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On Cowboys and Welfare Queens: Independence, Dependence, and Interdependence at Home and Abroad

EILEEN BORIS

Against a historiography that too often considers domestic policy apart from foreign policy, this essay suggests connections based on two cultural/political archetypes, the cowboy and the welfare queen, which were or are simultaneously gendered and racialized. The cowboy as a symbol of white male individualism has represented worthy American manhood; the welfare queen has stood for a despised black womanhood. Behind the image of the cowboy stands the workings of empire; behind the portrait of the welfare queen lies the punishment of poor women, often African American or Latina, for their motherhood, sexuality, and lack of dependence on husbands. The problem with the welfare queen is that she parlayed her dependence on the state into independence from men and employment (that is, work as commonly understood.) Like the enemies without, who would make the nation dependent through withholding a vital resource – oil – and require disciplining through “cowboy diplomacy,” welfare dependents have become the primitive other, politically assaulted, responsible for national decline, who need taming through cowboy social policy. Drawing upon newspaper accounts, blogs, speeches, and iconographic representations, this essay traces the ways that modern Presidents, including Theodore Roosevelt, Johnson, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush II, deployed these icons to push independence as a national virtue in spite of their apparently different political positions. The languages of independence and dependence provided an easy vocabulary for policymaking that aspires to moral heights, leading to a performativity that traps those who utter the tropes of their predecessors into policy grooves not necessarily of their own choosing.

“A country that does not take care of its domestic problems is not going to have an effective position abroad,” Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then a presidential assistant, noted in August 1969. The Nixon administration just had

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introduced a sweeping and ultimately unsuccessful plan to overhaul Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the thirty-four-year-old program of public assistance for poor single mothers and their children commonly referred to in the United States as “welfare.”¹ Richard Nixon, the foreign-policy President, had turned to welfare dependency, attacking its corrosive impact as harshly as he responded to any hint of “American” dependency abroad. AFDC “deepened dependency by all too often making it more attractive to go on welfare than to go to work,” the President charged.²

Tropes of independence and dependence pervaded the official discourse of the Nixon administration in foreign as well as domestic policy: continued independence at home would depend on independence abroad. At the time of the Yom Kippur War waged between US ally Israel and its Arab neighbors in 1973, reliance on Middle Eastern petroleum would lead to the oil embargo, gas lines, and an energy crisis – that is, to oil dependence.³ The oil crisis came amid Watergate and US defeat in Vietnam.⁴ Nixon responded with “Project Independence,” declaring that the

United States of America as the greatest industrial power of the world with 7 per cent of the world’s people and using 30 per cent of the world’s energy shouldn’t have to depend on any other country for energy that provides our jobs and our transportations and our light and our heat. We can become self-sufficient.⁵

In displaying these core hegemonic terms, Nixon drew upon a pervasive national discourse. Over the course of the twentieth century, as the United States became an urban, industrial society and moved from its earlier imperialist ventures through an internationalist foreign policy toward

¹ “Moynihan Applauds Nixon on Welfare,” *New York Times*, 11 Aug. 1969, 24. On Nixon’s welfare proposal see Jill Quadagno, “Race, Class, and Gender in the United States Welfare State: Nixon’s Failed Family Assistance Plan,” *American Sociological Review*, 55 (1990), 11–28.

² “Excerpts from Nixon Message to Congress on Welfare Plan,” *New York Times*, 12 Aug. 1969, 18.

³ For a recent account see Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 12–31, 61–65.

⁴ For the fullest discussion of the oil crisis see Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), chapter 2: “Getting the House in Order: The Oil Embargo, Consumption, and the Limits of American Power,” 71–104. See also *idem*, “In the Name of Austerity: Middle-Class Consumption and the OPEC Oil Embargo of 1973–1974,” in Van Grosse and Richard Moser, eds., *The World the 60s Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 138–61. See also, Meg Jacobs, “The conservative Struggle and the Energy Crisis,” in Bruce Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming, spring 2008).

⁵ “Transcript of Nixon’s Question and Answer Session With A.P. Managing Editors,” *New York Times*, 18 Nov. 1973, 62.

post-Cold War empire, the terms independence and dependence captured the national ideal and its disdained opposite. These relations we find most tellingly embodied in the gendered and racialized icons of the cowboy and the welfare queen, symbols of the nation and the anti-nation. Nixon himself was no cowboy – unlike Theodore Roosevelt, Lyndon Baines Johnson, and Ronald Reagan – he didn't ride horses and his claim to real masculinity always remained suspect. After all, he was the vice presidential candidate who cried during the 1956 Checkers Speech when pleading to retain his slot on the ticket even though he took inappropriate campaign contributions.⁶ But Nixon captured the spirit of the cowboy in tying domestic as well as foreign policy to the quest for independence.

Too often scholars of the United States consider domestic policy (at home) apart from foreign policy (abroad).⁷ This essay breaks with that scholarly division of labor by suggesting one set of connections based on two cultural/political archetypes, the cowboy and the welfare queen, which were or are simultaneously gendered and racialized. Political leaders both deployed cowboy iconography and were recognized for good or ill as displaying characteristics associated with a mythic American West in which this heroic figure tames the wilderness and crusades against evil, violent outlaws. The myth largely ignores that the cowboy acted to wipe out the indigenous, rightful inhabitants of the land.⁸ The welfare queen, in contrast, was a label that detractors gave to poor women, undeservedly growing fat on government largesse. It has existed as a verbal tag or a name printed or implied under a photograph that with another caption would merely serve as a picture of a black woman.⁹ Drawing upon newspaper accounts, blogs, speeches, and iconographic representations, this essay traces the ways that modern Presidents deployed these icons to push independence as a national virtue in spite of their apparently different political positions. Indeed, the languages of independence and dependence have provided an easy vocabulary for

⁶ David Greenberg, *Nixon's Shadow: History of an Image* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003); Richard Bradley, *American Political Mythology from Kennedy to Nixon* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

⁷ This division is particularly true in women's and gender history. For a critique see Laura Briggs, "Gender and U.S. Imperialism in U.S. Women's History," in S. J. Kleinberg, Eileen Boris, and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 146–60.

⁸ Feminist historians have undermined this myth. For a review of the literature see Susan Armitage, "Turner's Ghost: A Personal Retrospective on Western Women's Literature," in Kleinberg, Boris, and Ruiz, 126–45.

