorizing words for contemporary U.S. foreign policy, finding that after analyzing a variety of texts JQA's rhetoric was used to sanction interventionist and exemplarist positions.

### **The Contemporary Legacy of John Quincy Adams July 4<sup>th</sup> Oration**

When John Quincy Adams argued the United States should not go in seek of "monsters to destroy" he reasserted and extended a doctrine of non-intervention that was a hallmark of early U.S. foreign policy. However, Adams' time as Secretary of State was set against the backdrop of great upheaval in the international system. Revolutions occurred all throughout South America, Central and Eastern Europe. The Monroe Administration was pressured by voices within Europe and the United States, most notably Speaker of the House Henry Clay and Senator Daniel Webster, to change the course of American foreign affairs. Specifically, Clay and Webster suggested the United States create an alliance with Great Britain and other powers so they could directly support those revolutions, particularly in Greece, which had captured the imaginations of thousands, including the poet Lord Byron.

Speaking to this pressure to change course in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, Adams asserted in a letter to Robert Walsh, Jr. that directly supporting those revolutions, particularly in Europe, amounted to a "political doctrine in my estimation of the most pernicious tendency to this country . . . that doctrine that it is the duty of America to take an active part in the future political reformation of Europe."<sup>29</sup> For Adams, the foreign policy advocated by Clay and Webster would fundamentally alter America's character, but also endanger its democratic experiment. Taking "active part in the future political reformation of Europe" may infect the body politic with all of the defects of the European system, a system the United States had attempted to separate itself from with the American Revolution. America best influenced the affairs of the world with the power of its example, not the imposition of its political principles. His July 4<sup>th</sup> oration gave him the opportunity to directly rebut and refute any changes to America's policy of non-interventionism. His rhetoric was an eloquent defense of curtailing U.S. activity abroad.

Fast forward over 100 years later and since the end of the World War II exemplarism within U.S. foreign policy circles, while still important, has been eclipsed by the intellectual heirs of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. Interventionism is the primary way the United States enacts its exceptionalist in the international arena. Yet the end of the Cold War brought with it considerable debate within American foreign policy circles about what America's proper role should be.<sup>30</sup> This

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<sup>28</sup>See Phillip Abbot, *The Exemplary Presidency: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the American Political Tradition* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990); Edwards, "Sanctioning Foreign Policy."

<sup>29</sup>John Quincy Adams, "Letter to Robert Walsh, Jr," *The Writings of John Quincy Adams*, Volume VII ed. by Worthington C. Ford (New York: Macmillian Company), 117.

<sup>30</sup>See Edwards, *Navigating the Post-Cold War World*; Karl K. Schonberg, *Pursuing the National Interest: Foreign Policy Debates in Twentieth Century American Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

debate allowed the exemplarist wisdom of John Quincy Adams to resurge and be appropriated when discussing America's role in post-Cold War politics.

### The “Charming” but Outdated Wisdom of JQA

When analyzing how JQA's authorizing words have been employed America's post-Cold War foreign policy I noticed different variants of its usage. For example, some politicians and pundits used Adams' words as evidence to demonstrate the folly of his foreign policy wisdom for the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Instead, they asserted the United States must maintain and extend its interventionism or there would be considerable consequences for the U.S. and the world. For example, neoconservative intellectuals William Kristol and Robert Kagan criticized the Clinton administration and other conservatives for abiding by a doctrine of not going in “search of monsters to destroy,” which they called a “charming old metaphor” that if adhered to fully would “leave monsters on the loose, ravaging and pillaging to their hearts' content, as Americans stand by and watch.”<sup>31</sup> The Clinton administration's inaction in Rwanda and Bosnia were examples of monsters being allowed to run loose.<sup>32</sup> For Kristol and Kagan, the monsters Clinton decided not to fight were not only in humanitarian crises, but were the leaders of rogue states like Iraq and North Korea. Their position was that because the United States stood as the lone superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union, giving it the power destroy most of the globe's monsters adhering to “a policy of sitting atop a hill and leading by example becomes in practice a policy of cowardice and dishonor.”<sup>33</sup> Instead, Kristol and Kagan advocated a much more proactive form of foreign policy they titled “benevolent hegemony.” Benevolent hegemony called for the United States to actively project its military, diplomatic, and economic power to not only destroy monsters (e.g. Saddam Hussein) but to deter them from arising in the first place. According to Kristol and Kagan, this kind of foreign policy doctrine would make the world safer, cement America's global leadership, and ensure the post-Cold War world would be shaped in its image. If taken seriously, JQA's advice would imperil the United States' role as world leader and its ability to project power to protect its interest and those of its allies. JQA's lesson for 20<sup>th</sup> century America was that not “going in search of monsters to destroy” harmed America's exceptionalism.

After the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> many argued monsters, this time in the form of terrorists, had found the United States. If the United States did not prosecute the war on terror with full vigilance and maintain an international leadership position this would allow monsters to return. Former Secretary of State Alexander Haig stated that “John Quincy Adams warned us against going abroad ‘in search of monsters to destroy,’ and some argue that the war on terror is such a case. I disagree. On 9/11, the monster found us asleep at home and will continue to find us inadequately prepared unless we muster more strength and more wisdom.”<sup>34</sup> For Haig, “more strength and more wisdom” came in the form of projecting more military might toward Iraq, which would

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<sup>31</sup>William Kristol and Robert Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 75 (1996): 31; Owen Harries, “The Foreign Policy Race; Bob Dole's Calculated Pragmatism,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 1996, 68-75.