⁹ Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Anti-poverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

polycymaking that aspires to moral heights, leading to a performativity that traps those who utter the tropes of their predecessors into policy grooves not necessarily of their own choosing.¹⁰

These types, of course, represent constructions. Actual cowboys, those who herded cattle on the ranching frontier, composed a multi-cultural workforce, whose position as wage-earners dependent on their employers hardly appears salient in the national imagery, never mind media representations.¹¹ Until recently, the majority of women on welfare were white; most of these poor single mothers spent less than two years receiving public aid before returning to employment.¹² But just as the cowboy as a symbol of white male individualism has represented worthy American manhood, so the welfare queen has denoted a despised black womanhood.¹³ Behind the image of the cowboy stands the workings of empire; behind the portrait of the welfare queen lies the punishment of poor women, often African American or Latina, for their motherhood, sexuality, and lack of dependence on husbands. The problem with the welfare queen is that she parlayed her dependence on the state into independence from men and employment (that is, work as commonly understood).¹⁴ Like the enemies without, who would

¹⁰ Here I extrapolate from Joan W. Scott, "Experience," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22–40; Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *idem*, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 226–42.

¹¹ Don Santina, "Cowboy Imagery and the American Presidency: Ride 'Em Brush Cutter'!", *CounterPunch*, 19 Dec. 2005, at <http://www.counterpunch.org/santina12192005.html>; accessed 1 Sept. 2006; David E. Lopez, "Cowboy Strikes and Unions," in Walter Nugent and Martin Ridge, eds., *The American West: The Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 164–75; Dee Garceau, "Nomads, Bunkies, Cross-Dressers, and Family Men: Cowboy Identity and the Gendering of Ranch Work," in Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau, eds., *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 149–65; Simon M. Evans, Sarah Carter and Bill Yeo, eds., *Cowboys, Ranchers, and the Cattle Business: Cross-Border Perspectives on Ranching History* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2000); R. Philip Loy, *Westerns in a Changing America, 1955–2000* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004); Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Atheneum, 1992).

¹² Rickie Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers: How the Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 143.

¹³ Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Holloway Sparks, "Queens, Teens and Model Mothers: Race, Gender, and the Discourse of Welfare Reform," in Sanford Schram, Joe Soss, and Richard C. Fording, eds., *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 171–95; Wahneema Lubiano, "Black Ladies, Welfare Queens, and State Minstrels: Ideological War by Narrative Means," in Toni Morrison, ed., *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Identity* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992), 323–63; Martha Fineman, "Images of Mothers in Poverty Discourse," *Duke University Law Journal*, 2 (1991), 274–95.

¹⁴ Gwendolyn Mink, *Welfare's End* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

make the nation dependent through withholding a vital resource – oil – and require disciplining through “cowboy diplomacy,” welfare dependents have become the primitive other, politically assaulted, responsible for national decline, who need taming through cowboy social policy.

IMPERIAL COWBOYS, DOMESTIC REFORMERS: TR AND LBJ

The presidential cowboy rode onto the national stage during the imperialistic extension of the nation’s boundaries across the West to the Pacific. He temporarily became discredited with the morass of the Vietnam War.¹⁵ Both Theodore Roosevelt and Lyndon Baines Johnson combined expansionist foreign policy with domestic reform to improve the lives of the less fortunate. Nonetheless, the dependency of mothers and children taken for granted in 1900 no longer held by the 1960s. Not only did a growing women’s movement demand the end to workplace discrimination and equal pay for equal work, but the face of welfare in the political imagination had undergone a racial transformation from the white widow to the black “matriarch,” as Moynihan named these female heads of families, no matter the persistence of unequal treatment of women of color who applied for public assistance.¹⁶ It no longer was clear that mothers with small children belonged with the frail elderly and the permanently and totally disabled among the unemployables or that they were deserving of public assistance. The meaning of dependency changed, and so did government support when the color of dependency became black.¹⁷

The first presidential cowboy undoubtedly was Theodore Roosevelt. TR shed his aristocratic and effete Ivy-League upbringing to construct, as biographer Sarah Watts has argued, “the cowboy-soldier hero model” as a new ideal of manliness. Purchasing a Dakota ranch in 1883, over the next years he hardened his body by busting broncos and shooting buffalos, running for New York mayor as the “Cowboy of the Dakotas” shortly thereafter. He remade himself into the Rough Rider, a term synonymous in the

¹⁵ Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 253–89; Mathew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876–1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

¹⁶ Jennifer Mittelstadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 107–54; Anna Marie Smith, *Welfare Reform and Sexual Regulation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ “Percent African American in Newsmagazine Pictures of the Poor, 1950–1992 (compared with true percent black),” table in Gwendolyn Mink and Rickie Solinger, eds., *Welfare: A Documentary History of U.S. Policy and Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 538.

popular culture with “Western horsemen,” charging up Cuba’s San Juan Hill during “the splendid little war” against Spain, and made sure that the United States “took” the Philippines.¹⁸ Though as President he would broker peace between Russia and Japan, TR advocated the use of force. In conducting the nation’s foreign adventures through a modernized navy and army, he would “speak softly and carry a big stick.” He interpreted this “old proverb” to mean, “If a man continually blusters, if he lacks civility, a big stick will not save him from trouble; and neither will speaking softly avail, if back of the softness there does not lie strength, power.”¹⁹

As historian Gail Bederman has argued, this conception of national might was racialized. Just as his multi-volume saga *The Winning of the West* celebrated “the American race” forged from English, German, and other Northern European “blood” in its conquest of indigenous peoples, and the Spanish-American War marked the triumph of “Anglo-Saxonism,” so America’s rise to world power would be a racial, as well as a manly, victory. The “white frontiersman,” like the soldier against Philippine guerillas, fought not “a civilized foe” but rather a brutal and brown savage. Cowboyhood may have elided race, but the independence it evoked became associated with whiteness and manhood, and both of these attributes with democracy and civilization.²⁰

The imperialist was a domestic reformer, especially when it came to confronting the ills generated by immigration, urbanization, and industrialization. TR sought to reinforce the existing gender order of male breadwinner and female homemaker in ways that a century later a generation of religious conservatives could only dream of achieving. His understanding of dependency grew from a progressive, albeit masculinist, perspective that certainly rejected the fatalistic conservatism of his day. The dependency that stood for weakness among men, who were to be strong and independent, was a natural condition for women and children. Women’s dependency, then, justified use

¹⁸ Sarah Watts, *Rough Rider in the White House: Theodore Roosevelt and the Politics of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 123–35; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170–77, 191. See also Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

¹⁹ Bederman, 188–89; Theodore Roosevelt, “National Duties,” in *idem, The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (St. Clair Shores, MI: Scholarly Press, 1970; first published 1901), 288.