<sup>32</sup>The Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Christopher Hitchens made a similar point over ten years later when he advocated that allowing monsters like Serbian General Ratko Mladic to run loose, committing war crimes against innocent civilians, and causing general chaos during the Yugoslav civil wars of the early to mid-1990s was evidence of the folly of Adams' advice in a 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century world. See Christopher Hitchens, “The Monster Inside the Frail Old Man,” *National Post*, June 1, 2011, 14.

<sup>33</sup>Kristol and Kagan, “Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy,” 31.

<sup>34</sup>Alexander Haig, “The US Will Stay the Course in Iraq in Coming Months,” *The Australian*, July 11, 2007, 15.



curtail a monster from reappearing in that country. Haig's opinion was circulated at a time when the United States had destroyed the monster of Saddam Hussein, but the overall war was going badly for American forces. Many politicians opposed President Bush's troop "surge" in Iraq in early 2007; the United States, they said, should no longer be there searching for monsters. For Haig, the advice the opposite because if the United States did not strengthen its position in Iraq then more Saddam Husseins were likely to arise, putting America in more peril. In other words, the exemplarist wisdom of John Quincy Adams in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world weakened the United States and only invited enemies to attack America.

*Boston Globe* columnist Jeff Jacoby, similar to Kristol and Kagan, admonished those for advocating the United States shrink from its position as global super cop, even with the military missteps in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Jacoby, "in Adams' day America was not the mightiest, wealthiest, and most influential nation on the face of the earth. Today it is. If the United States is the world's only superpower, and if we shrink from the role of global policeman, no one else will fill it."<sup>35</sup> For Jacoby, the United States had no choice but to go in "search of monsters to destroy." As he noted, "with great power comes great responsibilities, and sometimes one of those responsibilities is to destroy monsters: to take down tyrants who victimize the innocent and flout the rules of civilization."<sup>36</sup> Senator Marco Rubio struck a similar tone when he asserted, "some suggest that America should heed the famous words of John Quincy Adams and go 'not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy.' The problem is if America turns inward and ignores the monsters abroad, they are likely to come here."<sup>37</sup> Senator Rubio then asserted those monsters arrived prior to World War I, World War II, and on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Accordingly, the United States must be vigilant. It must be on the offensive. It must project its strength through military might and maintain its global leadership or the monsters will return.

Ultimately, these interventionists demonstrate that John Quincy Adams' advice worked solely for a 19<sup>th</sup> century world where the United States was weaker and could afford the luxury of staying out of global affairs. Up until the 2016 election, Adams' foreign policy doctrine is evidence as to what the United States should not do. His advice is "charming" but it is "old" and cannot account for the dynamics of post-Cold War global affairs and America's responsibility to act when others cannot. Consequently, maintaining an interventionist position upholds the leadership role America has built for the past one hundred years and strengthened its exceptionalism at the same time. By maintaining the leadership role the United States can continue to the world's leader and greatest nation. By contrast if political leaders obey the maxim of Quincy Adams it would entice an enemy to attack, degrading the United States, and by implication its status as an exceptional nation because it did not maintain its vigilant global leadership role.

### **The Sage Wisdom of JQA Lives On: Pre 9/11**

Despite criticism that not going in "search of monsters to destroy" was folly for the age of globalization there were a number of pundits and intellectuals who used Adams' sage wisdom as part of an argument to curtail American interventionism. This curtailment can be divided into two brief eras: prior to September 11, 2001 and post-September 11. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold

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<sup>35</sup>Jeff Jacoby, "The World's Best Policeman," *The Boston Globe*, June 22, 2011 [http://articles.boston.com/2011-06-22/bostonglobe/29690781\\_1\\_ethnic-cleansing-monsters-rasmussen](http://articles.boston.com/2011-06-22/bostonglobe/29690781_1_ethnic-cleansing-monsters-rasmussen).

<sup>36</sup>Jacoby, "The World's Best Policeman."

<sup>37</sup>Marco Rubio, "Senator Rubio Delivers Remarks on America's Role in the World," September 14, 2011, <http://rubiobio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=ef8bd270-f228-4128-8b70-c55db81438a3>.

War, even though the Bush and Clinton administrations were committed to engagement and intervention with the international community, many voices advocated the United States return to a “traditional” doctrine of American foreign policy. For example, former Reagan Administration United Nations Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick asserted the U.S. had won the Cold War and it was to time to return to a foreign policy of “normalcy,” which was not going in search of “monsters to destroy.” For Kirkpatrick, the Cold War was an aberration, a necessary one, but an aberration nonetheless in U.S. foreign policy history. In “normal” times, without a great enemy to face, the United States must eschew thoughts of benevolent hegemony and influence the affairs of the world through its example.<sup>38</sup>

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Walter McDougall made a similar argument. Quoting John Quincy Adams, McDougall maintained that a tradition within U.S. international affairs is to “obey that dictum” of going in search of “monsters” to destroy. All of America’s wars were entered into with reluctance and unwillingness by many Americans. For McDougall, identifying “monsters,” destroying them, and moving on was “not the American style.” Rather, he asserted “our traditional wisdom is based on refusing to cry before we are hurt, going the extra mile to insure (should conflict come) that there is doubt about whom it to blame, and letting the enemy take the first shot.”<sup>39</sup>

Benjamin Schwarz, an *Atlantic Monthly* correspondent, derided America’s global ambitions and its “crusade” to intervene in the Balkans, Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia, and other hotspots around the world where there were no vital U.S. interests. He noted that he and others who opposed these interventions were being branded with the foreign policy epithet of “neo-isolationist.” As Schwarz explained, “neo-isolationism is based on the grand tradition that embraces not only the views of left-wing foreign policy critics, but also a strain of thoughtful conservatism that goes back to John Quincy Adams” who “admonished Americans to go ‘not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.’” Schwarz further observed George Kennan, the architect of the Cold War, Senator William Fulbright, and journalist Walter Lippmann, all supported JQA’s mindset, even in a contemporary setting. These intellectuals, like Adams, realized that “foolish globalism” leads us to “unending wars of intervention” and intoxicates Americans into “thinking with the illusion that it is a crusader for righteousness.”<sup>40</sup> Not going in search of monsters to destroy was not just advice for 19<sup>th</sup> century America as suggested by some. Rather, it was a principle to be obeyed in all eras of American history.

Prior to September 11<sup>th</sup>, these exemplarists used John Quincy Adams foreign policy advice as a means to curtail American engagement abroad, primarily military engagement. For Kirkpatrick, McDougall and Schwarz, the tradition of the United States not “taking the first shot” was the more prudent course for U.S. politics. Maintaining an interventionist position merely led to “unending wars of interventionism” that proved disastrous for America domestically and internationally, haunting us like Vietnam has since the 1970s. Additionally, this advice was not merely rants from peaceniks on the liberal left, but was balanced between “left-wing” circles and “conservatism.” The lesson of exemplarism was that it has a long history of being supported by all sides of the aisle in U.S. politics and if implemented could protect the American people from “foolish globalism”

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<sup>38</sup>Jeanne Kirkpatrick, “Returning to Normalcy,” *The New World Order: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. by Matthew Polesetsky and William Dudley (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1991), 74-81.

<sup>39</sup>Walter McDougall, “Foreign Monsters, False Alarms,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1997, A25; Walter McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: America’s Encounter with the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

<sup>40</sup>Benjamin Schwarz, “Leading vs. Dominating,” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 21, 1999, 8; Benjamin Schwarz, “A Look at . . . America’s Role; New Isolationists, Old Fallacies,” *The Washington Post*, October 31, 1999, B3.

and the unenviable position of being “crusaders” of the modern world, a policy that would surely end in disaster as it had for its predecessors.

### **Post 9/11**

After September 11<sup>th</sup>, for just over a year or so, John Quincy Adams’ advice of not going in “search of monsters to destroy” seemed inappropriate for the circumstances in which the United States found itself. The Bush administration easily made the claim that the Al-Qaeda “monster” had found the United States, partly because America had been asleep at the wheel of its post-Cold War foreign policy.<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, most Americans supported the war in Afghanistan and the ongoing hunt for Osama Bin Laden.

However, as America’s eyes turned toward the “monster” of Saddam Hussein, coinciding with the Bush administration’s promotion of its pre-emption doctrine,<sup>42</sup> an internal American debate arose about America’s role in the world. Robert Kagan maintained the Iraq War inspired a “very old debate, which Americans have thrashed out in every generation.”<sup>43</sup> This debate is not about being anti or pro-American, but it is “between two different American traditions concerning how the United States can best promote its values and ideals.”<sup>44</sup> On one side of this debate, as noted earlier, were people who supported America’s “benevolent hegemony” or what Kagan called our “messianic impulse.” This impulse—which is “Americans belief in the possibility of global transformation”—has “always been the more dominant strain in the nation’s character.”<sup>45</sup> This dominant strain received even greater support after America’s invasion of Iraq. Public intellectuals such as Salman Rushdie and Dinesh D’Souza, Canadian Labor Party Leader Michael Ignatieff, historians Margaret MacMillan and Niall Ferguson, as well as others all supported U.S. intervention. Speaking specifically about U.S. influence, D’Souza called the United States “the most magnanimous imperial power ever,” which allowed the United States to approach Iraq in a manner to transform not only that country, but the whole of the Middle East.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Niall Ferguson drew upon the experience of Britain’s empire, calling it a great civilizing influence upon the world. He implored the Bush administration to stay the course, bringing stability and democracy to Iraq and the Middle East.<sup>47</sup>

However, significant public opposition grew toward the Iraq war. Here John Quincy Adams’ returned as an authorizing figure for critics of U.S. foreign policy. In the months leading up to the Iraq war several commentators argued that JQA’s maxim must guide U.S. foreign policy even amidst the ongoing fight against Al-Qaeda. For example, Mark Danner asserted Adams principle of not going “in search of monsters to destroy has been a cherished truism of our foreign policy, central to how Americans look at themselves and at their role in the world . . . if America invokes

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<sup>41</sup>George W. Bush, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001,” September 20, 2001, *The Public Papers of the President*, 1142-1146.

<sup>42</sup>In the 2002 *National Security Strategy of the United States* the Bush administration laid out its doctrine of pre-emption. According to the doctrine, the United States had the right to intervene in states that it felt posed a grave and immediate danger toward U.S. interests. Iraq was the next immediate and grave threat, along with other members of the “axis of evil” Iran and North Korea.