²⁰ Bederman, 178–79, 181. The contradictory position of African Americans in these wars is well documented, even if neglected by racialist proponents. See, for example, Michele Mitchell, “‘The Black Man’s Burden’: African Americans, Imperialism, and Notions of Racial Manhood 1890–1910,” *International Review of Social History*, 44, Supplement 7 (1999), 77–99.

of the police powers of the state to protect them. Since the strong had the responsibility to come to the aid of the needy, the purpose of government under the vigorous leadership of worthy men should be to relieve the helpless. TR would enhance the power of the state to regulate the economy, clean up the cities, and maintain the family.²¹ Thus he embraced public assistance for poor children. As he told the White House Conference on Children in 1909,

Parents of good character suffering from temporary misfortune, and above all, deserving mothers fairly well able to work but deprived of the support of the normal breadwinner, should be given such aid as may be necessary to enable them to maintain suitable homes for the rearing of their children.²²

Along with prominent “maternalist” reformers in the social settlement houses and women’s organizations, such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, Roosevelt pushed for mothers’ pensions, public allotments to poor mothers that would become Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) during the New Deal and AFDC in the 1960s. In the 1910s mothers’ pensions represented the other side of the paycheck. Fashioned from the same gender ideology that criminalized male desertion and non-support of families, they represented a form of state provision for social reproduction. Mothers without male supporters due to death (and sometimes incapacity, divorce, or desertion) would need no longer to enter the wage-labor force full time, which previously necessitated breakup of the family, with children sent to orphanages or left to roam the streets. In practice, without an allotment for the mother herself, these pensions provided inadequate income. Mothers had to enter the labor force anyhow, crowding low-waged and flexible employments like public cleaning and industrial homework. Because states, indeed counties, controlled the pensions, they determined eligibility, imposing restrictions by marital status, residency, race, citizenship, and moral or maternal fitness. Fearing long-term dependency, some required employment outside the home. Geography would determine the extent of assistance obtainable by children and their caregivers when no national standard existed.²³

²¹ On Roosevelt as a progressive see Kathleen Dalton, *Theodore Roosevelt: A Strenuous Life* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

²² Theodore Roosevelt, “Special Message to the Senate and House of Representatives,” from *Proceedings of the Conference on the Care of Dependent Children* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1909), in Mink and Solinger, 24.

²³ Sonya Michel, “The Limits of Maternalism: Politics Toward American Wage-Earning Mothers during the Progressive Era,” in Sonya Michel and Seth Koven, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 277–320; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Mothers and Soldiers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the*

When justifying federalization of mothers' pensions as Title IV of the 1935 Social Security Act, the US Children's Bureau retained the association of children with acceptable dependency. New Dealers instituted work relief to curb demoralization among adult men, but, as former bureau chief Grace Abbott explained, "children are always dependent, and they are 'demoralized' by inadequate not by adequate care."²⁴ Prior to the 1960s, when AFDC became stigmatized in the public mind because of increased numbers, reports of fraud, and a shift in recipient population from white widows to African Americans and the never married, it represented assistance given to worthy dependents.²⁵

But from the start, even before the full-blown image of the welfare queen, local governments vigilantly looked for ways to eliminate recipients from receiving benefits. When the referent for mother became non-white, states beginning with Louisiana in 1943 adopted "employable-mother" regulations to compel entrance into the labor market. Additional "man-in-the-house" rules reinforced male breadwinning and responsibility for the family by requiring stepfathers or any cohabiting man to support children and mothers to request courts to enforce payments from absent fathers. Further suitable-home and employable-mother rules halted the equitable coverage of African Americans that had developed during the 1940s. From 1956, amendments to Social Security encouraged wage-earning for mothers on ADC, a shift in philosophy that would undermine a mother's "right to assistance even if she refused to go to work," one administrator feared.²⁶

To the problem of poverty, Lyndon Baines Johnson brought martial metaphors. Riding a horse on his Texas ranch, LBJ embodied a cowboy

United States (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 424–79; Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Gwendolyn Mink, *Wages of Motherhood* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Joanne L. Goodwin, *Gender and the Politics of Welfare Reform: Mothers' Pensions in Chicago, 1911–1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); S. J. Kleinberg, *Widows and Orphans First: The Family Economy and Social Welfare Policy, 1880–1939* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

²⁴ Quoted in Mary Poole, "Securing Race and Ensuring Dependence: The Social Security Act of 1935," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 2000, 251.

²⁵ Lisa Levenstein, "From Innocent Children to Unwanted Migrants and Unwed Moms: Two Chapters in the Public Discourse on Welfare in the United States, 1960–1961," *Journal of Women's History*, 11 (winter 2000), 10–33.

²⁶ Joanne Goodwin, "'Employable Mothers' and 'Suitable Work': a Reevaluation of Welfare and Wage Earning for Women in the Twentieth-Century United States," *Journal of Social History*, 29 (1995), 253–74; Ellen Reese, "The Politics of Motherhood: The Restriction of Poor Mothers' Welfare Rights in the United States, 1949–1960," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State, and Society*, 8 (2001), 65–112; Edward Berkowitz, *Mr. Social Security: The Life of Wilbur J. Cohen* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 106–7.

image, even though the former teacher had been a politician since the 1930s and his persona was much more one of a Washington insider.²⁷ “When he first came into office, he seemed to be proud of that cowboy image,” one Johnson press secretary recalled. “He wanted to have pictures taken riding a horse. The Westerner image was something that he cultivated. He built it up; he didn’t try to hide it.” But later on he felt that the Eastern establishment dismissed him because of his cowboy persona.²⁸ Certainly the image has stuck. Millinery websites continue to offer broad Stetsons as LBJ cowboy hats.²⁹ In his conduct of the Vietnam War, commentators still remember cowboy characteristics, such as “shoot first” and go it alone. In advising George W. Bush to follow Johnson’s lead, *USA Today* founder Al Neuharth reinforced both men’s association with the cowboy:

LBJ, after mismanaging the Vietnam War that so bitterly divided the nation and the world, decided he owed it to his political party and to his country not to run for reelection. So, he turned tail and rode off into the sunset of his Texas ranch.

George W. Bush, he implied, should follow suit.³⁰

Johnson justified foreign policy in terms of national independence; stopping communism was necessary to maintain freedom. In the 1964 State of the Union Address he declared that “we must strengthen the ability of free nations everywhere to develop their independence and raise their standard of living, and thereby frustrate those who prey on poverty and chaos. To do this, the rich must help the poor – and we must do our part.”³¹ This goal paralleled that of domestic policy to enhance the independence of the most impoverished within the nation. But with Vietnam the cowboy’s self-reliance had morphed into an “arrogance of power.”³²

When it came to welfare and dependency, Johnson’s Great Society modernized the New Deal. Thirty years before, FDR, a polio survivor

²⁷ Robert A. Caro, *The Path to Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Knopf, 1982); Santina, “Cowboy Imagery and the American Presidency.”

²⁸ George Christian quoted in Douglas Quenqua and Sherri Deatherage Green, “W’s Ranch Spurs Homely Feel to President’s Image,” *PRWeek USA*, 3 Sept. 2001, <http://www.sherrigreen.com/W’s%20ranch.htm>; accessed 1 Sept. 2006, quoted with permission of publisher.

²⁹ http://www.cowboyhatstore.com/stetsonfelt_index/openroad_LBJ_index.htm; http://www.millerhats.com/lbj_catalog/lbj.html; accessed 1 Sept. 2006.