<sup>43</sup>Robert Kagan, “Our Messianic Impulse,” *The Washington Post*, December 10, 2006, B07.

<sup>44</sup>Owen Harries, “America’s Challenge from Within,” *The Age*, December 12, 2003, 11.

<sup>45</sup>Kagan, “Our Messianic Impulse,” B7.

<sup>46</sup>David Olive, “Pax Americana’s Cheerleaders,” *The Toronto Star*, May 4, 2003, B3.

<sup>47</sup>Olive, “Pax Americana’s Cheerleaders,” B3.

and occupies Iraq, they no longer will be.”<sup>48</sup> Following a similar logic and responding to an article by Salman Rushdie who observed the U.S. should remove Saddam Hussein from power to ease the suffering of the Iraqi people, Sheldon Richman of Conway, Arkansas invoked Adams, further stating “the Constitution of the United States does not empower the U.S. government to overthrow foreign rulers who oppress their people. The Framers, suspicious of government power—especially war power—omitted that power.” The United States “is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”<sup>49</sup> Hiraoki Sato stated the “one rationale that underlies the debate for American intervention is democracy.” However, Sato noted Adams in his July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1821 address stated the United States never interfered “in the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings.” If she did then “the fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force.”<sup>50</sup> For Sato, American intervention into Iraq put the United States on the path to become “the dictatress of the world,” which meant America would “be no longer the ruler of her own spirit.”<sup>51</sup> *The New Straits Times* argued that President Bush has already “fathered the Dictatress, an illegitimate enterprise where the global community is concerned.”<sup>52</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer* asserted the Iraq war caused the United States has gone from a “nation born out of longing for freedom from domination has now become the dominator.”<sup>53</sup> Famed historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., after invoking the wisdom of JQA, opined by “seeking out monsters” George W. Bush “has overturned two centuries of U.S. thinking on global diplomacy.”<sup>54</sup> For all the individuals cited, America’s Iraq war altered the character of U.S. foreign policy from being a cheerleader for democracy to the creation of an American imperium, something which most Americans voiced their opposition. Empire only brought with it grave consequences internally and externally as it had to every other empire.

Several rhetors spoke specifically about those consequences. One such concern was the increased distrust of the United States by people in the Middle East and the loss of American prestige abroad because of the Iraqi invasion. America’s Iraq war resulting in “abuses at Abu Ghraib, the destruction of Fallujah, the alleged Marine rampage in Haditha—all are reflections of how, in our search for “monsters to destroy,” we have found them in ourselves.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, Adams was right. Our intervention got America into a situation when it tried to get rid of a monster, but became one. America’s inability to manage to the war did irreparable harm to its image in the Middle East and abroad. By implication its exceptional ethos was damaged by becoming a “dictatress” to the world instead of being a nation to emulate.

An additional consequence was the Iraq War has practically bankrupted the United States economically and morally. Andrew Bacevich, while tracing our penchant to empire to the 1970s, asserted the Iraq War has brought the United States to the brink of destruction. It undercut American exceptionalism, not enhanced it. If the United States did not stop its oversea adventures it will

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<sup>48</sup>Mark Danner, “The Struggles of Democracy and Empire,” *The New York Times*, October 9, 2002, 27.

<sup>49</sup>Sheldon Richman, “Letter to the Editor: Regime Change as ‘Liberation,’” *The Washington Post*, November 8, 2002, A30.

<sup>50</sup>Hiraoki Sato, “Words of Wisdom on U.S. Interventionism,” *The Japan Times*, October 28, 2002. Lexis-Nexis Database.

<sup>51</sup>Sato, “Words of Wisdom on U.S. Interventionism.” For a similar viewpoint see Ernest W. LeFever, “Can We Export Democracy?,” *The Washington Times*, March 12, 2006, B3.

<sup>52</sup>“U.S. Imperium Beyond Iraq,” *New Straits Times*, March 23, 2003.

<sup>53</sup>Medea Benjamin, “Join a Fast for the Sake of Peace in Iraq,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 4, 2006, A9.

<sup>54</sup>Arthur Schlesinger, “Seeking Out Monsters,” *The Guardian*, October 19, 2004, 23.

<sup>55</sup>Benjamin, “Join a Fast,” A9.

mean further disaster for the American economy, morality, and its standing in the world.<sup>56</sup> America has been destroying itself by ignoring Quincy Adams' advice. If JQA was not heeded, the U.S. could very well lose her democratic soul.

Consequently, the only way for the United States to correct problems is to specifically "extricate ourselves from Iraq so that Iraqis can rule their own nation and Americans can, once again, become the rulers of her own spirit."<sup>57</sup> More generally, critics of American imperium, such as Jonathan Freedland, implored the United States to return to its traditional exemplar tradition of U.S. foreign policy that follows John Quincy Adams' advice to "export its brand of liberty . . . not through force but by the power of its own example."<sup>58</sup> As Adams put it in 1821, America must be the "well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all," while also "commending the general cause by the countenance of her voice, and the benignant sympathy of her example."<sup>59</sup> If the United States did not return to the foreign policy principles of Adams then it not only will alter traditions of U.S. foreign policy, but it will go down a road, as demonstrated by the incompetent intervention into Iraq, with consequences that will endanger U.S. prestige abroad, but it might very well bring down the United States itself, similar to the experiences of the Roman and British empires. Going in search of "monsters to destroy" only led to disaster for the U.S. and its body politic.

### **President Obama and Libya**

When Barack Obama entered the presidency in 2009 it appeared, in part, that he would actually heed JQA's advice of not going in "search of monsters to destroy." President Obama disavowed President Bush's strategy of preemptive war—attacking an enemy before it attacked you; declared he would make it a central point of his foreign policy to reduce the world's nuclear stockpiles and the threat of nuclear war; end the war in Iraq and wind down the war in Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> Instead, Obama stated it was time to do some "nation-building here at home." Obama's America would influence the affairs of the world, not through building an American imperium and intervention, but through its domestic example.

However, in 2011, the Arab Spring would remake Obama's foreign policy.<sup>61</sup> The Arab Spring began in Tunisia with a single person who protested against lack of economic opportunity within the country, governmental suppression of civil rights, and government corruption at all levels. This person's martyrdom brought about a movement that saw hundreds of thousands of protesters in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Syria, Oman, Yemen, and Jordan mobilizing to speak out against corruption, political freedom, and lack of economic opportunity. Within a few weeks, dictators in Tunisia and Egypt were ousted from power and the next target appeared to be Libya. The momentum of the spring moved to Libya in late February 2011. Peaceful protesters began gathering the streets of Libya. Seeing what had happened in Tunisia and Egypt, Libya's leader, Moammar Gaddafi,

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<sup>56</sup>Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Empire: The End of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Macmillan Books, 2009).

<sup>57</sup>Benjamin, "Join a Fast," B9.

<sup>58</sup>Jonathan Freedland, "Emperor George: What Has Become of American Values and Idealism? All Swept Away in This Thoroughly Un-American War," *The Guardian*, April 2, 2003, 21.

<sup>59</sup>Adams, An Address Delivered at the Request of a Commission at the Citizens of Washington, 32

<sup>60</sup>Jason A. Edwards, "Resetting America's Role in the World: President Obama's Rhetoric of (Re)Conciliation and Partnership," *The Rhetoric of Heroic Expectations: Establishing the Obama Presidency* ed. by Jennifer Mercieca and Justin Vaughn (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 120-139).

<sup>61</sup>Ryan Lizza, "How the Arab Spring Remade Obama's Foreign Policy," *The New Yorker*, May 2, 2011, [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/05/02/110502fa\\_fact\\_lizza](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/05/02/110502fa_fact_lizza).

began a violent crackdown of the protesters. Soon this crackdown erupted into all-out civil war and endangered hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. Gaddafi launched an offensive against Libya's rebels that was indiscriminate in its targets. According to some estimates, Gaddafi killed over 10,000 civilians in a short period of time.<sup>62</sup> The attacks on civilians became so bad that the United Nations Security Council authorized the use of force to protect civilians from Libyan forces.

Responding to the Security Council resolution, President Obama announced in a national address a U.S. mission, along with allies in NATO and other Middle Eastern countries, to protect civilians. Prior to the announced intervention and afterwards critics of President Obama signified their opposition to U.S. involvement in Libya by, partly, invoking John Quincy Adams foreign policy maxim. Pundits warned of the dire consequences that would ensue and its future effects on U.S. foreign policy. For example, Ryan Girdusky argued America cannot "afford to 'go in search of monsters to destroy' because it was not 'in America's interests to intervene.'" Additionally, the intervention would result in huge "civilian casualties," "loss of treasure America can ill afford" because of our ill-fated wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and "anti-U.S. blowback."<sup>63</sup> For Girdusky, this blowback could be the greatest consequence because it will fuel anti-Americanism in the Middle East where it was already quite high, even when President Obama's attempted to reset relations with the region.<sup>64</sup> Because of America's past problems with the Middle East (e.g. pronounced support of dictators over democracy and the Iraq War) "America doesn't have the credibility to make war in the Arab world. Our touch in this is actually counterproductive."<sup>65</sup>

Opponents of Obama argued a more important consequence for U.S. foreign policy was that an intervention into Libya would set a dangerous precedent by expanding how and when American military forces would be used. Spurred on by the lack of international action in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Darfur a growing cacophony of voices within the United States and from across the world maintain the international community has a fundamental duty to protect civilian populations from war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.<sup>66</sup> Libya was the first test of this new global "responsibility to protect" to protect civilians from their leaders.<sup>67</sup> However, Tim Rutten asserted JQA's admonition against foreign interventions "remains resonant, particularly when applied to our murkily enmeshment in the revolutionary uprising against Libya's Moammar Qaddafi. Rutten further argued Libya is a "political revolution, which now appears to be settling into a civil war. Those can be bitter and bloody affairs fraught with atrocity and tragedy on every side," but the situation did not meet the threshold for genocide or crimes against humanity, at least not in the sense of those committed against Armenians, Jews, and Tutsis. Rather, Libya's problems look similar to other countries dealing with civil unrest. If an intervention occurred it suggested "that the humanitarian crisis category is being expanded beyond reason."<sup>68</sup> In other words, America's intervention into Libya stretched the notion of "humanitarian intervention" to include a multitude

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<sup>62</sup>Ryan James Girdusky, "Libya Intervention: US Cannot Afford to 'Go in Search of Monsters to Destroy,'" *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 24, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/0324/Libya-intervention-US-cannot-afford-to-go-in-search-of-monsters-to-destroy>.