³⁰ Al Neuharth, “Should Cowboy Bush Ride into the Sunset?” *USA Today*, 13 May 2004, at http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/columnist/neuharth/2004-05-13-neuharth_x.htm; accessed 1 Sept. 2006.

³¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 8, 1964,” www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/640108; accessed 2 Sept. 2006.

³² J. William Fulbright, *Arrogance of Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

dependent on others for mobility, had equated independence with employment. “Continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual and moral disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber,” Roosevelt proclaimed in 1935. “To dole out relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit.”³³ LBJ remained true to the New Deal’s preference for work over relief when designing the War on Poverty to offer “a hand-up, not a hand out,” which would assist “taxeaters” to become “taxpayers.”³⁴ Training and education programs proliferated. But in encouraging maximum participation of the poor through community action and in promoting civil rights, the War on Poverty helped to spark a nationwide welfare rights movement that demanded a decent standard of living, reproductive freedom, and fair treatment by the state itself. These poor single, predominantly African American, mothers rejected the equation of welfare with dependency and instead sought welfare as a right of citizenship.³⁵

Nixon relied on similar rhetoric in promoting work over welfare. As part of a political scheme to capture southern white voters for the Republican Party, he sought to direct government funds to poor white male-headed families over black single mothers. Nixon promised that the poor would gain “the opportunity to guide their own destinies” and “a way of independence through the dignity of work.”³⁶ His Family Assistance Plan (FAP) would institute a guaranteed basic annual income. But, in doing so, the government would require employment or work from adult recipients, exempting only mothers of small children, still seen as worthy of government aid. Following the Work Incentive Program of 1967, states were able to require recipients to work for their payments – what came to be called workfare. Welfare rights activists charged that such forced work was slavery, the ultimate dependence, and that Nixon’s proposed annual income was too low to support an urban northern family. Along with trade unions, they helped to “zap FAP,” a program that the President himself had abandoned to defeat after 1972.³⁷

³³ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Message to the Congress,” 4 Jan. 1935, in *Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman, 13 vols. (New York: Random House, 1938–50), 4, 19.

³⁴ James T. Patterson, *America’s Struggle against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 132; Christopher Weeks, *Job Corps: Dollars and Dropouts* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), 130–31.

³⁵ Felicia Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³⁶ James M. Naughton, “The Presidency: He Proposes a New Way of Helping the Poor,” *New York Times*, 10 Aug. 1969, E1.

³⁷ Nadasen, 157–86; Eileen Boris, “When Work Is Slavery,” in Gwendolyn Mink, ed., *Whose Welfare?* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 37–8.

Nixon, however, may never have believed in his own program. As he commented to White House aides the previous May in the characteristically crude language captured by his secret tapes, “We’re going to [place] more of these little Negro bastards on the welfare rolls at \$2,400 a family ... let people like Pat Moynihan and Leonard Garment [his attorney] and others believe in all that crap. But I don’t believe in it ... work, work, throw ’em off the rolls. That’s the key.”³⁸

Nixon’s foreign policy introduced questions of interdependence, which were subject to political debate in a more robust way than they would be after the ending of the Cold War had presumably left the US as a lone superpower. Talk of oil dependence, independence, and interdependence pervaded the press, including the nation’s foremost newspaper the *New York Times*. Some proposed increased interdependence. News articles declared, “Self-Sufficiency May Be only a Mirage,” and columnists questioned, “A Fortress America?” and asked, “Alone or Together?”³⁹ Letters to the editor suggested internationalizing oil resources. One correspondent emphasized the need for US–European interdependence, lest a Soviet–Arab stranglehold suffocate European growth. Another writer even invited Europe to join “Project Independence” as an equal partner, paying its share of the cost, of course.⁴⁰ Early in 1974, however, the *Times* editorialized that “‘Project Independence’ – to make this country independent of unreliable foreign sources for its essential energy needs – should begin with an overhaul of the tax laws that have resulted in Condition Overdependence”; that is, inducements to US companies, like the oil depletion allowance, that encouraged expanded foreign production over domestic development. Domestic and foreign policy depended on each other.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger engaged in “shuttle diplomacy.” Kissinger saw the US as generating cooperation among allies; he proposed that Europeans, North Americans, and Japan work together to develop “an initial action program for collaboration in all areas of the energy problem.”⁴² At the “World Energy Conference” in Washington in early February 1974 the US secretary of state pointed to “the energy crisis” as

³⁸ James Warren, “Nixon on Tape Expounds on Welfare and Homosexuality,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 Nov. 1999, “Perspective,” 2.

³⁹ Harry Schwartz, “Self-Sufficiency May Be Only a Mirage,” *New York Times* 9 Dec. 1973, 260; Anthony Lewis, “A Fortress America?” *New York Times*, 3 Dec. 1973, 39; James Reston, “Alone or Together?” *New York Times*, 16 Dec. 1973, 243 (page numbers from Proquest edition).

⁴⁰ Letters to the Editor, *New York Times*, 18 Nov. 1973, 238 (Proquest).

⁴¹ “The Taxes on Oil,” *New York Times*, 21 Jan. 1974, 26. ⁴² Reston, 243.

“indicat[ing] the birth pangs of global interdependence.” But French foreign minister Michel Jobert questioned this assumption, seeing in Kissinger’s vision regional independence rather than global interdependence: “We must not appear before the entire world as seeking to define alone a ‘new course’ which would inevitably lead to a confrontation or a conflict with the producing countries and maybe with all the developing countries,” Jobert urged. “Let us not seek to establish or to impose a new world energy order.”⁴³ Kissinger would implore Europe “to work with the United States for a new world order,” *Times* writer James Reston argued. France, however, suggested a sinister plot on the part of the US to regain its dominance over other industrial nations and “would go it alone,” only highlighting in Reston’s analysis the ridiculousness of “selfish nationalistic interests.”⁴⁴ In essence, as Reston had earlier explained, “Kissinger ... switch[ed] the emphasis from Project Independence to Project Interdependence.”⁴⁵

The notion of ‘interdependence’ within a Cold War alliance system that recognized US supremacy existed within its diplomatic repertoire, even if the concept of “interdependence” remained absent from promotion of “workfare” over welfare. But as historian Natasha Zaretsky convincingly argues, the oil crisis symbolically linked the national appetite for oil, including the over-consumption of middle-class families and wage-earning women of “convenience” foods and appliances, with lack of restraint exhibited by poor mothers and “the Arab oil sheik,” two “racialized notions of dependency.”⁴⁶ Independence through homes, thus, replaced notions of interdependence within them.