<sup>63</sup>Girdusky, "Libya Intervention."

<sup>64</sup>Edwards, "Resetting America's Role in the World."

<sup>65</sup>Maureen Dowd, "In Search of Monsters," *The New York Times*, March 13, 2011, pg. 11.

<sup>66</sup>See Aidan Hehir, *The Responsibility to Protect: Rhetoric, Reality, and the Future of Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>67</sup>Irwin Cotler and Jared Genser, "Libya and the Responsibility to Protect," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/opinion/01iht-edcotler01.html>.

<sup>68</sup>Tim Rutten, "Does Duty Call in Libya," *The Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 2011, A21.

of civil unrest across the globe. For Rutten, as well as other critics, Obama's policy toward Libya established a precedent that America would have to commit itself to quell every pocket of violent outbreak across the globe. Accordingly, when the United States could not fulfill that burden, because no nation ever could, then the United States and the Obama administration's foreign policy would be accused of abandoning those in need and its foreign policy would be deemed hypocritical. Thereby, reinforcing a stereotype that many within the international community share about U.S. foreign policy and ultimately undercutting any kind of credibility the Obama administration had attempted to rebuild on the world stage. America's inability to meet its commitments only lessened its status as a global leader. The suggestion being President Obama by acting in Libya endangered its foreign policy, its leadership, and its future.

Neil Hrab, writing for the *Washington Examiner*, shared a similar sentiment when he stated "wherever you are now, John Quincy Adams, you've got to be shaking your head at the news that the U.S. and its allies have rushed into just the sort of foreign adventure you warned against." According to Hrab, "the leaders of the US, France, Canada, the UK, Denmark, etc. are determined to go to Libya, 'in search of monsters to destroy.'" Finding these monsters give political leaders the precedent they needed to assert "for the right to intervene militarily elsewhere in the world—perhaps in Sudan, one day; perhaps Zimbabwe, perhaps even Iran. Libya is a test case for their new foreign policy doctrine . . . legitimizing more frequent use of military force in international relations."<sup>69</sup> Hrab's column implied this "right to intervene" was not only a "new foreign policy doctrine" but that it may have some disastrous unforeseen implications. This new doctrine would drag the United States and the west into conflicts across the world, which America may not be able to extricate itself (e.g. Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq).

An even greater implication and subsequent problem was that this "frequent use of military force" had echoes of the previous Bush administration's policy of pre-emptive war and military power as a primary weapon in its foreign policy arsenal. While President Obama did not advocate pre-emption to deal with America's enemies his use of military power made the use of force a primary option instead of a secondary one. Consequently, critics of American imperium would be emboldened; arguing Obama was merely an extension of President Bush's foreign policy and that this imperium would be embedded in U.S. foreign policy culture. Ultimately, as Maureen Dowd of the *New York Times* succinctly wrote, Obama's "search for monsters" in Libya committed "the United States to endless wars of altruism. And that's folly."<sup>70</sup>

The pronounced logic for this "war of altruism" was to stop civilian casualties within Libya, but for Obama's critics it had three larger effects. First, it implied the United States will inevitably look hypocritical in international relations, which was/is a constant criticism of its foreign policy. For example, the U.S. pronounces its support of human rights, but allows huge abuses to go on in places across the world. It rhetorically supports democracy, but does not invest the time and effort to see those ideas through in every nation. It allowed America's enemies/opponents to assert why Libya and not Syria? Egypt? Bahrain or other parts of the world? What are the rules for America's intervention? For Obama's critics, the Libya intervention established a precedent and perception that the U.S. should intervene in every conflict where leaders commit atrocities against their people. Because the United States could not possibly intervene militarily everywhere at all times, it makes America look duplicitous, which ultimately undercuts its credibility on U.S. foreign policy.

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<sup>69</sup>Neil Hrab, "Searching for 'Monsters to Destroy' in Libya," *The Washington Examiner*, March 19, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/01/opinion/01iht-edcotler01.html>.

<sup>70</sup>Dowd, "In Search of Monsters," 11.

The less credibility it has the less leverage the U.S. has to establish coalitions and partnerships to tackle global problems the international community will face.

A second effect was a Libyan intervention to protect civilians appears as the right thing to do, but it also reinforces American imperium. The United States, along with other Western nations, imposed its will upon smaller country about how the world should be run. In that sense, President Obama appeared no different than President Bush.

Finally, America's Libyan military adventure increased American militarism into U.S. foreign relations and militarism in international relations in general. No longer will the use of force be a last resort; a tool for defense rather than offense. Rather, force became a primary option. Increased global militarism in the world increased the potential for global conflict, sucking the United States into conflict not of its choosing and that it might be incapable of fighting. America will find itself embroiled in conflict with "entangling alliances," something which George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams warned the United States should avoid. Consequently, Obama put America in danger and deviated from its founding principles of exemplarism. Thus, the only choice was to return to John Quincy Adams's foreign policy maxim of not seeking out monsters to destroy.

### **John Quincy Adams' Return to the White House**

Despite the critics of President Obama's military adventure into Libya interventionism held dominant sway over most of his term in office and was/is the primary intellectual construct of most of America's foreign policy intelligentsia. However, the 2016 presidential debate began to change the debate. Perhaps, it was the trillions of dollars spent in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps, it was Americans who were tired of looking for "monsters" overseas. Instead, they wanted to focus on perfecting the U.S. example to better demonstrate global leadership. Whatever the reason the 2016 presidential campaign marked a prominent return of the foreign policy principles of John Quincy Adams. For example, for the first time ever in a presidential debate, JQA's aphorism was invoked by a presidential candidate. In the October 13, 2015 CNN Democratic Presidential Debate, former Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley was discussing Hillary Clinton's support for the use of military force in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. O'Malley argued the president should never take the use of military force off the table, but "whenever we go in contrary to John Quincy Adams's advice—"Searching the world for monsters to destroy"—and when we use political might at the expense of democratic principle we hurt ourselves."<sup>71</sup> Here O'Malley clearly argued the interventionism of President Obama and potentially of a President Clinton could actually do more harm than good. For O'Malley, U.S. foreign policy makers spent too much time "searching the world for monsters to destroy" particularly through military intervention. America must take a more measured response with diplomacy, sanctions, or not getting involved at all. Because of we ignore Quincy Adams's advice "we hurt ourselves" at home and abroad. In other words, the foreign policy of Hillary Clinton would bring potentially more harm than good.

Despite O'Malley's warning Hillary Clinton won the Democratic nomination for president. For the Republicans, the debate became more pronounced and JQA's wisdom found a modern-day champion in Donald Trump. Most of the Republican presidential candidate field were traditional interventionists. Although they disagreed with candidate Clinton on a number of issues there

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<sup>71</sup> "Full Transcript: Democratic Presidential Debate," *New York Times*, October 14, 2015, <https://www.ny-times.com/2015/10/14/us/politics/democratic-debate-transcript.html>



were committed to maintaining and even extending the mission of interventionism that had dominated U.S. foreign policy since World War II. Candidate Donald Trump rejected those foreign policy norms.

A representative anecdote of his foreign policy views can be found in his first major foreign policy address on April 27, 2016 before the Center for the National Interest. Here Trump discussed his foreign policy of “America First,” which rhetorically resembled the pre-World War II group that advocated staying out of the war in Europe. Toward the end of his address Trump stated, “I will seek a foreign policy that all Americans, whatever their party, can support, and which our friends and allies will respect and welcome. The world must know that we do not go abroad in search of enemies, that we are always happy when old enemies become friends, and when old friends become allies.”<sup>72</sup> While Trump did not invoke JQA’s name, his principle that “we do not go abroad in search of enemies” clearly was a reference to Adams’ foreign policy advice; advice that presidential administrations had ignored for decades, which had resulted, at least for Donald Trump, in a material and moral disaster for the United States. As he further noted in his April 27<sup>th</sup> address, “many Americans must wonder why our politicians seem more interested in defending the borders of foreign countries than their own . . . No country has ever prospered that failed to put its own interests first . . . We will no longer surrender this country, or its people to the false song of globalism.”<sup>73</sup> Here, Trump clearly implied the dominant mission of interventionism was going to come to an end. The United States would no longer be lulled by the “false song of globalism.” Rather, America can only prosper by putting “its own interests first.” Materially that manifested in Trump’s specific criticisms of foreign policy deals like NAFTA; costly military interventions into Iraq and Libya; not standing up to and having NATO nations pay their fair share for the cost of defense; creating terrible arms reduction deals like the Iranian nuclear deal; and locking America into job-killing climate deals like the Paris Accords. For Trump, these decisions made by Democratic and Republican administrations put the United States into material and moral peril. The United States followed Senator Rubio’s advice, did not turn inward, but went searching for enemies but the enemies still followed us home and now those decisions were wreaking havoc on American domestic life. For Trump, the true “monsters” the United States needed to avoid certainly terrorist groups like ISIS, but also the people who had invaded Iraq, allowing ISIS to be created in the first place, and those who negotiated trade deal like NAFTA and the Iranian nuclear deal. The “monsters” America needed to avoid were interventionists. Trump’s address at the Center for the National Interest made it clear that once he was president he would reverse the dominant logic of U.S. foreign policy. He would become a champion of JQA’s sage wisdom once more.

Trump’s campaign message of “America First” and curtailing its foreign policy adventures abroad resonated with many Americans. For example, a *Tampa Tribune* editorial called Trump’s April 27 speech the start of a “revolution” that repudiated the “Obama-Clinton foreign policy and the legacy of Bush Republicanism and neo-conservatism.” Furthermore, when George W. Bush declared that America’s goal would become to end tyranny in our world. An utterly utopian delusion, to which Trump retorts by recalling John Quincy Adams’ views on America: She goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.”<sup>74</sup> One *Denver Post* columnist proclaimed ten reasons why he switched to Trump, which included “America first: Donald Trump dares speak the long avoided truth that our country never wins anymore. His inclination toward less going abroad in

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<sup>72</sup>Donald J. Trump, “Donald J. Trump Foreign Policy Speech,” April 27, 2016, <https://www.donaldjtrump.com/press-releases/donald-j-trump-foreign-policy-speech>.

<sup>73</sup>Trump, “Donald J. Trump Foreign Policy Speech.”