REAGAN’S LEGACIES

But Ronald Reagan, not Richard Nixon, crafted “a new world order.” Historians have argued that Reagan “lived in a world of myths and symbols, rather than facts and programs.”⁴⁷ He gained a reputation “as a rigid ideologue with an underdeveloped social conscience, a rawhide foreign policy and a dangerously simplistic world view.” During the presidential campaign of 1980, advisers toned down the impression that he would “put on a

⁴³ Bernard Gwertzman, “Kissinger Offers 7-Point Program on World Energy,” *New York Times*, 12 Feb. 1974, 1, quotes at 20.

⁴⁴ James Reston, “Two Cheers for France,” *New York Times*, 15 Feb. 1974, 33.

⁴⁵ Reston, “Alone or Together?,” 243.

⁴⁶ Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, 95.

⁴⁷ Michael Schaller, *Reckoning with Reagan: America and Its President in the 1980s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 122.

six-shooter and take Iran” or that “he’s flinty-hearted and would kick all the blacks off welfare.”⁴⁸ In foreign policy he actually gave great latitude to advisers, which undoubtedly helped usher in the Iran–Contra scandal. Despite Central American misadventures, he did negotiate arms reduction, setting the basis for, first, détente with Mikhail Gorbachev and, then, the end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Soviet Union back into Russia.⁴⁹

As an actor, Reagan actually had played few cowboys, although his favorite Hollywood films were “adventure and action,” involving “escape and rescue.” The public associated him with the small screen’s “Death Valley Days”; as the Old Ranger selling 20-Mule Team Borax, his representation as a Western outsider barely camouflaged his salesmanship of corporate goods. Reagan left television to run for governor, a post he won after promising toughness against civil rights, anti-war, student, and other outbursts against “law and order.” After two terms in Sacramento, he bought a ranch in Santa Barbara County, where photographers could picture him in the saddle and cutting brush.⁵⁰ As President he drew upon that past in fashioning an imaginary as the sheriff who would bring the bad guys – the Soviet Evil Empire – to justice.⁵¹ Voters described him as “a man who, when he says something, sticks to his guns.” He recalled “a John Wayne type of thing ... the Cavalry.” One 1984 poll had respondents describing him with “terms like ‘bravado,’ ‘swagger,’ ‘swashbuckle,’ ‘tough guy,’” in contrast to effete Democrats.⁵² No less than the general public, scholars and journalists have delighted in painting him as “tall in the saddle”⁵³ He became known for “cowboy capitalism,” or what one “free-market” proponent defined as “policies of low tax rates, deregulation, free trade, price stability, and massive entrepreneurship ...” Reaganomics, the name given to his combination of tax cuts and reductions in domestic spending, then, would encourage individual

⁴⁸ Howell Raines, “Reagan Words Often Conflict with Strategy,” *New York Times*, 13 July 1980, 1, quote at 12.

⁴⁹ Schaller, 149–78; Gil Troy, *Morning in America: How Ronald Reagan Invented the 1980s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ Santana, “Cowboy Imagery and the American Presidency.” For the governorship see Lou Cannon, *Reagan* (New York: Putnam, 1982).

⁵¹ Robert Dallek, *Ronald Reagan: The Politics of Symbolism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 21; Michael Rogin, “Ronald Reagan,” *the Movie, and Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 38.

⁵² James Combs, *The Reagan Range: The Nostalgic Myth in American Politics* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 50–1.

⁵³ Schaller, 119. The cover of this study has Reagan in cowboy shirt riding a horse.

action without government presence, behavior associated with the freedom of the range, with the cowboy's West.⁵⁴

Reagan rode to political prominence by fanning resentment against the "welfare queen." As California's governor, he linked together big government, high taxes, and welfare fraud. "Public assistance should go to the truly needy not the truly greedy," he claimed, as he pledged to end cheating by undeserving poor black and brown single mothers – by replacing social workers, who, he charged, coddled the poor, with eligibility clerks and by forcing recipients to work for their benefits.⁵⁵ Their crime was manipulating the system, deliberately having children for a higher relief check, in contrast to the disabled, ill, and elderly, whose dependency came from no fault of their own. These other clients of public assistance remained, like children, naturally dependent. In contrast, the poor mother on welfare became, as historian Rickie Solinger has shown, "the symbol of *the dependent woman who makes bad choices*."⁵⁶ During Reagan's two terms, California tightened welfare eligibility rules, instituted workfare and "birth control training," and refused to implement federal directives, including those promulgated by the Nixon administration, that required more generous benefits – until unfavorable court decisions forced compliance.⁵⁷

The story of the "welfare queen" became a staple of the presidential campaign trail. During the New Hampshire primary in 1976 Reagan incorporated into his stump speech the tale of a Chicago woman charged with welfare fraud by an "Illinois investigation." This woman "has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veterans' benefits on four nonexisting deceased husbands," he proclaimed. She received "welfare under each of her names," overall obtaining \$150,000 in "tax-free cash

⁵⁴ Larry Kudlow, "Saddle up with the Dollar: Cowboy Capitalism Will Take Care of the Greenback," 16 Nov. 2004, at <http://www.nationalreview.com/kudlow/kudlow200411160821.asp>; accessed 3 Sept. 2006; Olaf Gersemann, *Cowboy Capitalism: European Myths, American Realities* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2004), unfavorably compares European economic decline to America's cowboy capitalism.

⁵⁵ "Committee to Re-elect Governor Reagan," press release on Labor Day Address, 7 Sept. 1970, 3, GO 186, Research File, Health and Welfare, Welfare 1970 (4/5), Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley. For Reagan vs. social workers see Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: How Home Health Workers Became the New Face of Labour* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), chapter 4.

⁵⁶ Solinger, *Beggars and Choosers*, 148; added/original emphasis.

⁵⁷ Cabinet Staff Meeting, 22 Nov. 1968, GO 25, Cabinet Meeting Minutes, November 1968 [2/2], 2–3, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library; Bill Boyarsky, "Reagan Proposes \$100 Million Cutback for Welfare in State," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 March 1970, 1; Philip Hager, "State Offers New Plan on Welfare to Avert Fund Cutoff," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 Oct. 1970, A3.

income.” But like many lines recited by the former actor, this one turned out to be an exaggeration. The woman in question, Linda Taylor, indeed seemed to have collected a disproportionate amount from the government, but not nearly to the extent portrayed by Reagan. She apparently used four aliases to receive \$8,000. The police later confiscated “her Cadillac limousine,” which they believed “was used to transport a fur coat, television set, diamond ring,” and other consumer goods that signaled her “bad choices” as a consumer as well as waste of taxpayer dollars.⁵⁸ But, thanks to Reagan, this forty-seven-year-old woman became the prototypical woman on welfare, who treated herself as royally as a “pig at the trough.”⁵⁹ Later, Reagan would parlay voter resentment of welfare to increase the number of investigations for fraud and thus the policing of poor families. Meanwhile, he enacted deep cuts in social programs, including food stamps and aid to the disabled, transforming even the deserving poor into the undeserving.⁶⁰ Reagan promoted work requirements to end dependence, believing, “We can only measure our success by the number of people we have removed from the welfare rolls and made self-sustaining citizens – not the number we have added.”⁶¹ But the wages available to those leaving welfare rarely lifted their families out of poverty.⁶²

From a liberal strategy to increase women’s independence, employment had become a conservative weapon to punish female sexuality and reinforce the low-wage labor force. Republicans had portrayed Bill Clinton as “soft” on foreign policy, but he certainly took a hard line when it came to welfare dependency. Though he asked for increases in child- and healthcare, his rhetoric appropriated Republican themes, encouraging opponents who would punish the autonomy of women under the guise of “family values” and who never accepted aid to poor solo mothers in the first place.⁶³ During the 1992 campaign he promised to “end welfare as we know it,” and in his first address as President called to “end welfare as a way of life and make it a path to independence and dignity.” As the 1996 election loomed he continued

⁵⁸ “‘Welfare Queen’ Becomes Issue in Reagan Campaign,” *New York Times*, 15 Feb, 1976, 51; “‘Welfare Queen’ Loses Her Cadillac Limousine,” *New York Times*, 29 Feb. 1976, 42; “Chicago Relief Queen Guilty,” *New York Times*, 19 March 1977, 8; Solinger, 179–80.

⁵⁹ For Reagan’s language used in the early 1970s see Johnnie Tillmon, “Welfare Is a Woman’s Issue,” in Mink and Solinger, *Welfare*, 375.

⁶⁰ Robert Pear, “3 Key Aides Reshape Welfare Programs,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1982, B8. ⁶¹ Ronald Reagan, “Welfare Is a Cancer,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1971, 41.

⁶² Frances Fox Piven, “Welfare and Work,” in Mink, *Whose Welfare?*, 83–99.

⁶³ R. Kent Weaver, “Ending Welfare as We Know It: Policymaking for Low-Income Families in the Clinton/Gingrich Era,” in Margaret Weir, ed., *The Social Divide: Political Parties and the Future of Activist Government* (Washington: Brookings, 1998), 361–416.

to deploy the old tropes. “We can break the vicious cycle of welfare dependency,” Clinton urged. “It should be pro-work, pro-family, pro-independence, responsible. Welfare should be a second chance, not a way of life.”⁶⁴

The resulting legislation replaced AFDC with TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). It forced recipients to take any job, even one below minimum wage, eliminating credit for higher education as a work activity as well as making such poor mothers leave the home for other labor. It also limited social assistance to no more than five years in a lifetime, established a family cap restricting poor women’s reproductive freedom, and continued the attempt to garner the wages of poor men to reimburse the state for assisting the mothers of their children. Reacting to fears that pregnant women crossed the border to deliver in the United States, thus automatically making their children citizens, Congress further excluded immigrants from benefits. Some states used their own monies to cushion these provisions, which became more restrictive under the next Bush administration.⁶⁵ TANF reauthorization a decade later curtailed state flexibility by increasing the number of work hours, shrinking what counts as work, and cutting childcare and other family supports. To further reduce welfare dependency, George W. Bush proposed a massive \$1.5 billion pro-marriage initiative and pushed prevention of motherhood. Marrying off poor single mothers to men, or at least forcing men to take fatherhood support seriously, would make women independent of public support.⁶⁶ His policies would reverse what welfare rights activist Johnnie Tillmon over thirty years before had described as “trad[ing] a man for *the man*.”⁶⁷

Clinton, the anti-war protestor, could not escape the cowboy designation any more than his predecessor, the well-mannered George H. W. Bush, who, in his first year of office, had appeared as a “modest, sober, selfless steward” rather than a cowboy. But Bush Senior certainly proved that he was “no policy wimp,” and, after Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, became a real “Rambo,” the Cold War update of the gunslinger, even as he built a multi-national

⁶⁴ William J. Clinton, State of the Union, 17 Feb. 1993, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/states/docs/sou93.htm>; William J. Clinton, “The President’s Radio Address,” 18 May 1996, in John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, *The American Presidency Project* (online), Santa Barbara, CA: University of California (hosted), Gerhard Peters (database), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=52834>; accessed 4 Sept. 2006.

⁶⁵ Mink, *Welfare’s End*; see also the essays in Mink, ed., *Whose Welfare?*

⁶⁶ Editorial, “Marriage Skills, Federal Style,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 Jan. 2004, 10; “Welfare Rolls Continue to Fall,” *HHS News*, 9 Feb. 2006, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2006/welfare_rolls_decline_june_05.htm; accessed 4 Sept. 2006.

⁶⁷ Tillmon, “Welfare,” 374; original emphasis.

consensus for troop deployment to the Persian Gulf.⁶⁸ Though some charged Clinton with dependency on the European allies, he too was castigated for going at it alone when it came to Bosnia and accused of being “trigger-happy.”⁶⁹ A political opponent of Hussein, who lived in Seattle, complained following Clinton’s continued bombing of Iraq, “The whole ... administration is a bunch of machos with cowboy mentality.”⁷⁰ The persistence of oil dependency – “an energy policy which basically has given up the goal of energy independence,” as one former energy secretary explained – led Clinton’s secretary of state to speak in terms of outlaw regimes as much as would the administration of George W. Bush.⁷¹

REAGAN REDUX?

During his presidential campaign George W. Bush declared, “I started as a cowboy. Now I’m a statesman.”⁷² Two images of Bush II suggest his appropriation of the cowboy that both hail and mock the past. The first comes from a website selling Republican Party memorabilia and places Bush in a white Stetson next to Ronald Reagan in a similar iconic hat (Figure 1). With the words “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys,” this button seeks to transfer the enthusiasm and affection of party faithful from Reagan to G. W. Bush, a son who aspires to be more like the “Gipper” than his own father.⁷³ Bush Junior apparently shares Reagan’s proclivity for make-believe, as well as

⁶⁸ Charles Krauthammer, “When the Going Gets Tough, We Will Need a Captain,” *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 8 Feb. 1989, A15; Stephen Kurkjian, “Bush Proves He’s No Policy Wimp,” *Boston Globe*, 31 Dec. 1989, A3; Charley Reese, “Ultimatum to Iraq a Blunder that Boxes in Bush and Hussein,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 26 Aug. 1990, G2; Lynn Garner, “Bush Dubbed ‘Rambo’ in Cool Reception to Energy Plan on Capitol Hill,” *Oil Daily*, 22 Feb. 1991, 2.

⁶⁹ “Globo-cop glop,” *The Progressive*, 59 (December 1995), 9–10; John Hall, “Nation’s Forces – and Maybe Its Fate – In Hands of Others,” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 17 April 1994, F2; David Limbaugh, “It’s also Foreign Policy ... and TV Drama,” *Washington Times*, 3 April 1999, C1.

⁷⁰ “Thoughts from Some with Special Perspectives on Iraq Bombing,” *Seattle Times*, 17 Dec. 1998, A21.

⁷¹ Laura Mecoy, “U.S. May Feel Effects of Invasion at Gas Pump,” *Sacramento Bee*, 3 Aug. 1990, A24; Robin Wright, “Fighting the Fires of Islam,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1993, M-1; Marilyn Greene, “Iran, Iraq, Libya Are Targeted on Terror,” *USA Today*, 31 March 1993, 4A; Maura Reynolds, “The State of the Union Address,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 Jan. 2003, A1.

⁷² Quoted in Infact Report, “Cowboy Diplomacy: How the US Undermines International Environmental, Human Rights, Disarmament and Health Agreements,” <http://www.infact.org/cowboyd.html>; accessed 30 Aug. 2006.

⁷³ “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys Button – #21197,” Republican market at <http://www.republicanmarket.com/store/home>; accessed 28 Aug. 2006.

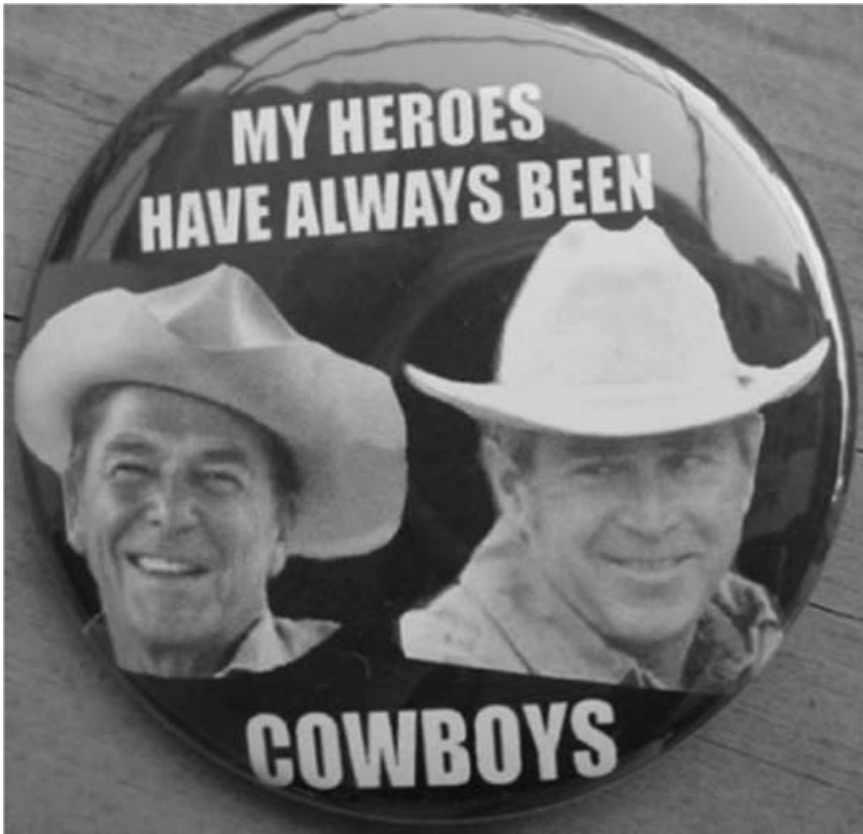


Figure 1. “My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys,” from RepublicanMarket, 2004.

his economic conservatism and New Right social positions. Like Reagan, this Bush purchased his ranch in anticipation of running for higher office and the ranch has functioned as a stage set for image-making. But this Bush, unlike Reagan, is no horserider. In Crawford he drives a good ol’ boy pickup truck.

Bush II’s connection to TR is more complicated, as the second image suggests. Whereas TR truly transformed his body into a cowboy, G. W. Bush, however fit, only looks the part. Standing below a photograph of the Rough Rider during a White House news briefing on 2 July 2003, Bush challenged Iraqi militants to “bring them on”. In the same room, he earlier declared, “the game is over” (Figure 2).⁷⁴ Historians William Marina and

⁷⁴ Christopher Allbritton, “Cowboy Bush Taunts the Enemy,” 2 July 2003, posted on “Back to Iraq,” <http://www.back-to-iraq.com/archives/2003/07/>; accessed 4 Sept. 2006.



Figure 2. US President George W. Bush pauses while talking about Iraq and President Saddam Hussein in front of a portrait of Teddy Roosevelt in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington, 6 February 2003.
© Reuters/CORBIS

David T. Beito have argued that “Teddy Roosevelt Fathered the ‘Bush Doctrine’” of preemptive war.⁷⁵ Or, as another commentator has explained, the Bush doctrine of preemption is just another name for a “cowboy ethics” that justifies US interventionism abroad on the basis of “a sense of moral providence,” “the world in terms of a good/evil dichotomy,” “the right to anticipatory self-defense,” “a willingness to act alone,” and “a sense of duty to defend the weak”⁷⁶ – characteristics applied to TR as well. But the lip-biting Bush undermines his own identification with Roosevelt’s muscular

⁷⁵ William Marina and David T. Beito, “How Teddy Roosevelt Fathered the ‘Bush Doctrine,’” 9 Dec. 2004, <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=1435>; accessed 4 Sept. 2006.

⁷⁶ Holiday Dmitri, “Frontier Justice: Cowboy Ethics and the Bush Doctrine of Preemption,” University of Chicago, Master of Arts paper, August 2003, ii; see also <http://www.njweedman.com/bush.htm>; last accessed 6 Sept. 2006.



Figure 3. Anti-war demonstration, Glasgow, March 2003. Photographer: Leon McDermott

imperialism. His face suggests that this time interventionism would lead to farce if the Iraq War did not have all the elements for becoming a national nightmare, draining both material and human resources.

The cowboy moniker has stuck with Bush II. Where Republican partisans during the contested 2000 election in Florida proclaimed, “This Country Needs Cowboys, Not Smarty Pants,” a few years later anti-war protestors at home and abroad held signs, as one in Glasgow, Scotland, far less favorably declaring that “Bush Is A Cowboy” (Figure 3).⁷⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* likened his March 2003 ultimatum to Saddam Hussein to “a Wild West sheriff warning the bad guys to get out of town.” It was “giving Saddam and his boys 48 hours to get out of Dodge.”⁷⁸ But Cartoonist Charles Pugsley

⁷⁷ “What the World Needs Now,” in Wayne Lutz, “Joe Hoeffel, Anti-Cowboy,” *Tocquevillian Magazine*, 18 March 2004, <http://www.tocquevillian.com/articles/0173.html>; contrast with <http://www.submitresponse.co.uk/archives/march/march-Pages/Image3.html>; last accessed 6 Sept. 2006.

⁷⁸ Reed Johnson and Gayle Pollard-Terry, “Bush’s Speech: One for the Ages? Maybe,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 2003, E-1.

Fincher scorned “Cowboy Bush’s Cowboy Plan for Terrorists” as a bad replay of the movies.⁷⁹ “Old West Cowboy Ethic” may have remained “the American Way to Fight Evil,” but, for Europeans, the cowboy has become the “symbol of reckless irresponsibility.”⁸⁰ Hans Ulrich Klose of the German parliament complained, “the way he talks, this provocative manner, the jaggng of his finger at you ... It’s Texas, a culture that is unfamiliar to Germans. And it’s the religious tenor of his arguments.”⁸¹ As the war began the *Ventura County Star* (California) described his lack of European support: “If Bush is the cowboy sheriff, he’s riding without a posse.”⁸² Democratic opponents lamented his go-it-alone behavior, with Connecticut Senator Chris Dodd insisting that we must not “act like a unilateral cowboy.”⁸³ The libertarian *Santa Barbara News Press* concluded, “George W. Bush’s brand of cowboy justice hasn’t served the country well”; his going it alone had undermined the US position in the world.⁸⁴

PERSISTENT ICONS

George W. Bush may have distorted “the Cowboy Code,” as a *Village Voice* columnist claimed, by failing to protect the little guy and the weak or stick by his word and be truthful or work hard while maintaining dignity.⁸⁵ But his foreign policy has come to stand for “cowboy diplomacy,” so that when it appeared that he was consulting with allies, *Time* magazine announced “The End of Cowboy Diplomacy” with a cover featuring a big Stetson with the presidential seal and a pair of boots sticking down from it. Bush II apparently floated notions of interdependence only when, as realpolitik *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer explains, “there is something the allies will actually help accomplish, or ... There is nothing to be done anyway, so

⁷⁹ <http://www.theillustrateddaily.scribble.com/daily.scribble.pages.05/06.30.05.html>; accessed 6 Sept. 2006.

⁸⁰ Andrew Bernstein, “Old West Cowboy Ethic Is the American Way to Fight Evil,” *Insight on the News*, 1 April 2003, 50–1.

⁸¹ David E. Sanger, “To Some in Europe, the Major Problem Is Bush the Cowboy,” *New York Times*, 24 Jan. 2003, 1.

⁸² Tom Teepen, “If Bush Is the Cowboy Sheriff, He’s Riding without a Posse,” *Ventura County Star*, 21 March 2003, B12.

⁸³ Quoted in John Potter, “Bush Gives Cowboys Bad Image,” *Billings Gazette*, 8 March 2003, at <http://www.billingsgazette.com/newdex.php?display=rednews/2003/03/08/build/opinion/potter.inc>; accessed 1 Sept. 2007.

⁸⁴ “Leadership Over Damage Control,” *Santa Barbara News Press*, 14 April 2004, A10.

⁸⁵ Erik Baard, “George W. Bush Ain’t No Cowboy,” *Village Voice*, 28 Sept. 2004, at <http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0439,baard,57117,1.html>; accessed 2 Sept. 2006.

multilateralism gives you the cover of appearing to do something.”⁸⁶ Still other commentators countered that “Cowboy Diplomacy Is not Dead yet,”⁸⁷ continuing to defend “a cowboy over a ‘Kum-ba-yah’ type any day.”⁸⁸ The cowboy remained an icon of masculinity, independence, and action.

The welfare queen has not only persisted as a descriptor of poor single mothers but migrated to additional referents, others who illegitimately get rich from public funds. Thus, in receiving foreign aid, the Republic of Korea goes to the top of the US State Department’s “foreign policy welfare queens.” As the state with the most federal assistance per capita, Alaska has become “a welfare queen.”⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the political left hurls “welfare queen” as an epithet at corporations for undeservingly dipping into public coffers. Thus, in paying workers so little that they have to rely on food stamps, Medicaid, and the earned income tax credit, Wal-Mart has transferred costs of doing business onto taxpayers, while other companies, like Boeing, live off federal contracts. An Arizona Green Party chapter compared support of “the welfare mother” with that of the “corporate welfare mother,” who costs the government billions of dollars more.⁹⁰ Such designations reinforce the negativity of welfare and thus legitimate the term in its original signification of the dependency of poor black mothers.

These tropes of independence and dependence are powerful precisely because they tap into historical memories and lend themselves to multiple readings or manipulations. But we need not construct a new world order on the basis of old myths. Feminist theorists of care, and other advocates for social justice, offer an alternative to such binary oppositions; we have

⁸⁶ Charles Krauthammer, “The Comeback Kid: Multilateralism,” *Santa Barbara News-Press*, 29 Aug. 2006, A11.

⁸⁷ Mike Allen and Romesh Ratnesar, “The End of Cowboy Diplomacy,” *Time*, 17 July 2006, posted 9 July 2006, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1211578-1,00.html>; accessed 17 Aug. 2006; Jim Lobe, “Cowboy Diplomacy Is Not Dead Yet,” 15 July 2006, at <http://www.antiwar.com/lobe/?articleid=9310>; accessed 29 Aug. 2006.

⁸⁸ Thomas Lindaman, “George W. Bush and Cowboy Diplomacy,” 18 Aug. 2006, at <http://www.nationalledger.com/artman/publish/article-27267785.shtml>; accessed 29 Aug. 2006.

⁸⁹ Doug Bandow, “Foreign Policy Welfare Queen,” 22 Oct. 2005, at http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=5146; Charles Soto, “Alaska is such a Welfare Queen,” *cnet News*, 28 Feb. 2006, at <http://news.com.com/5208-1034-o.html?forumID=1&threadID=14425&start=0>; both accessed 29 Aug. 2006.

⁹⁰ See “Corporate Welfare, the Shame Page,” <http://www.progress.org/banneker/cw.html>; “Wal-Mart, the Welfare Queen,” http://blog.wakeupwalmart.com/ufcw/2005/04/wal-mart_the_wel.html; Mary, “Boeing: Corporate Welfare Queen,” *The left coaster*, 7 Dec. 2003, at <http://www.theleftcoaster.com/archives/000860.php>; accessed 29 Aug. 2006.

emphasized interdependence over the dyad of dependence/independence.⁹¹ Globalization has connected people more tightly than ever before as producers, consumers, and even reproducers. We are dependent on each other for the air we breathe and the water we drink, as much as for goods and services. Nuclear or biological terrorism, bird flu, or other pandemics will wipe out people who seem distant but have become close. A truly new world order will put cowboys and welfare queens to rest.

⁹¹ For example, Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Selma Sevenhuijsen, *Citizenship and the Ethics of Care: Feminist Considerations on Justice, Morality, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Wendy Sarvasy, "Social Citizenship from a Feminist Perspective," *Hypatia*, 12, 1 (1997), 54–74; Madonna Harrington Meyer, ed., *Care Work: Gender, Labor, and the Welfare State* (New York: Routledge, 2000).