<sup>74</sup>Charles the Hammer, “At last! America First,” *The Tampa Tribune*, May 1, 2016, 28.

search of monsters to destroy, in the John Quincy Adams mode, points to a better change of peace through strength in the Reagan mode.”<sup>75</sup> While these are just two examples, Trump’s foreign policy message struck a chord with many Americans because he not only won the Republican nomination against a field of traditional foreign policy Republicans, he changed the Republican party platform to better reflect curtailing America’s foreign policy adventures, and he defeated the “Obama-Clinton” foreign policy in the 2016 election. His presidency clearly suggests he will move U.S. international affairs to one that more closely aligned with some of the precepts set forth by Quincy Adams almost two hundred years ago.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that John Quincy Adams serves as an authorizing figure in U.S. foreign policy discourse, whose famous phrase “we do not go in search of monsters to destroy” functions to sanction arguments made in America’s ongoing debate on the extent of its involvement with the international community. John Quincy Adams’ aphorism has been used by proponents and opponents alike. With the election of Donald Trump, it appears clear that the pendulum has swung back to a different foreign policy construct at least for the next four years. The question remains what is the continuing legacy for John Quincy Adams as a foreign policy authorizing figure?

First, this paper demonstrates that authorizing figures cannot only be used to support arguments, but also to negate them. In the overall study of collective memory, scholars typically focus on the “positive” aspects of memory. In other words, memories function to support or sustain larger discourses within use. Certainly, the memory of JQA serves that overall purpose, but it also acts as a foil to those who would argue against U.S. foreign policy. James Janack would term this negative collective memory as *dystalgic*.<sup>76</sup> Janack examined how memories of the Soviet era were utilized in the 1996 Russian presidential election between incumbent Boris Yeltsin and his Communist-party opponent Gennady Zyuganov. He noted Yeltsin’s campaign rhetoric continuously argued the Soviet era was oppressive, full of corruption stifles political rights, and brought misery to millions of Russian citizens. Electing Zyuganov would only continue that legacy of oppression, corruption, fear, and misery for millions. Yeltsin used memories of the Soviet era to offer lessons as to what Russians should *not* return to. Instead, Yeltsin’s budding democratic government offered more freedom, more prosperity, and more hope for a brighter Russian future than they had ever enjoyed. Similarly, William Kristol, Robert Kagan, Alexander Haig, and others used JQA’s words to offer lessons as to what U.S. foreign policymakers should not do. According to these interventionists, JQA’s wisdom was fine for the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but proved folly in a world where the United States was the unquestioned global power. To leave the world to its own devices, as JQA’s heirs would have the United States do, would bring nothing but danger and destruction to America, as it did on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Rather, an active foreign policy that engaged and was shaped by the U.S. to serve its larger interests was the key to maintaining and extending Western and by extension American values. Authorizing figures can be used to negate and fight against certain policies and principles. Therefore, the function of negation or dystalgia should be added to Rice’s three functions of the authorizing figure.

Additionally, the rise of Donald Trump has fundamentally altered America’s exceptionalist ethos. As Henry Kissinger noted in *Diplomacy* there is an inherent tension in U.S. foreign policy

<sup>75</sup>“Why I Switched to Trump,” *The Denver Post*, May 15, 2016, 4D.

<sup>76</sup>James Janack, “The Future’s Foundation Found in a Contested Past: Nostalgia and Dystalgia in the 1996 Russian Presidential Election,” *Communication Quarterly* 59 (1999): 34-48. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10417949909373154>

between those who want to demonstrate U.S. global leadership through becoming a beacon for the world to emulate. Then there are those who advocate the U.S. should crusade for those values globally. Typically, these different advocates are at odds with each other (e.g. League of Nations debate). After World War II, presidents began to rhetorically fuse the exemplar and the interventionist missions together. For example, in his Truman Doctrine address, President Truman argued, “free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world—and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation.”<sup>77</sup> Here Truman argued for renewed global leadership to defend “free peoples of the world.” At the same time, the “welfare of our own nation” was predicated on this global leadership. In other words, America’s ability to be an exemplar was directly tied to fulfilling our interventionist mission. After the Cold War, President Clinton actually reversed the logic of this rhetorical fusion. He asserted we must rebuild America’s example at home, which then offers more rhetorical gravitas to perform our global leadership duties. In other words, presidents fused our exceptionalist missions together to advocate for U.S. global leadership. Trump’s rhetoric has broken that fusion. His rhetoric, once again, creates a tension between America’s exceptionalist missions that had been largely removed since the end of World War II. Because of this rhetorical fission, there is great confusion among America’s foreign policy intelligentsia and leaders across the world about what will comprise U.S. foreign policy? Will it continue its status as the de facto leader of the world? How will this impact multilateral institutions, treaties, and the U.S. diplomatic and military posture?

These questions we cannot totally answer here, but based upon President Trump doubling down on his America first strategy in his inaugural address, his immigration ban, his calling for cuts in the budget of the State Department, and calling for closer ties with countries like Russia there is clearly a sea-change in U.S. foreign policy. Under a Trump administration it is not totally clear that he will totally adhere to Quincy Adams’ advice of not going in search of monsters to destroy. At the very least, his foreign policy insight has become prominent and potentially dominant once more.

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<sup>77</sup>Harry Truman, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress,” March 12, 1947, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/trudoc.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp)