

The Idea of Progress in Political Speech

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Abstract of Thesis

By conducting a content analysis of inaugural addresses given by the last twenty Presidents of the United States, this study will examine the appearance of the word *progress* in American political rhetoric over the course of the twentieth century and determine the existence of any thematic patterns of its usage. I have categorized the appearances of the word *progress* into four contextual categories – *economic*, *political*, *social*, and *moral* – and have also coded the appearances of the word in terms of whether it was used to refer to progress on a *national* or on a *global* level. The results of this analysis indicate that the idea of progress is invoked quite frequently by U.S. Presidents in their inaugural speeches, although by some Presidents more than others. Specifically, U.S. presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Herbert Hoover, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan tended to use the word quite often, while presidents Woodrow Wilson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Jimmy Carter did not use it at all in their inaugural addresses. In addition, there are clearly more appearances of the idea of progress in the speeches of Republican presidents than Democrats. Also, the context in which the word *progress* has been used by presidents overwhelmingly tends to be political or economic in nature, rather than moral or social. Analyzing the idea of progress as it appears in presidential speeches will hopefully serve to partially dismantle and deconstruct its almost mythical power to give an ideological justification to even the some of the darkest facets of human existence. It will be argued that the cultural notion of progress as positive social change is largely, if not entirely, relative to the social and temporal location in which it emerges, despite its frequent portrayal by U.S. presidents as an objective and agreed-upon fact of human existence.

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1) Introduction

“No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one that leads from the slingshot to the megaton bomb.”

-Theodor Adorno

For the past three hundred years, Western capitalist society's prevailing conception of its place in history has assumed a single narrative: the idea of *progress*. Continual progress is the “story” of the human race; it is an epic tale, a hero's journey in which all of humanity is the protagonist. The word progress implies far more than the concept of temporal continuity which its literal definition indicates; it symbolically represents a far reaching conception of the nature and purpose of human existence. Progress, in its grand sense, implies not only a process of change, but of positive change, of improvement, or movement toward a desired goal or destination. However, despite many claims to the objective and independent nature of the process, progress is in actuality a highly relative concept which is not only understood quite differently in various cultures, but has also shifted its meaning and implications over the course of human history (Bury, 1920; Carlson, 2007).

By conducting a content analysis of inaugural addresses given by the last twenty Presidents of the United States, this study will examine the appearance of the word *progress* in American political rhetoric over the course of the twentieth century and determine the existence of any thematic patterns of its usage. I have categorized the appearances of the word *progress* into four contextual categories – *economic*, *political*, *social*, and *moral* – and have also coded the appearances of the word in terms of whether

it was used to refer to progress on a *national* or on a *global* level. The results of this analysis indicate that the idea of progress is invoked quite frequently by U.S. Presidents in their inaugural speeches, although by some Presidents more than others. Specifically, U.S. presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Herbert Hoover, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan tended to use the word quite often, while presidents Woodrow Wilson, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Jimmy Carter did not use it at all in their inaugural addresses. In addition, there are clearly more appearances of the idea of progress in the speeches of Republican presidents than Democrats. Also, the context in which the word progress has been used by presidents overwhelmingly tends to be political or economic in nature, rather than moral or social.

Analyzing the idea of progress as it appears in presidential speeches will hopefully serve to partially dismantle and deconstruct its almost mythical power to give an ideological justification to even the some of the darkest facets of human existence, such as global inequality, domination, war, and torture. It will be argued that the cultural notion of progress as positive social change is largely, if not entirely, relative to the social and temporal location in which it emerges. The idea of progress is strongly ingrained into the framework of modern social structure, to the point that a sociological analysis of this concept as an object of interest in and of itself is exceedingly difficult. Despite its elusive conceptual nature, however, the conviction that human civilization is steadily progressing towards a more advanced state of existence is so widespread that it would be unwise to ignore the sociological importance of the idea itself. Speaking to the importance of a sociological understanding of this idea, Erville Bartlett Woods (1907) wrote:

If the idea of progress is likely to continue in constant use, it is possible that some merit may attach to an effort to assort and criticize, in the light of present sociological theory, a few of the various significations which it has acquired, to analyze out of the mass of meanings a few definite characteristics, and to formulate them into a criterion which may serve as a measure of social progress (p. 779). Specifically, the prevalence of the idea of progress in the political speech of U.S. Presidents holds great potential to illuminate the possible manifestations of this idea as a major ideological factor which strongly influences political agendas.

Progress is more than a word; it is an idea that represents Western capitalist society's justification of its past, its present, and its future. It is a story we tell ourselves to give social life a sense of meaning and direction, it can serve as the grand overarching narrative of our existence as a species. Many people want to believe, in the face of all the madness, death and destruction of human existence, that we are still moving forward as a species and that a better world is not only possible, but inevitable. The idea of progress is powerful, and our collective definition of its meaning has tended to set a course for our social institutions and structures to follow. A sociological understanding of the idea of progress as a cultural phenomenon can provide a deeper understanding of the way in which societies give meaning to the world around them amidst rapid and sweeping social and political change. For this reason, I believe this analysis of the idea of progress in American political speech will prove pertinent and valuable to a more thorough sociological understanding of a concept that has great influence on modern political and social thought.

2) The History of Progress

In order to provide a theoretical background upon which to construct this analysis, it will prove beneficial to review the existing literature of three areas important to the sociological analysis of the idea of progress. The literature review will begin with a discussion of the idea of progress itself, and will include a brief history of the idea of progress, as well as an overview of some past attempts to grasp its broader social implications. This section will also touch upon how the idea of progress influenced the theoretical worldviews of classical sociologists like Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim in order to establish a sociological basis for the idea of progress – to show that this notion is not solely the domain of philosophers and political theorists, but rather that the idea of progress has long been embedded in sociological theory. I will follow the historical section with a review of postmodernist theories of progress, including an in-depth look at the concept of the metanarrative as conceptualized by Jean-Francois Lyotard, which will form the backbone of my theoretical analysis and discussion. To begin with, I will attempt to postulate a definition of the word *progress* that I believe will prove useful in my attempt to deconstruct the range of connotations it has possessed when used in various contexts over time.

On the surface, the idea of progress is the notion of positive social change; the constant, if gradual, improvement of the human condition. However, this definition does not capture the full extent of progress as it should be understood in modern sociological discourse. Dodd (1934), proposes that “we define the word 'progress' as meaning social changes which are desired by the group undergoing those changes” (p. 351). I would suggest that progress be defined as social changes which are desired by the group

undergoing those changes *at that time*. What is considered to be progress at one time is frequently looked upon in a different light some years later. Thus, far from being a universal truth of human existence, progress would appear to be an entirely relative concept, its positive associations applicable only within the boundaries of the social group to which it applies, and even there only temporarily.

From a more subjective perspective, human progress, even within a single society like the United States, is not even entirely unidirectional, and it is quite conceivable that a step “forward” could be accompanied by two steps “back” so to speak, as issues and concerns change over time, some gaining in importance and immediacy while others fade from public discourse. What is most important to remember is that for as long as it has existed, the idea of progress has been entirely subjective (Bury, 1920).

Prior to the European Enlightenment, most Western intellectual thought was guided by the spiritual worldview dictated by powerful religious organizations (Bury, 1920; Bossard, 1931). Up until the middle of the 17th century, the great majority of the European population possessed a clear purpose to their lives, namely, to serve their God and live in accordance with his standards as dictated by the church in order to attain salvation in the afterlife (Weber, 1930). Most, if not all, aspects of the natural world and social life could be explained through the lens of religious doctrine, and civilization existed in the minds of its members solely to serve a spiritual purpose. The idea of progress as we know it today was largely nonexistent, in fact, the opposite view was quite common, namely that humanity was in a state of constant decline from a prior golden age, a sentiment exemplified perfectly by the Christian myth of humankind's expulsion from a primordial Eden (Bury, 1920; McGowan, 2008).

With the widespread rejection of the religious worldview in favor of secular rationality and scientific inquiry that occurred during the Enlightenment, European society lost its main ideological motivation for existence. In a suddenly strange and uncertain world, people found themselves without a unifying ontological conception of their place in the universe. It was during this time that the idea of progress became popular among the societies of the West (Bury, 1920; Bossard, 1931; McGowan, 2008).

From the end of the 17th Century onward, following the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, progress quickly became an almost entirely obvious reality of human existence, a perfect example of widely recognized a priori knowledge. A belief in the constant progression of the human race towards a better tomorrow is still quite commonplace today (Bury, 1920; Carlson, 2007). Historian J.B. Bury (1920) describes the evolution of this idea in great detail in his seminal work *The Idea of Progress*, wherein he lays out a convincing treatise that progress as it is understood today is a relatively recent addition to human discourse and philosophy. According to Bury (1920), the idea of progress “means that civilization has moved, is moving, and will move in a desirable direction” (p.20).

Despite the popularity of this idea from the Enlightenment period onward, Bury insists that it is more difficult to determine what progress means and whether it is occurring than most people tend to think: “To the minds of most people the desirable outcome of human development would be a condition of society in which all the inhabitants of our planet would enjoy a perfectly happy existence. But it is impossible to be sure that civilization is moving in the right direction to realize this aim” (Bury, 1920: 5). Progress to Bury is a highly complex and subjective concept, not a simple fact of human existence that can be assumed away by philosophers, scientists, and thinkers of

all types. Presuming the existence of such a thing as progress is akin to making assumptive leaps towards a belief in the human soul, or life after death, Bury (1920) uses extensive historical evidence to make the case that:

In short, it cannot be proved that the unknown destination towards which man is advancing is desirable. The movement may be progress, or it may be an undesirable direction and therefore not progress. This is a question of fact, and one which is at present as insoluble as the question of personal immortality. It is a problem which bears on the mystery of life. (p. 5)

According to Bury, the idea of progress as it is popularly understood today simply did not gain ideological traction prior to the European Enlightenment. Ancient Greek thinkers, although relatively enlightened for their time, had no clear vision of human progress comparable to its contemporary meaning, for reasons made clear by Bury (1920):

In the first place, their limited historical experience did not easily suggest such a synthesis; and in the second place, the axioms of their thought, their suspiciousness of change, their theories of Moira, of degeneration and cycles, suggested a view of the world which was the very antithesis of progressive development. (p. 18)

Nor did the rise of Christianity in Europe provide fertile ground for the idea of progress to take root: “According to the Christian theory which was worked out by the Fathers, and especially by St. Augustine, the whole movement of history has the purpose of securing the happiness of a small portion of the human race in another world; it does not postulate a further development of human history on earth” (Bury, 1920: 18). It was only beginning during the Renaissance in the 15th century and kicking into high gear with the

Enlightenment in the late 1600s and through the 1700s that the conditions of intellectual discourse in Europe were prepared to adopt a widespread belief in the idea of progress. Bury (1920) writes of the Age of Enlightenment: “Self-confidence was restored to human reason, and life on this planet was recognized as possessing a value independent of any hopes or fears connected with a life beyond the grave” (p. 25).

Bury (1920) downplayed the role of religion in the development of the idea of progress, even going so far as to claim that the popularity of religious doctrine was severely detrimental to the adoption of progress as a worldview. Some theorists, however, disagree with Bury's assessment of the origins of the idea of progress, arguing that religion, especially Christianity, has always played an important role in the perpetuation of the idea of progress in Western society (Woods, 1907; McGowan, 2008; Williams, 2009; Stuart, 2011). The belief in progress could be, paradoxically, a result of both increased rationality and the rise of a scientific worldview on the one hand as well as a deep-seated belief in divine providence on the other. Evidence for this can be found in U.S presidents' frequent mentions of God and Divinity as a driving force behind prosperity and American progress. The possible religious origins of progress are also discussed by John McGowan, who writes: “The narrative of progress closely resembles various providential versions of human history. Humans are in God's hands – and he will secure a happy ending to the story even if the present is manifestly imperfect” (McGowan, 2008: 34).

Progress, although commonly perceived to refer to positive change, is not a universally positive process. This was recognized by many early twentieth century thinkers who saw the optimistic promise of progress crushed under the weight of tragedy

wrought by the technological horrors which were unleashed on the battlefields of World War I. The philosopher John Dewey, writing during the early 1900s, saw clearly that social change was not necessarily equal to positive social progress. He proposed rather that social change merely provided an opportunity for human beings to steer progress in a direction desired by those in a position to exert such influence: “While the modern man was deceived about the amount of progress he had made, and especially deceived about the automatic certainty of progress, he was right in thinking that for the first time in history mankind is in command of the possibility of progress” (Dewey, 1916: 314). Dewey saw progress not as an automatic, deterministic process separate from us and beyond our control, but as a process that can and should be guided by humankind to further the betterment of society and the improvement of the human condition. Facing the disastrous consequences of misguided political, economic, and technological development culminating in the Great War, Dewey concluded: “Progress depends not on the existence of social change but on the direction which human beings deliberately give that change” (Dewey, 1916: 314).

The damage done to the idea of progress by the brutality of modern warfare is also mentioned by John McGowan, who writes: “While World War I destroyed the idea that the world was, slowly but surely, becoming more peaceful, more democratic, and more humane, the horrors of the twentieth century that followed the Great War demonstrated that the idea of a better future could be used to create a truly horrific present” (McGowan, 2008: 33). Throughout the twentieth century, with all the horrific realities of scientific potential laid bare through mechanized warfare and scientific atrocities of an ever increasing magnitude, the idea of scientific progress as positive and

inevitable remained largely unscathed, albeit somewhat altered. A belief in human progress is not by any means universal, and the idea of progress is highly disputed in many circles. Nevertheless, the idea of progress lives on within contemporary political rhetoric despite the numerous examples of its problematic offspring: tanks, aerial bombers, warships and submarines, chemical and biological weapons, human eugenics projects, and the apocalyptic potential provided by atomic weaponry. Even with such a large resume of atrocities, science and technology are still largely viewed as having always existed on a continuous time-line of positive progression, due largely to world-altering achievements in transportation, communication, medicine, and agriculture. Scientific and technological development remain the most enduring endorsements of the existence of human progress, and the assumption that progress is a reality of human existence is prevalent in all scientific pursuits, including sociology.

Many of the noted forefathers of modern sociology based their observations of social life from within a decidedly progressive paradigm, whether consciously or unconsciously. Bury (1920) writes of the so-called father of sociology:

Auguste Comte did more than any preceding thinker to establish the idea of progress as a luminary which could not escape man's vision. The massive system wrought out by Comte's speculative genius – his organic scheme of human knowledge, his elaborate analysis of history, his new science of sociology – was a great fact with which European thought was forced to reckon. The soul of this system was progress, and the most important problem he set out to solve was the determination of its laws. (p. 190)

Auguste Comte's well-known *law of three stages* presumes the existence of a definite

progression of human knowledge, and is obviously talking about a form of progress in so many words. According to Comte (1856), the history of social development shows that societies evolve through three distinct stages: the *theological* stage, the *metaphysical* stage, and the *positive* stage. In the theological stage, reality is largely understood by means of supernatural and religious explanations, such as various types of divine influence or the existence of deities. The metaphysical stage arises from the theological, moving further away from a concrete belief in a particular deity and more toward the rational discussion of existence through philosophical reasoning and logic. The final, positive stage is characterized by the rise of the scientific method and an increasingly intellectual, evidence-based worldview. Comte contends that all human societies, and all schools of thought which exist within these societies, develop through these three stages. Additionally, he uses the word *development* quite frequently to describe this process in his writings, and there is a general sense that he is implying that development through these stages can also be viewed as the general improvement of social conditions. In his theoretical writings, Comte blatantly assumes the evolutionary superiority of modern, positivist, schools of thought and sees only one correct course for human progress to follow, one for which Western European society forms the ideal model (Boussard, 1931). The sociocultural relativity of the idea of progress does not seem to occur to him.

The theoretical worldview espoused by Karl Marx (1848) also clearly assumes the possibility of some form of human progress, albeit one that is conditional upon human consciousness and action. Marx and his intellectual collaborator Friedrich Engels extensively discussed Western society's development from a pre-industrial mode to one characterized by the capitalist economic system, and finally the dissolution of the

capitalist way of life in order to make way for socialism and, eventually, a stateless and classless, communist society (Marx, 1867). Marx's predictions invoke a sense that progress through these forms of social organization is indeed possible, however his theories, unlike those of Auguste Comte, do not assume the existence of some great law of history that will carry civilization from feudal life, through capitalism, then socialism and the disintegration of the state. Marx's entire theoretical paradigm assumes the *possibility* of human progress, but it places the responsibility for that progress in the hands of the population. According to Pachter (1974), Marx emphasized that “the transition from capitalism to socialism was not guaranteed by any providential law and that, instead of socialism, the outcome might be a relapse into barbarism. (...)He did not see history as an escalator bound to carry mankind from one floor to the next in predetermined stages” (p. 136).

Although Karl Marx was hopeful about the possibility for revolution and the eventual improvement of social order and the human condition, he emphasized the importance of collective social action as a means to steer progress along a desirable path, one characterized not just by technological advance, but by moral and social improvement as well. Pachter (1974) further illuminates this aspect of Marxist sociology:

No 'objective' criterion tells us what direction progress must take. The decision belongs to human praxis. This is the basic reason why the mechanical increase in technological advances is not enough to define progress – and, incidentally, why a dictatorship that legitimizes itself only by the claim that it modernizes and industrializes a country is not progressive in any Marxian sense; the bourgeoisie

also brought political and religious liberation, Messrs Amin and Qadaffi do nothing of this kind. (p. 136)

Karl Marx's conception of human progress was not as an objective law of existence, as was that of Auguste Comte, but as a far more subjective process which depends greatly on human agency.

Max Weber's (1930) renowned work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* lays out a disturbing critique of what is commonly referred to as progress. Weber (1930) explains that the emergence of Western capitalism went hand in hand with the Calvinist ideology prevalent in Europe at that time. Calvinists believed that material success in life, especially in business and the procurement of wealth, was an indication of God's favor and that such success was as predetermined as that person's eternal salvation in the afterlife. In addition, devotion to one's worldly profession, however humble, was widely preached as being of great religious merit. This drive to succeed on material terms led to the rapid growth of the capitalist economic system and made the maximization of profit and wealth one of the guiding motivations behind social life. In time, the religious origins of this practice became irrelevant to its perpetuation as a system of social organization, as the rewards provided by savvy business investments and ingenuity provided more than enough incentive on their own. Productive activity was increasingly rationalized as being a virtue in and of itself, and the accumulation of wealth ceased to be solely a means to an end and became an end all its own (Weber, 1930).

The process of rationalization forms the backbone to many of Weber's social theories. Rationalization to Weber is the process through which humankind will achieve ever greater mastery over the forces of nature while casting off archaic and superstitious

beliefs in favor of scientific reason and logic. Despite these claims, Weber was not optimistic about the process of rationalization, and points out many of the potentially negative implications of human social development according to this principle. Increased rationalization tends to have a dehumanizing effect on social organization, leading to increased bureaucratization and a social and moral disconnect between individuals. He warns of a future where rational efforts to maximize objective efficiency could undermine many of the values inherent to a democratic way of life, trampling irrational sentiments like love, compassion and fairness in favor of meticulously cold calculation (Weber, 1930). Throughout his life's work, Max Weber attempts to explain the processes which bring about human progress as we know it, but does not shy away from presenting the potential for what many understand as progress to lead humanity into a less desirable future.

Emile Durkheim (1893) envisioned progress as being intimately connected to the ever-increasing division of labor in society, and was he referred to as the evolution from mechanical to organic solidarity. In traditional, small-scale societies, social integration and cohesion arises from the homogenous nature of individuals, a type of social organization Durkheim called mechanical solidarity. In such societies, for example tribal and nomadic groups, people derive a sense of connection to each other from the fact that they all have similar types of work, comparable education, and relatively homogenous religious beliefs and lifestyles (Durkheim, 1893). As a society develops further and reaches greater levels of complexity, an increased division of labor results which necessitates a new functional configuration to maintain solidarity within increasingly diverse groups. When people's professions become more specialized, they begin to lack

connection based on their similarities, but instead develop a different kind of social connection based on interdependence. This Durkheim called organic solidarity, the maintenance of social cohesion due to the increased dependence of every individual, regardless of profession, intellect, religiosity, or lifestyle, on every other individual. In modern societies characterized by organic solidarity, the success of even the most wealthy banker depends on the produce grown by farmers, the wiring installed by electricians, and the refuse hauled away by garbagemen (Durkheim, 1893).

Durkheim concluded that this process was as close to a fundamental law of social development as could be determined. The evolution of human society from mechanical to organic solidarity dramatically affects the types of norms, laws, and sanctions which are adopted, the degree of collective conscience and authority, and the popularity of religious doctrines. As societies transition into an organic mode of solidarity, laws tend to become less oppressive and more civil, individual rights and beliefs gain greater importance than collective authority and the interests of the group, and secularism begins to take greater hold in the collective conscience (Durkheim, 1893). This developmental process is the basic mechanism of human progress, but Durkheim went so far as to even propose its cause. The inherent desire for human beings to increase their own happiness, to Durkheim, is the primary motivating factor behind humanity's quest for novelty and innovation, and is the most potent fuel for the engine of human progress.

Despite their vastly differing conceptions of the mechanisms contributing to human progress, these social theorists all seemed to share a general conviction that some sort of progress was occurring, and that even if progress toward an objectively better future was not guaranteed, it was at least possible. In order for there to exist a widely

understood assumption of the existence of progress in the classical sense, a belief in the process of constant improvement of the human condition through ever-increasing domination over the natural world, there must exist in the minds of human beings a conception of a shared historical narrative of past progress. As Bury (1920) writes: “The idea of human progress then is a theory which involves a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future. It is based on an interpretation of history which regards men as slowly advancing in a definite and desirable direction, and infers that this progress will continue indefinitely” (p. 6). In order to have any idea about where we are going as a society, we require a comprehensible vision of where we have been. In order to see a brighter future, we must be made aware of a darker past. As the United States aged, it developed an ever more intricate history, and while the future may still at times be uncertain, America's past continues to provide a shining example of human achievement.

U.S. Presidents frequently invoke a past characterized by our nation's great achievements. The best way to show that we will continue to progress is to show that we have always been progressing. The best evidence for future progress can be found in the past. This necessitates what Jean-Francois Lyotard (1979) referred to as the *metanarrative*, a grand story of a society's past that helps provide a vision for the future, and sets an ideological course for subsequent generations to follow. According to Lyotard, the production of knowledge in the form of metanarratives is of central importance to the maintenance of established power structures. Those who are in the best position to create these narratives and to dictate what is considered progress tend to be those who hold positions of power in a given society. It is in the nature of political and economic institutions, through their representatives to the public, to promote historical

metanarratives which legitimize and sustain their own existence (Mills, 1956; Lyotard, 1979). The historical metanarrative of a capitalist democratic system such as the United States will for the most part tell a tale of the triumphant rise of capitalism and democracy and the necessity of expanding these systems around the globe for the betterment of all mankind (Gikandi, 2001; Piety, 2004). Indeed, a great deal of the appeals to progress made by US presidents reference how far American society has come since its humble beginnings, and stress the need to appreciate and cherish our past, to be proud of our nation's history and accomplishments in order to use that confidence to bring about a more prosperous and peaceful future, not only for our own nation, but for the entire world. This sort of deconstruction of long-standing sociocultural assumptions undertaken by thinkers such as Lyotard is the hallmark of postmodern theory, which will now be discussed in relation to its ability to shed light on the idea of progress.

3) Progress and Postmodernism

The construction of a grand historical metanarrative telling the story of human progress was, in many ways, the primary hallmark of the Enlightenment and continued to grow in popularity despite modernist reevaluations of Enlightenment philosophy by subsequent generations. Indeed, the idea of progress, especially scientific progress, can be viewed as one of the major philosophical pillars of modern political and social thought (Bury, 1920; Carlson, 2007). In more recent times, scholars running the gamut of disciplines have discussed the fact that as of the latter half of the twentieth century, we have been witnessing the diminishing influence of the early twentieth century modernist ideology as humankind progressively experiences a breakdown of long-held categorical

assumptions (Lyotard, 1979; Jameson, 1991; Haraway, 1991). This ideological and philosophical movement, known as postmodernism, has gained widespread acceptance among a range of scholarly and artistic disciplines.

Frederic Jameson, in the exhaustive theoretical work *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, criticized the main postulation of the postmodernist movement, stating that despite all its claims of being an end to the old ways of thinking of the world and humanity's place in it, postmodernism as an intellectual and cultural movement was in fact the result of a more evolved capitalist society, a social order that has successfully commodified virtually every facet of human culture, including our own identity as a species (Jameson, 1991). He writes:

Capitalism, and the modern age, is a period in which, with the extinction of the sacred and the “spiritual”, the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is clear that culture itself is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but quite inescapable. (Jameson, 1991: 67)

During the late 1900s and into the mid-twentieth century, progress seemed an obvious reality of human existence due to the highly visible nature of rapid social changes brought about by the industrial revolution and subsequent transformative technological developments. As Jameson (1991) exemplifies throughout his work, progress has the appearance of being self-evident due largely to the temporal overlap of various stages of development which can be seen in many realms of social life. Discussing this strange juxtaposition of history and modernity, Jameson (1991) writes of a modern world that:

(...) included both grimy medieval monuments and cramped Renaissance

tenements, *and* motorcars and airplanes, telephones, electricity, and the latest fashions in clothing and culture. You know and experience these last as new and modern only because the old and traditional are also present. One way of telling the story of transition from the modern to the postmodern lies in showing how at length modernization triumphs and wipes the old completely out: nature is abolished along with traditional countryside and traditional agriculture; even the surviving historical monuments, now all cleaned up, become glittering simulacra of the past, and not its survival. (p. 311)

Jameson sees this collage of historical realities as resulting from what he calls “uneven development”, a lag between the speeds of social change among various cultures, or classes within cultures: “Some parts of the economy are still archaic, handicraft enclaves; some are more futuristic than the future itself” (Jameson, 1991: 307).

We can here refer back to the working definition in part provided by Dodd (1934), namely that of progress being social change desired by the group experiencing that change at that time. If progress and technological development occurs within various societies in different ways and at different speeds, then it seems clear that there would always exist a certain amount of resistance to progress and social change, both within and among societies. Various groups are experiencing progress in quite different ways, both within Western society and outside of it, and while their experiences are no more or less “modern”, they often have vastly differing conceptions of the nature, necessity, and ultimate end goal of progress, and frequently resist the progressive worldview held by economic and political elites. Jameson (1991) recognized this in his analysis of theoretical views on modernism:

The various modernisms have just as often constituted violent reactions against modernization as they have replicated its values and tendencies by their own formal insistence on novelty, innovation, the transformation of older forms, therapeutic iconoclasm and the processing of new (aesthetic) wonder-working technologies. If, for example, modernization has something to do with industrial progress, rationalization, reorganization of production and administration along more efficient lines, electricity, the assembly line, parliamentary democracy, and cheap newspapers – then we will have to conclude that at least one strand of artistic modernism is anti-modern and comes into being in violent or muffled protest against modernization, now grasped as technological progress in the largest sense. (p.304)

A belief in existence of progress is far from unanimous, and the indicators that such a process is occurring are a matter of much dispute. Therefore, within any group that wishes to maintain a stable social structure, there arises the need to compensate for the emergence of competing paradigms and visions of progress by creating a strong narrative that reinforces the validity of the existing social paradigm. The promulgation of such a narrative involves a process of legitimation that employs political speech and the ideologies promoted by political figures as mechanisms for its dissemination. Inaugural speeches serve this goal by outlining a clear trajectory for future progress, and cementing the superiority of American economic, political, social, and moral systems in the minds of the population at large.

With this research, I have little interest in promoting a classical idea of progress, especially the sort which will lead us inevitably to a brighter future. The goal of this

research is not to uphold the social structures which are dependent on the narrative of progress for their survival, but to dismantle the illusion of progress, and allow for the idea that human kind is just as likely to be headed towards extinction as toward salvation. If humankind dismisses the idea of progress as inevitable and its eventual facets as entirely objective in their nature, it risks losing its grasp on its own self-determination as a species. Social and political science must face the reality that Western and, specifically, American systems are quite possibly not at the forefront of human progress, and open themselves up to other ideas, worldviews, and systems of thought and belief. So long as we define progress from within an economic and political paradigm, we will never move beyond the confines of the economic and political systems we currently live under.

By declaring the end of history and abandoning the long-held progressive narratives incubated in the Enlightenment era, postmodernism as a movement threatens to set humanity's sense of purpose adrift once again, and make our worldview even more susceptible to the strong currents of the capitalist market. Although he clearly recognized the potential of the idea, Jameson was not optimistic about the possibility of a postmodern transformation of the capitalist social order: "The postmodern may well in that sense be little more than a transitional period between two stages of capitalism, in which the earlier forms of the economic are in the process of becoming restructured on a global scale, including the older forms of labor and its traditional organizational institutions and concepts" (Jameson, 1991: 417).

Despite the postmodern deconstruction of the idea of progress, and the widespread disagreement as to the meaning and applicability of the concept for all of human society, there remains one area where the idea of progress in the most classical

sense of the term still holds widespread acceptance. Scientific and technological progress is viewed as a given by the majority of the academic community, indeed, it is the defining assumption upon which all scientific pursuits are based, for without a sense of progression, without the idea that one is moving ever closer to an attainable goal of knowledge and truth, science as a concept would make very little sense (Kuhn, 1996; Bauer, 2003). Progress, in turn, would also make very little sense without the existence of science. According to Bury (1920):

The popularization of science, which was to be one of the features of the nineteenth century, was in fact a condition of the success of the idea of Progress. That idea could not insinuate itself into the public mind and become a living force in civilized societies until the meaning and value of science has been generally grasped, and the results of scientific discovery had been more or less diffused. The achievements of physical science did more than anything else to convert the imaginations of men to the general doctrine of progress. (p. 77)

The idea of scientific progress has long been the defining assumption underlying virtually every academic field (Bury, 1932; Niiniluoto, 1980, Kuhn, 1996; Bauer, 2003). In many ways, science could be seen as the symbolic figurehead of the idea of progress, the quantifiable measure by which the degree of development within a given society can be judged. As discussed earlier, technology provided the tangible proof necessary for a belief in the collective movement toward a brighter tomorrow to gain widespread acceptance over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries (Bury, 1920; Jameson, 1991). In addition, technological difference proved to be a major justification behind colonialism, as Western superiority appeared self-evident when judging other cultures based on their

scientific and technological mastery of the natural world (Connell, 2007). Western civilization's vision of progress, further cemented by the findings provided by evolutionary biology, allowed for people to look to the natural world as precisely the sort of dark, primordial past needed to solidify a positive vision of future progress (Bury, 1920; Haraway, 1991, Bauer, 2003).

According to social theorist Donna Haraway (1991), the acceptance of our evolutionary heritage allowed for the justification of systems of domination among people by showing the natural origins of dominant behavior among our animal “ancestors”. Viewed more broadly, the very idea that humanity as we know it today is the result of a long process of evolution from a more primitive state added powerful fuel to the engine of progress as the defining narrative of human existence. As Haraway (1991) states: “Animals have continued to have a special status as natural objects that can show people their origin, and therefore their pre-rational, pre-management, pre-cultural essence” (p. 11). Thus, the increasing popularity of the worldview portrayed by evolutionary theory further accentuated the self-evident appearance of human progress, and helped provide a rational explanation for the injustice of continued colonial imperialism. This sentiment is echoed by Connell (2007), who remarks: “It is no wonder that Spencer became immensely popular in the colonies of settlement, where the idea of the evolutionary superiority of the settlers replaced missionary religion as the main justification of empire” (p. 17).

Not all are in agreement that scientific discovery is synonymous with progress. One can of course make the argument that vaccines and farming technology have improved the living conditions of millions (Rosenberg, 1998), but it is more difficult to

rationalize the value of technological monstrosities such as the atomic bomb as being indicative of the steady improvement of the human condition (Light, 2001; Dinerstein, 2006). Furthermore, the potentially catastrophic consequences of widespread technological development and capitalist consumption patterns, like the pollution of natural resources, global warming, and deforestation cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to any rational attempt to determine the existence of progress (Light, 2001; Dauvergne, 2010). Indeed, there appears to be no end to the monstrous possibilities inherent to navigating the uncharted waters of scientific and technological development. Today, the scientific horizon has expanded to include new frontiers of cutting-edge research, including fields such as computer programming and artificial intelligence, robotics, nanotechnology, and genetic engineering. Scientific pursuits in contemporary society are increasingly focused on the development of technologies that seek to augment human existence and expand it beyond the boundaries imposed by biological determination. Science today strives to improve upon the model provided by nature by increasing our quality of life in numerous artificial ways, leading many to envision a future in which humans and their technology are irreversibly interconnected (Dinerstein, 2006; Haraway, 1991). The potential for unintended negative consequences to occur as a result of rapid scientific discovery along these new horizons is a source of anxiety for many forward-gazing thinkers.

The social implications of scientific and technological development frequently provide the subject matter for science fiction, a genre which has oftentimes had the uncanny ability to provide an alarmingly accurate vision of the future, while simultaneously emphasizing the progressive anxieties embedded in the present cultural

zeitgeist (Haraway, 1991; Gallego, 2010). Much has been written in the science fiction genre of the possible dystopian consequences of utopian planning and of the potential evils inherent to the notion of a technocratic society of the future led solely by reason alone. Facing the potential for radical advances in science to fundamentally transform society, many people today continue to exhibit what Jameson (1991) referred to as the “anxiety of utopia”, the fear that believing in the promise of a better world could lead to the dawn of an inescapably worse one. While science fiction literature and cinema is replete with images of a possibly horrific future brought about by science and technology, some social theorists have employed the dark metaphors provided by dystopian novels like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984*, as well as films such as *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, *Minority Report*, and *The Terminator* to envision a future of possible positive changes that could be brought about by the integration of humans and their technology (Haraway, 1991; Gallego, 2010). Not all futurist predictions are bleak, indeed many see technology as the only way to ever truly evolve as a species. Gene Roddenberry's well-known television series, *Star Trek*, for example, depicts a future in which technological advancement has created a near utopia of abundance, peace, and social equality on Earth.

Donna Haraway (1991) uses the vocabulary and imagery of science fiction to create a symbolic representation of her own vision of progress, the development of *cyborg* society, where technology serving as the catalyst for a broad reorganization of many of the social categories humanity has so long taken for granted, such as race, gender, and the nature of humanity's relationship with the natural world. In this sense, Haraway (1991) closely echoes the sentiment expressed by Dewey (1916), that social

change, in this case that which is affected by scientific and technological development, provides an opportunity to steer the course of progress in a desirable direction. Utopian thinkers like Haraway insist that the negative potential of technological progress can be mitigated, so long as we shift the paradigm within which it occurs. Interestingly, none of the mentions of progress made by U.S. presidents specifically discuss it in a solely scientific or technological sense, only within an economic or political context. Even when progress is mentioned in connection with the development of railroads and canals, for instance, it is always within the broader context of what this development will mean for economic and political interests. Rather than frame the construction of canals or railways themselves as progress, U.S. presidents tend to emphasize what it will do for economic growth.

Such optimism is greatly welcomed in the face of the rapid technological changes we are witnessing today, however, when taking the reality of the global capitalist economy into consideration, there is some difficulty presented in assuming that technological progress will inevitably bring about increased global equality. The scientific advancement necessary to bring Haraway's cyborg vision to fruition is not occurring at an equal rate in all parts of the world (Carlson, 2007). Due to preexisting systemic inequalities based on past domination, nations lacking the resources necessary to keep up with the technological advances of the already powerful nations will experience developmental lag, and will fall ever farther behind as the rate of scientific progress in the developed nations increases at an exponential rate. Carlson (2007) points out that:

All human societies – from the Stone Age to the present, from Americans to

Pacific Islanders – use technology to provide themselves with food, clothing, and shelter. But while all human societies have technology, every society employs technology differently to structure social relationships and give life spiritual or religious meaning. Some cultures use technology to concentrate wealth in the hands of a ruling class, while others choose to distribute wealth across society. People construct great monuments such as temples, cathedrals, and skyscrapers as expressions of their ideas about sacred, political, or economic power. They develop different ways of communicating ideas, spreading information, and organizing knowledge. (p. 131)

Not all societies will have access to the newest scientific and technical knowledge at the same time, and what is considered true and valid within the realm of academic discourse may well continue to be dictated by the same global powers which have long been in a position to do so. Just as everything else, the high-tech society required to bring about Haraway's metaphorical cyborg will eventually be commodified by the capitalist market. Technological self-empowerment will likely come at a price, and the privilege of posthumanism will be available only to those who can afford it.

Speaking to people's apparent addiction to self-improvement through science, Jameson (1991) writes: “This new Utopianism is only in part a glorification of new machinery, as in futurism; it expresses itself across a gamut of impulses and excitement that ultimately touch on the impending transformation of society itself” (p. 313).

Proponents of postmodernism may declare an end to progress, but the bastion of science continues to strive toward a justifiably realistic expectation of progress and self-improvement. The inevitable result of the postmodern is the arrival of the posthuman

(Dinerstein, 2006). The prominent position of scientific inquiry in the list of factors informing a widespread belief in human progress leads us to conclude that the ability to influence what is considered scientific fact can in turn greatly affect the way progress is perceived, and indeed, whether or not it is perceived to be occurring at all. The ability of a particular culture to claim scientific superiority over others enables that culture to also assume the superiority of its knowledge, and thereby its particular vision of human progress. By placing themselves firmly on the side of progress, societies and groups within these societies can rationalize judgments of cultural superiority, and justify the need to intervene in the economic and political development of other societies.

Jean-Francois Lyotard's (1979) theory of the metanarrative describes this crucial link between the development of knowledge-systems and the exercise of political power. Lyotard (1979) writes:

When we examine the current status of scientific knowledge – at a time when science seems more completely subordinated to the prevailing powers than ever before and, along with the new technologies, is in danger of becoming a major stake in their conflicts – the question of double legitimation, far from receding into the background, necessarily comes to the fore. For it appears in its most complete form, that of reversion, revealing that knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided? In the computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government. (p. 8)

Lyotard defines metanarratives as systemic ideological frameworks which attempt to explain human existence in a way consistent with both scientific knowledge and

established political power structures:

There is a universal 'history' of spirit, spirit is 'life,' and 'life' is its own self-presentation and formulation of in the ordered knowledge of all of its forms contained in the empirical sciences. The encyclopedia of German idealism is the narration of the 'history' of this life-subject. But what it produces is a metanarrative, for the story's narrator must not be a people mired in the particular positivity of its traditional knowledge, nor even scientists taken as a whole, since they are sequestered in professional frameworks corresponding to their relative specialties. The narrator must be a metasubject in the process of formulating both the legitimacy of the discourses of the empirical sciences and that of the direct institutions of popular cultures. (Lyotard, 1979: 34)

Lyotard makes a connection between what we think of as human progress and the development of knowledge-systems and metanarratives. He establishes a theoretical link between the legitimation of knowledge and the creation of a narrative structure. To Lyotard, the development of knowledge is dependent upon technological advancements which augment the human senses in ways that allow for more evidence and proof of scientific facts to be observed, such as microscopes or telescopes. The more advanced the device used in scientific inquiry, the stronger the claim that can be made that it is able to discern scientific truth. Because more advanced investigative technologies are more expensive and require more resources to develop, the ability to legitimize scientific knowledge, and thus the power to create truth, becomes a privilege of the wealthiest members of society. Lyotard (1979) writes:

A new problem appears: devices that optimize the performance of the human body

for the purpose of producing proof require additional expenditures. No money, no proof – and that means no verification of statements and no truth. The games of scientific language become the games of the rich, in which whoever is wealthiest has the best chance of being right. An equation between wealth, efficiency, and truth is thus established. (p. 45)

In modern capitalist societies like the United States, the state is increasingly perceived to have the responsibility of maintaining economic stability. Government is held accountable for economic problems like unemployment, inflation, and a lack of financial regulation. Due to the structural pervasiveness of the capitalist economic system, the state in turn is reliant on revenue provided by the capitalist market and must, in the interests of its own survival, provide the conditions necessary for the market to thrive. One of the ways government does this is by investing heavily in scientific and technological research and development, either through its own agencies like NASA or DARPA, or by providing funding for private research conducted at institutes or universities. Thus, government investments in scientific and technological research are aimed not so much at discovery for its own sake, but as a means to maintain state power and control. Lyotard (1979) concludes:

The State and/or company must abandon the idealist and humanist narratives of legitimation in order to justify the new goal: in the discourse of today's financial backers of research, the only credible goal is power. Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power. (p. 46)

Increasingly, the power to fund scientific research and technological development leads to an increased ability for the most wealthy corporations and governments to influence

the scientific consensus on the legitimacy of certain forms of knowledge, and allows these powerful entities to dictate what is considered truth. Over time, this power has the tendency to envelop not just the establishment of truth in the scientific sense, but in more abstract, ethical realms as well. Lyotard (1979) states:

The “people” (the nation, or even humanity), and especially their political institutions, are not content to know – they legislate. That is, they formulate prescriptions that have the status of norms. They therefore exercise their competence not only with respect to denotative utterances concerning what is true, but also prescriptive utterances with pretensions to justice. As already said, what characterizes narrative knowledge, what forms the basis of our conception of it, is precisely that it contains both of these kinds of competence, not to mention all the others. (p. 31)

The economic and political elites of a society wield the power to configure the public consensus of truth and use this ability as a means of promoting ideologies that serve to legitimize both the existing social structure and their own elite status within it. “The important thing is not, or not only, to legitimate denotative utterances pertaining to the truth, such as ‘The earth revolves around the sun,’ but rather to legitimate prescriptive utterances pertaining to justice, such as ‘Carthage must be destroyed’ or ‘The minimum wage must be set at x dollars’” (Lyotard, 1979: 36). Furthermore, Lyotard (1979) points out that: “This procedure operates within the following framework: since 'reality' is what provides the evidence used as proof in scientific augmentation, and also provides prescriptions and promises of a juridical, ethical, and political nature with results, one can master all of these games by mastering 'reality'” (p. 47).

The key to greasing the wheels of the capitalist economy while simultaneously increasing the power and control of the state is the construction of a metanarrative of progress, in order to serve as a justification for the vast sums of government money being poured into projects of all types or directly implemented through policy. In order to give legitimacy to their own positions and actions, politicians must tell a story, a story that both shows our previous progress by emphasizing how far we have come as a nation, and also reassures the public that progress will undoubtedly continue in perpetuity. As Lyotard (1979) writes: “The State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the 'people' under the name of the 'nation' in order to point them down the path of progress” (p. 32).

Within the American political atmosphere, metanarratives take form through the platform of political parties. What Lyotard (1979) referred to as *language games* are played out by political parties through carefully drafted speeches and official statements. One speech of great importance to this process is the American president's inaugural address to the nation. This speech outlines the narrative structure that the country will follow in the near future, it orients the American people on their path toward a common direction, at least for the next 4 years, if not much longer. United States Presidents have frequently invoked the concept of progress as a grand narrative in their speeches and writings, and an understanding of the way in which these presidents tended to frame the idea, in what context the idea of progress was presented in their speeches, could help to broaden our understanding of the important role that metanarratives like progress play in the formation of our public policy and the broader ideological implications of legislative action, both domestically and abroad. Lyotard's (1979) theory of the metanarrative serves

to effectively deconstruct the historical notion of progress. This analysis also operates from within this paradigm, in the hopes that by categorizing the usage of the word progress by U.S. presidents, some of the hidden facets of this term can be exposed and the idea of progress can be disarmed of its political power. The idea of progress is a socially constructed metanarrative which serves as a mechanism of legitimation for existing power structures. The power to define progress is the power to determine the course of history.

The question remains as to what place the idea of progress inhabits in a postmodern world, and whether the ideological quest to abandon the broad metanarratives of the past has succeeded. It would seem that despite great postmodern upheavals in many aspects of social life, humankind's conception of progress remains firmly in place, having adapted itself slightly to contemporary conditions by employing a host of new monikers and aliases, such as *development* and *globalization*. Although it has revealed the highly subjective nature of such a belief, the postmodern movement has failed to remove the widely held conviction that humanity is moving towards a universally "better" future. The seemingly undying human faith in the narrative of progress is due in no small part to the strikingly visible nature of the many social ramifications continuing to be brought about by groundbreaking advances in science and technology (Jameson, 1991). The results of this study further confirm this assessment, and show that at least in the rhetoric of newly elected presidents, the idea of progress remains a popular and potent ideological concept. The enduring popularity of the idea of progress, however, does not diminish the importance of postmodern theories seeking its deconstruction. Indeed, only by looking beyond the progressive paradigm itself can we

ever hope to fully comprehend its scope.

4) Progress, Politics, and Power

Political speech is relevant to a sociological understanding of the construction and legitimation of metanarratives which help uphold social cohesion around established power structures (Lyotard, 1979). This analysis is focused specifically on the metanarrative of progress. The American conception of progress as being inherently measurable in economic and political terms allows for the legitimation of power structures, both national and global in scope, which protect the economic and political order currently in place. The idea of progress itself is part of what legitimates state and financial power structures, just as it has legitimized colonial domination and the subjugation of entire societies in centuries past.

In his influential work *The Power Elite*, critical social theorist C. Wright Mills (1956) distinguished between two types of social configurations which lead to very different avenues by which public opinion comes into being: the *public* and the *mass*:

In a public, (1) virtually as many people express opinions as receive them. (2) Public communications are so organized that there is a chance immediately and effectively to answer back any opinion expressed in public. Opinion formed by such discussion (3) readily finds an outlet in effective action, even against – if necessary – the prevailing system of authority. And (4) authoritative institutions do not penetrate the public, which is thus more or less autonomous in its operations. (Mills, 1956: 303)

Within such social configurations, the formation of public opinion is a democratic,

horizontal process; indeed, this ideal of the *public* and public opinion as expressed by Mills forms the assumptive backbone of traditional understandings of the way democracy functions. He writes:

In the standard image of power and decision, no force is held to be as important as The Great American Public. More than merely another check and balance, this public is thought to be the seat of all legitimate power. In official life as in popular folklore, it is held to be the very balance wheel of democratic power. (Mills, 1956: 298)

Mills (1956) goes on to describe the transformation of a society from a *public* into a *mass* as being one of the major trends which modern, industrial societies tend to follow over the course of their development. The systemic qualities inherent to the *mass* lead to an erosion of traditional democracy in favor of increased centralized control and the concentration of power in the hands of elites:

In a mass, (1) Far fewer people express opinions than receive them; for the community of publics becomes an abstract collection of individuals who receive impressions from the mass media. (2) The communications that prevail are so organized that it is difficult or impossible for the individual to answer back immediately or with any effect. (3) The realization of opinion in action is controlled by authorities who organize and control the channels of such action. (4) The mass has no autonomy from institutions; on the contrary, agents of authorized institutions penetrate the mass, reducing the autonomy it may have in the formation of opinion by discussion. (p. 304)

Mills saw this to be true of public opinion in his own time, and the factors he sees as

leading to such a configuration have only intensified in the last fifty years. American society today increasingly exhibits the characteristics of a *mass*. Public opinion is developed less in a horizontal fashion with all members of the population contributing equally, and more in a top-down manner with powerful elites defining the boundaries beyond which socially acceptable public opinion may not tread. These opinions are disseminated to the population in part through corporate advertising, popular culture, and political platforms. The distance, both physical and social, between these leaders of public opinion and average members of the population is becoming ever greater. Mills (1956) writes:

The small shop serving the neighborhood is replaced by the anonymity of the national corporation: mass advertisement replaces the personal influence of opinion between merchant and customer. The political leader hooks up his speech to a national network and speaks, with appropriate personal touches, to a million people he never saw and never will see. (p. 305)

In a globalized world, the opinions of American political and economic elites not only affect American public opinion, they increasingly affect the entire world. Mills' theories can be used not just to describe the American population, but to encompass the idea of the global public and the global mass. The roots of colonialism run deep under the geopolitical landscape of the modern world (Monten, 2005). Although the era of colonialist expansion is commonly viewed as having come to end, the remnants of Western colonial empires still hold great hegemonic power over most of what is today referred to as the global South. Due to historical circumstance, Western nations such as the United States and powerful members of the European Union control vast financial

and political resources, giving them a distinct advantage over those nations which have been deemed less advanced or developed in terms of standards and measures laid out by powerful international organizations like the World Bank and United Nations (Gikandi, 2001; Connell, 2007). The “developing world” is still widely viewed as existing at some earlier, more primitive, point along the time-line of progress, whether or not this difference is associated with difficulties inherent to location and culture or attributed to to the legacy of colonial subjugation and subsequent economic and cultural domination (Connell, 2007). McGowan (2008) makes the cases that: “The standard of progress, of civilization, not only justifies violence but offers a metric by which to determine which lives are 'more precious' than others” (p. 34).

The development of nations according to the economic and political paradigms of progress informs many of the measures by which the development of nation-states is evaluated. In the eyes of major global organizations like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, or the World Bank, development is clearly associated with economic growth and the establishment of a stable state government, preferably of the quasi-democratic variety (Gikandi, 2001; Connell, 2007). According to McGowan (2008), “True 'development on the ground has been uneven, but there has been a strong presumption that once the process of modernization has begun, the whole package of modernity will eventually be installed. There are modern societies, societies on the way to becoming modern societies, and primitive societies” (p. 33).

The global domination by Western philosophical ideology and scientific paradigms is emphasized by Raewyn Connell in her work *Southern Theory*. To Connell

(2007), the Western historical narrative of progress is buttressed by what she calls the concept of global difference:

The idea of global difference was often conveyed by a discussion of 'origins'. In this genre of writing, sociologists would posit an original state of society, then speculate on the process of evolution that must have led from then to now. The bulk of Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, first issued in the 1870s, told such a story for every type of institution that Spencer could think of: domestic institutions, political institutions, ecclesiastical institutions, and so on. Spencer acted as if the proof of social evolution were not complete without an evolutionary narrative, from origins to the contemporary form, for each and every case. (Connell, 2007: 7)

Connell critiques classical sociology for being virtually oblivious of its own cultural biases and of the fact that, throughout most of the twentieth century social science served to reinforce, rather than dismantle, structures of social inequality and domination, especially when viewed on a global scale. "Sociology formed within the culture of imperialism, and embodied an intellectual response to the colonized world" (Connell, 2007: 9).

Once again we see the relationship between visions of social progress as professed by the sociological discipline and the effort to steer such progress in a direction desired by those in a position to affect broad ideological control. To emphasize this point, Connell quotes sociologist Arthur Todd in *Southern Theory*: "From Comte onward sociologists have generally agreed that the only justification for a Science of Society is its contributions to a workable theory of progress" (Todd 1918, quoted in Connell, 2007: 9).

Over the course of the twentieth century, the fledgling science known as sociology did much to reify the conceptual paradigm of global difference it was itself based within. “By the time sociology was institutionalized in the final decade of the [nineteenth] century, the central proof of progress – and therefore the main intellectual ground on which the new science rested – was the contrast of metropolitan and colonized societies” (Connell, 2007: 10).

A sociological theory of progress provided a justification not only for the physical and economic domination of the global south, but for its intellectual domination as well. A society which assumes its own advanced position along the time-line of progress, must also assume that its scientific endeavors are equally advanced, and will inevitably conclude that its explanations of reality are closest to objective truth, compared to those of other societies perceived to be less developed (Lyotard, 1979; Connell, 2007).

Indeed, Connell speaks to the pervasive nature of the progressive worldview among prominent classical Western thinkers when she writes: “The arguments of Ward, Hobhouse, Durkheim, Spencer and Comte himself are absurd if one does not presuppose the *reality* of progress” (p. 10). In a way, Connell's notion of global difference is complementary to the working definition of progress postulated by Dodd (1934). Once the realization is made that progress is relative, it becomes clear that what is seen as progress by one society can simultaneously be viewed as catastrophe by another, thus leading to global systemic inequality justified by the theoretical framework of the dominant group and filtered to the masses in the form of prepackaged, mass produced ideological tropes.

While the term progress has gone somewhat out of style, newer terms, such as

development and globalization, have replaced it within the modern academic and, subsequently, political discourse. The basic progressive paradigm, however, remains the same. Those nations referred to as “developing” or “underdeveloped” are seen as lagging behind the more “developed” nations on a sort of progressive continuum, the measures of which are dictated largely by the most powerful world nations in concert with international organizations. The process of globalization is widely viewed as an almost inevitable result of an ever-expanding capitalist market economy and with the spread of capitalism comes the spread of the political norms and values clung to by its adherents (Gikandi, 2001; Connell, 2007).

Economic development in the form of globalization goes hand in hand with large scale sociopolitical and cultural change. Connell (2007) writes: “In a constitutive act of reification, the idea of globalization as an economic strategy was replaced by the idea of globalization as *a new form of society*” (p. 52). Despite a new face and new jargon, globalization is nothing but the old philosophy of imperial domination, and indeed, the old global imperial order itself, repackaged and refined for contemporary times (Gikandi, 2001; Monten, 2005; Connell, 2007). Connell remarks on the ubiquity of this worldview, stating: “The idea of modernity spreading from its heartland in Europe and North America to cover the whole world is probably the most widespread of all views of global society” (Connell, 2007: 54).

Within this new imperialism, the greatest concentration of power is found not in nation-states, but in the hands of international financial institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as multinational corporations. These entities transcend the boundaries of nation-states in unprecedented ways, and seek to

steer the course of global development along a path desirable to the capitalist interests to which they are beholden (Lyotard, 1979; Jameson, 1991). Part of this process is the global dissemination of sociopolitical ideologies conducive to the capitalist market, such as value systems associated with the Judeo-Christian faith or American democracy, and the suppression of those value systems and ideologies which are deemed incompatible with the existing power structure (Gikandi, 2001; Connell, 2007). It also includes the development of monopolistic control over knowledge-systems in order to establish the basis for scientific truth upon ground which will prove to be fertile to the capitalist mentality (Lyotard, 1979; Connell, 2007).

The widespread acceptance of the global development ideology allows for the justification of economic and political oppression on a global scale. The fact that academic and political discourse is largely controlled by the global elites serves to highlight the benefits of the global development project, while largely ignoring its negative effects (Connell, 2007). Lyotard (1979) makes the case those with wealth dictate what is knowledge and hence, what is progress. Due to its vast economic resources, the United States has held, over the last century or so, a unique position to dictate truth and knowledge to the rest of the world. The American president's inaugural speech is an efficient distillation of what sort of knowledge and truth about unscientific things like justice and morality are being promoted by political elites during a given time period.

It is impossible to know the totality of what was running through the collective zeitgeist of the time, what every single person believed to be true, but analyzing the political platform of the person elected by a majority vote to the highest political office in

the country should give at least some indication of the various forms the idea of progress has taken over the years and in the hands of various heads of state. Of course one must be aware that many elections are close elections, and that the convictions of the president in his speeches may only represent the convictions of that segment of the population which voted for him. In practice however, basic assumptions about the general nature of human progress are so similar across party lines as to make such concerns irrelevant.

Pachter (1974) writes:

Progress and progressivism have been elevated to the status of ontological essences – abstract and universal 'laws' governing man and nature. Like any good divinity, these metaphysical entities are at the beck and call of their conjurers, and 'progressive' is whatever is useful to the government, its allies of the day, and its sycophants. Progress has become a tool of mass manipulation. (p. 136)

Keeping Dodd's (1934) definition of progress in mind, we must recall that to the economic and political elites of this world, global development *is* indeed progress, as they are the ones benefiting most from globalization by expanding markets and increasing the flow of capital. However, progress is not universal and what is perceived to be progress by the dominant group often has severely detrimental effects on the cultures and societies of the global South. Even the justification behind the current U.S. involvement in the Middle East, a military quagmire which has cost trillions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of lives, is attributed to a progressive goal of bringing democracy and Western social values to that part of the world (Monten, 2005). Cultural critic John McGowan (2008) comments wryly on this phenomenon: “Don't most nations justify their wars by claiming to act 'in the name' of high ideals? Is there some special

reason to cut empires more slack on that score? If democracy is one of the names for a progressive principle used to justify violence in our time, 'globalization' provides another stick with which to beat the recalcitrant” (p. 34).

There is a great deal of financial profit to be gained from the global development project, and the lines between state-run military operations and business strategy can sometimes become blurred. Public opinion as to what constitutes progress appears to be at the whim of powerful elites who keep the global population in line with promises of mass consumption and threats of mass destruction. If the outlook I have presented appears overly bleak however, it is important to remember that behind the banks and the bombings, there is another playing field upon which the course of progress is being decided. The underlying knowledge systems and paradigms which guide human existence are at stake, and the deciding confrontation over the course of progress will occur neither on the battlefield nor in the bull market. It will occur within the realm of academic discourse: “Knowledge is inherently questionable and, when the institutions of social science are working well, is persistently questioned. It is the foreclosing of questions and thus the end of a learning process that defines the moment when science turns into ideology, and its ideas become state, corporate, or institutional dogmas” (Connell, 2007: 228). For this reason, we must theoretically analyze seemingly abstract concepts such as progress, treating them as intrinsic social facts in an effort to trace the extent of their repercussions on social reality. We must not underestimate the complex power of simple ideas.

5) Data & Methodology

This analysis will focus only on the inaugural speeches given by U.S. presidents since the beginning of the twentieth century. Naturally, this approach could be broadened to include a wider range of presidential speeches, such as state of the union addresses. However, as a way of limiting the scope of this project along a clear boundary line, the data will be drawn only from the *inaugural* speeches given by presidents, either upon being elected to office for the first time, upon being reelected, or after inheriting the office due to the untimely death of a predecessor.

By their very nature, inaugural speeches possess a distinctly forward-looking quality. More than any other public addresses given by U.S. presidents, inaugural speeches talk about the future. They are a condensed outline of the contemporary goals and plans for the next four years and beyond. Therefore, inaugural speeches tend to mention the idea of progress quite frequently, either in terms of progress our nation has made in the past or in terms of progress we have yet to make in the future. By analyzing the appearance of the word *progress* within these speeches, it is possible to gain some sense of what American presidents meant by the idea of progress and what kind of worldview informed our leaders' vision of where our nation should be headed. It will also be possible to determine in what ways this worldview may have changed over time. Using archival data obtained from the Miller Center (<http://millercenter.org>) at the University of Virginia, all of the inaugural speeches given by U.S. presidents over the past century were compiled, beginning with William McKinley and ending with Barack Obama. On very few occasions, American presidents did not give a full inaugural address upon taking office, rather opting to give a short statement to congress in light of

having come into this position due to a tragedy like the assassination of John F. Kennedy, or a scandal, such as the Watergate affair which led to the impeachment of Richard Nixon. In these instances, the first substantial public speech given by the new president was selected for analysis in lieu of an inaugural address. Eventually, it would be prudent to broaden this analysis to include all U.S presidents, but in order to adjust for the scope of this project it has been limited to somewhat more contemporary presidential speeches.

After condensing the 31 speeches which made up my data into a single document, a search for the word *progress* within the texts found 84 total occurrences of the term. Words such as *progressive* or *progressing* were excluded, as they tended to refer not to the grand idea of progress which is the focus of this analysis, but rather to more specific events and projects. For similar reasons, other words which may be indicative of similar concepts, such as *development*, were not analyzed, but would likely prove to be of interest for further study. After determining the total number of appearances of the word *progress*, the number of times each individual president used the word in their inaugural speeches was counted. All but 3 U.S. presidents (Woodrow Wilson, Dwight Eisenhower, and Jimmy Carter) of the twenty included in this study used the word at least once in their inaugural addresses to the nation.

Each appearance of the word *progress* was then categorized based on the context in which it was used during the speech. This required a thorough reading of each and every inaugural address to determine the main themes and topics being discussed within them, while paying specific attention to the content of paragraphs immediately surrounding the word *progress* itself. Such an analysis necessitated a great deal of historical reflection in order to account for the impact of major events, such as the Great

Depression and World War II, which greatly informed the worldview of sitting presidents during those times.

Of critical importance in this analysis was correctly identifying the thematic context within which the word was used. In order to achieve this, the speeches were carefully analyzed in their entirety, with particularly close attention focused on the paragraphs immediately surrounding the word *progress*. Naturally, the entire context of a speech as a whole is of great importance to understanding the main ideological drive of the political agenda at that time. However, for this study, the focus was primarily on the context within which presidents (or their speech writers) have chosen to invoke the idea of *progress*. What subjects and themes are commonly being discussed when the word *progress* is used in inaugural speeches?

By measuring the frequency and context of the word *progress* in presidential speeches, it is my aim to answer the following research questions: a) How often have U.S. Presidents made direct reference to the *idea of progress* in their speeches? b) Which Presidents, and which political parties, have used the term most often? c) What type of *progress* is being referred to in these speeches? d) What patterns are present concerning the usage of the word *progress*? In order to answer these questions, the thematic context within which each usage of the word appeared was analyzed.

Each appearance of the word *progress* was initially coded according to whether it was referring to *national* issues or *global* issues. In other words, each of the 84 total appearances of the word *progress* was placed into one of two categories: *national* or *global*. For example, in his first address to congress after taking office in 1945, Harry Truman evoked *progress* of a global nature, when he spoke the following words:

“Today, the entire world is looking to America for enlightened leadership to peace and progress.”

This phrase clearly evokes progress in a global context, and presents an exceptional illustration of the sort of vaguely grand appeals to progress which are the focus of this study. Nowhere does Truman define precisely what he means by progress, and it would seem to require no further explanation despite the fact that the word itself could be taken to mean any number of things. What is clear however, is that in this example, the word progress is being used in a global context. No matter what Harry Truman really meant by progress, we can be fairly sure he was referring to the progress of the entire human race, of the whole world and not just the United States. This statement and others which fit the same criteria have been categorized as references to *global progress*. In contrast, take for example this passage from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's second inaugural speech in 1937, wherein the president is clearly referring to progress on a national scale:

“Today we reconsecrate our country to long-cherished ideals in a suddenly changed civilization. In every land there are always at work forces that drive men apart and forces that draw men together. In our personal ambitions we are individualists. But in our seeking for economic and political progress as a nation, we all go up, or else we all go down, as one people.”

While the reasons for the categorization of these specific examples may be relatively clear, it was sometimes difficult to discern which type of progress was being discussed. In the absence of any references to global events or circumstances, the default was to classify the statements as having solely national associations.

After determining whether progress was being mentioned in a national or global

context, the aim was to further deconstruct the usage of the word *progress* into as many thematic categories as would be necessary for this analysis. Despite the apparent difficulties of coding an abstract concept such as *progress*, all 84 usages of the word were able to be divided into 4 distinct and mutually exclusive categories. These categories are a) *political progress*, b) *economic progress*, c) *social progress*, and d) *moral progress*. When one appearance of the word could potentially be made to fit into two or more categories, the category to which it more clearly applied was chosen. After the coding was completed, each of the 84 appearances of the word *progress* belonged to 2 categories: either *national* or *global*, as well as either *political*, *economic*, *social*, or *moral*. For example, use of the word when discussing the need to support democratic governments in the Middle East would be coded as (*global/political*), while use of the word when drawing attention to the problems posed by racial segregation in Alabama would be coded as (*national/social*). These categories, and the reasoning behind their creation, will now be discussed in more depth.

Fig. 1: Categories of Progress

		Economic
	National	Political
Progress		
	Global	Social
		Moral

Economic Progress

All appearances of the word progress that appear in an economic or financial context have been coded as *economic progress*. Some presidents will specifically refer to economic progress by name, which of course makes coding much easier, but also included are all mentions of progress which occur in conjunction with topics such as industry, commerce, banking, financial reform, etc. Such uses of the word progress were quite frequent, especially during times of financial turmoil such as during the Great Depression and its aftermath in the 1930s and 1940s. Or take for example, this quote from Ronald Reagan's second inaugural speech in 1984:

“At the heart of our efforts is one idea vindicated by 25 straight months of economic growth: Freedom and incentives unleash the drive and entrepreneurial genius that are the core of human progress. We have begun to increase the rewards for work, savings, and investment; reduce the increase in the cost and size of government and its interference in people's lives.”

Political Progress

All appearances of the word progress that appear in a political or governmental context have been coded as *political progress*. Many presidents speak of the American system of government itself as a clear indicator of progress, and emphasize the need to steer the less-developed peoples of the world along the path to a similar model of self-governance and political liberation. Political ideals, such as freedom, democracy, and peace are in these cases mentioned as being the primary objective of progress, both domestically and around the globe. Such utterances more frequently than others take the

form of nationalistic proclamations as to the great achievements brought about by the American democratic system. Political uses of the word progress appear most frequently throughout the data, and remain common well into the twenty-first century, for example President George W. Bush's use of the word progress when emphasizing the need to spread American-style freedom and democracy around the globe. Or, for example, this quote from Richard Nixon's 1969 inaugural address:

“America's record in this century has been unparalleled in the world's history for its responsibility, for its generosity, for its creativity and for its progress. Let us be proud that our system has produced and provided more freedom and more abundance, more widely shared, than any other system in the history of the world.”

Social Progress

All appearances of the word progress that appear in a social context were coded as *social progress*. All mentions of progress in conjunction with social equality along racial, ethnic, gender, age, or other lines of social distinction are coded as belonging to this category. Some presidents used the term progress, for example, to discuss the need to make advances in protecting the civil rights of persecuted and excluded minorities like African-Americans and Native American tribes. The following well-known quote from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's second inaugural address in 1937 provides an example of progress in a social context:

“We are determined to make every American citizen the subject of his country's interest and concern; and we will never regard any faithful, law-abiding group within our borders as superfluous. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

Moral Progress

All appearances of the word progress which appear in a highly abstract, vaguely moral or ethical context were coded as moral progress. This last category is the rarest, and only includes a small number of uses of the word which specifically refer to a vague sense of progress of the spirit, of increasing human values, or of progressing toward a sort of moral maturity as a society. An example of this sort of highly vague conceptualization of progress appears in the 2009 inaugural address of sitting president Barack Obama:

“Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends—hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism—these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths.”

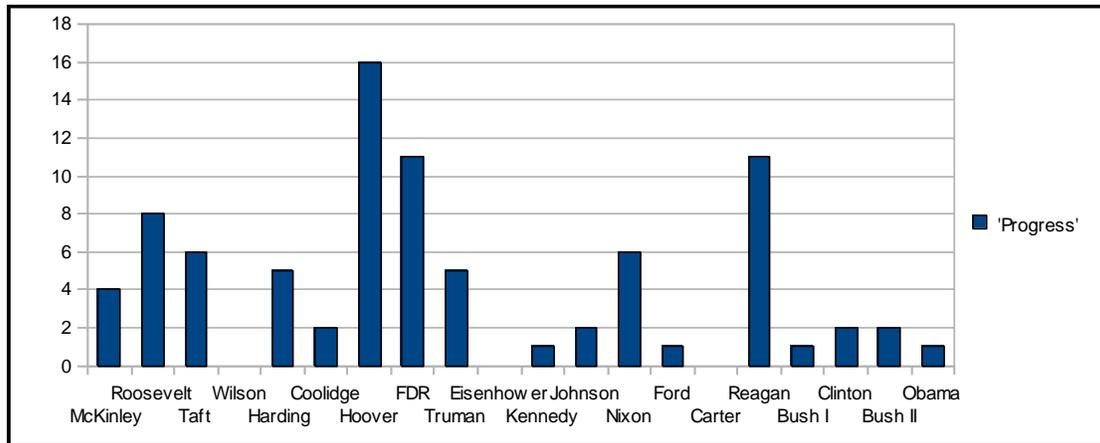
The prevalence of all four of these various conceptualizations of progress in the inaugural addresses of U.S. presidents indicates the chimeric nature of the idea of progress as it tends to be expressed by the members of the political elite. Following a

brief discussion of the quantitative results of this categorical analysis, both Lyotard's (1979) concept of the metanarrative and the analytical precedent set by Bury (1920) will be built upon to show, through numerous examples drawn from these speeches, that while the definition of progress is indeed a fluid concept which changes depending on the circumstances of the time in which the word is used, American presidents have tended to define the idea of progress primarily in political and economic terms. Rather than the unbending and objective law of nature as it is often portrayed by U.S. presidents, progress is an entirely subjective social construct which is molded to suit the ideological needs of the population at any given moment.

6) Findings

The initial findings of the analysis indicate a number of interesting patterns in the appearance of the word progress in presidential speeches (Fig. 1). To begin with, within the 31 total inaugural speeches given by the last 20 U.S. presidents, the word progress was used exactly 84 times. Of the 20 presidents which were the focus of this study, 12 were republicans, while 8 were democrats. Some presidents, like Herbert Hoover, Franklin Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan tended to use the word quite frequently in their speeches, while others like Woodrow Wilson, Dwight Eisenhower, and Jimmy Carter did not utter the word at all in theirs. The specific reasons for the divergent frequencies of usage among presidents remain unclear, but I can point to a number of patterns which may assist with informed speculation.

Figure 2: Appearance of the word “Progress” in the inaugural speeches of U.S. Presidents

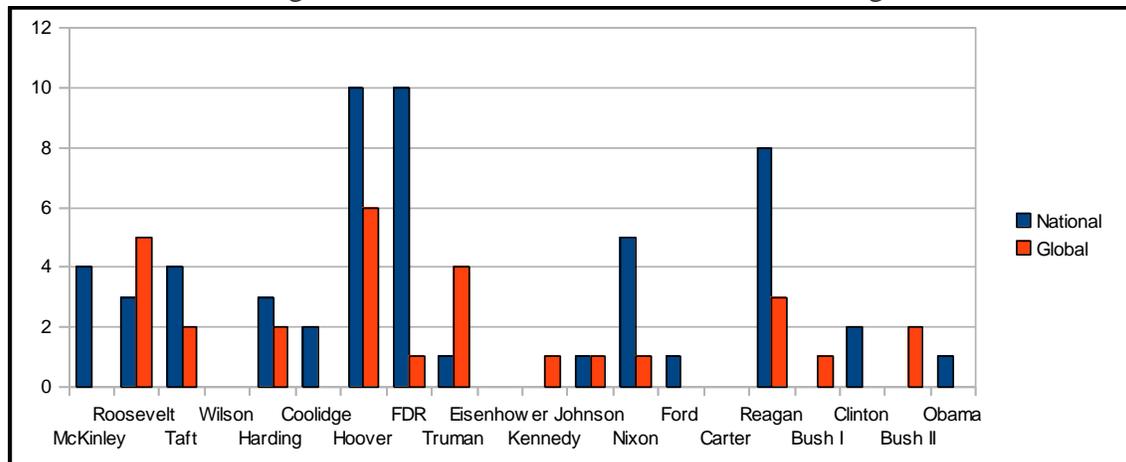


Withholding those presidents who made no reference to progress in their speeches at all, there were 11 republicans and 6 democrats who used the word at least once in their speeches, a ratio of nearly two to one. It is clear from this distribution that we can expect to see more appearances of the word progress within the speeches of republican presidents than in those of democrats, simply because there are more of them. However, the results show an even greater prevalence of the term among republicans than would normally be expected from the distribution. Out of the 84 total uses of the word progress, 62 were uttered by republican presidents, while only 22 appeared in the speeches of democrats, a nearly three to one ratio. There appears to be a slightly greater likelihood of the word progress to be used by republican presidents in their inaugural speeches than by democrats.

As for the distribution of national and global references to progress, 55 of the appearances of the word progress were focused solely on national issues, while only 29 referred to progress on a global scale (Fig. 3). For the most part, progress as discussed by

U.S. presidents refers to the progress of the United States and its people, as opposed to the global progress of all humanity. Of the 17 presidents who used the word progress, 14 placed it in a national context at least once. Presidents McKinley, Coolidge, Ford, Clinton, and Obama used the word only in reference to national progress. Overall, most presidents showed a preference for using the term in a national sense, although the prevalence of nationalistic conceptualizations of progress over global ones is especially noticeable in the speeches of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. In contrast, 12 of the presidents used the word progress at least once in a global context. Presidents John F. Kennedy, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush use the world solely in a global context in their speeches. Presidents Teddy Roosevelt and Harry Truman also showed a distinct preference for using the term in a broader, global sense.

Figure 3: References to National vs. Global Progress



After breaking down the 84 appearances of the word progress in these speeches into the four categories discussed earlier, it became clear that the majority of these utterances envisioned progress from within an economic or political context. More specifically, progress was mentioned in a political context 38 times, in an economic context 24 times,

in a social context 13 times, and in a moral context 9 times. Of the references to economic progress, 17 were national while only 7 were global. Social and moral progress was mentioned exclusively in a national context, with 13 references to social progress and 9 to moral progress. Only in the category of political progress did the majority of uses imply a global context, with 22 of the references to progress being global in nature and 16 being focused on national issues (Table 1).

Figure 4: Types of Progress

	Economic	Political	Social	Moral
National	17 (20.24%)	16 (19.05%)	13 (15.48%)	9 (10.71%)
Global	7 (8.33%)	22 (26.19%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)

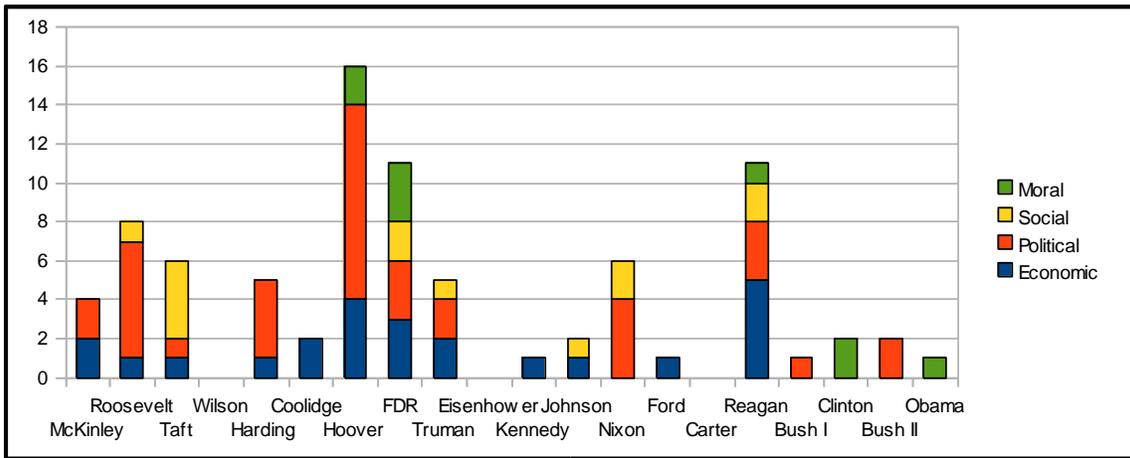
Looking at the distribution of these four types of progress among the different presidents (Fig. 4), we find some variation as to the type of progress which was emphasized by particular leaders over the course of the twentieth century. Most of the presidents who used the word progress frequently in their speeches made at least some mention of all 4 types of progress, although a distinct prevalence of economic and political progress can be found in the speeches of nearly all 17 presidents who used the word. Only 5 of the 17 presidents who used the word progress did not place it in an economic context at least once. Presidents Richard Nixon, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama did not mention progress in an economic context whatsoever. Presidents Calvin Coolidge, John F. Kennedy, and Gerald Ford mentioned the idea of progress solely in an economic context, although they used the word only once or twice in their speeches. The president who was most likely to place the idea of progress within an economic context was Ronald Reagan, with 5 of his 11 uses of the word being couched firmly in an economic framework.

Political progress was popular among a majority of U.S. presidents who used the word. Out of the 17 presidents who used the word progress, 11 mentioned it in a political context at least once in their speeches. The presidents most likely to refer to political progress were Teddy Roosevelt, Warren G. Harding, Herbert Hoover, and Richard Nixon, with the majority of their uses of the word falling into those categories. Only presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush use the word exclusively in a political context. Presidents Calvin Coolidge, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Gerald Ford, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama did not mention progress in a political context whatsoever in their speeches.

Mentions of social progress was somewhat less popular than the previously mentioned categories, but nevertheless appeared with regularity throughout the data. Seven of the 17 presidents who used the word progress placed it in a social context at least once. These were presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Taft, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan. Only William Taft showed a distinct preference for this conceptualization of progress over others, with 4 of his 6 uses of the word belonging to this category. The other ten presidents did not mention social progress whatsoever.

The most elusive category, moral progress, appeared in the speeches of only 5 of the 17 presidents who used the word: Herbert Hoover, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama. This was to be expected, as most uses of the word were specific enough as to not justify placement into this highly abstract category. Recent presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama used the word solely in a vaguely moral or otherwise abstract way in their speeches.

Figure 5: Types of Progress by President



7) Discussion

The results indicate that while the idea of progress may indeed be a highly subjective metanarrative, for the past century *progress* in the United States has predominantly been framed within an economic or political paradigm by its political leaders. This does not mean that U.S. presidents have tended to agree on what specifically is to be understood by economic or political progress, but merely that the large majority of conceptions of progress appear to exist within one of these two paradigms. While one president may have thought of economic progress as reducing government regulation of free enterprise, another perhaps believed that only through increased regulation of the free market would economic progress occur. In both cases, the paradigm remains essentially the same. Both could be said to be framing the idea of progress within an inherently economic context, or at least presenting progress as a process which is primarily measurable in economic and financial terms.

The prevalence of economic and political conceptions of progress within

American political speech indicate that capitalism and democracy are consistently presented as the driving forces of progress for both American society and for all of humanity. The following statements will illustrate this trend. President Calvin Coolidge, at the onset of a period of rapid economic growth known as the “roaring twenties,” made this statement in 1923:

“We cannot avoid the inevitable results of the economic disorders which have reached all nations. But we shall diminish their harm to us in proportion as we continue to restore our Government finances to a secure and enduring position. This we can and must do. Upon that firm foundation rests the only hope of progress and prosperity.”

By 1933, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt took office, the Great Depression was already in full swing. The catastrophic financial crisis necessitated frequent uses of the word progress in a context which would reassure Americans of the nation's ability to overcome its current economic difficulties. In his first inaugural speech, FDR stated:

“Finally, in our progress toward a resumption of work we require two safeguards against a return of the evils of the old order: there must be a strict supervision of all banking and credits and investments, so that there will be an end to speculation with other people's money; and there must be provision for an adequate but sound currency.”

Economic conceptualizations of the idea of progress are not solely directed at domestic affairs, but can also take on global connotations. In his second inaugural address in 1949, Harry Truman evoked the notion of economic progress while vastly broadening its scope to include the entirety of world nations:

“Fourth, we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant.”

President Ronald Reagan, as part of his second inaugural address in 1985, makes a grand reference to progress that very nearly fit into the moral category, but follows it up with a clarification which makes the economic context unmistakable:

“We believed then and now: There are no limits to growth and human progress when men and women are free to follow their dreams. And we were right to believe that. Tax rates have been reduced, inflation cut dramatically, and more people are employed than ever before in our history.”

These are but a few examples of the frequent references to progress in an economic sense made by U.S. presidents in their inaugural speeches. Of even greater frequency were references to progress of a political sort. The following excerpts will illustrate this trend. President Warren G. Harding, in stark contrast to more recent heads of state, favored a policy of nonintervention in foreign affairs, but does not shy away from proclaiming the superiority of the American state by using progress in a political light in his 1921 address to the nation:

“The recorded progress of our Republic, materially and spiritually, in itself proves the wisdom of the inherited policy of non-involvement in Old World affairs. Confident of our ability to work out our own destiny, and jealously guarding our right to do so, we seek no part in directing the destinies of the Old World. We do

not mean to be entangled. We will accept no responsibility except as our own conscience and judgment, in each instance, may determine.”

Herbert Hoover emphasized the need to reform the U.S. justice system, and evoked progress in order to elucidate the value of a properly functioning state judicial apparatus at his inaugural address in 1929:

“Reform, reorganization and strengthening of our whole judicial and enforcement system, both in civil and criminal sides, have been advocated for years by statesmen, judges, and bar associations. First steps toward that end should not longer be delayed. Rigid and expeditious justice is the first safeguard of freedom, the basis of all ordered liberty, the vital force of progress.”

Richard Nixon emphasizes the importance of sound government policy to ensuring domestic progress in his second inaugural speech in 1973:

“Abroad, the shift from old policies to new has not been a retreat from our responsibilities, but a better way to peace. And at home, the shift from old policies to new will not be a retreat from our responsibilities, but a better way to progress.”

More recently, President George W. Bush used the word progress to justify the dramatic shift in American foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11 during his second inaugural address in 2005:

“Our country has accepted obligations that are difficult to fulfill and would be dishonorable to abandon. Yet, because we have acted in the great liberating tradition of this Nation, tens of millions have achieved their freedom. And as hope kindles hope, millions more will find it. By our efforts, we have lit a fire as well, a

fire in the minds of men. It warms those who feel its power. It burns those who fight its progress. And one day this untamed fire of freedom will reach the darkest corners of our world.”

The overwhelming prevalence of economic and political conceptions of progress in the speeches of U.S. presidents is consistent with many of the contentions of both Mills (1956) and Lyotard (1979). American presidents' numerous appeals to progress from within these paradigms point to the necessity for public figures to project a narrative which supports existing political and economic power structures, specifically American-style democracy and free-market capitalism. Public figures have the ability to frame progress as they see fit, which allows for the controlled legitimation of a grand narrative of progress, with both domestic and international implications.

The ability to decide what is meant by progress is power in the truest sense of the word, and the political machine, especially one so deeply dependent on the capitalist system, as Lyotard (1979) describes, will see the need to dictate the “truth” of what is progress, what direction we should be headed in. This is why we see the economic and political paradigms manifest themselves so frequently in the data, these two institutions are mutually dependent and must maintain social metanarratives geared toward their own self-preservation. Society must be constantly reassured of the value of American capitalism and democracy, especially during times when these institutions are being called into question. In addition, with the American public increasingly exhibiting the characteristics of what Mills (1956) referred to as a *mass*, the dissemination of powerful metanarratives becomes an exclusively vertical process, with the words of political elites reaching millions around the world, while the individual lack any real ability to make his

or her voice heard.

However, contradictions between various economic and political interpretations, as well as the enduring presence of other conceptualizations of progress, like the social and moral varieties, are potential sources of political conflict. It is the multifaceted nature of the idea of progress, the fact that people tend to think of progress in so many different ways, some of which contradict each other, that contributes to frequent political deadlock along rigid partisan lines. Even though progress is understood by most presidents in economic and political terms, there exists much division as to the proper way to balance the forces of economic and political progress with traditional moral values and the desire to ameliorate social problems. The degree to which government should intervene in matters of social inequality and economic stratification are matters of constant disagreement among U.S. presidents. Some believe that the government should play a greater role in regulating the financial sector and overseeing the economy, while others believe that the free market functions best when left alone by the state.

Certain presidents stress the need to enact policy that will ensure an end to racial discrimination and provide for those who are unable to provide for themselves, and they make clear that progress is to be measured by these standards as well. Most do not mention this type of progress at all. The alternatives to economic and political conceptualizations of progress provided by the few U.S. presidents who chose to allude to them are, in the case of mentions of social progress, very specific and in the case of moral progress, highly abstract. In his 1909 inaugural address, William Taft referred to progress in a social context when discussing the increasing prosperity of African-Americans in the years since emancipation:

“The progress which the Negro has made in the last fifty years, from slavery, when its statistics are reviewed, is marvelous, and it furnishes every reason to hope that in the next twenty-five years a still greater improvement in his condition as a productive member of society, on the farm, and in the shop, and in other occupations may come.”

President Lyndon Johnson evoked progress in his appeal to the nation to put aside age-old divisions and come together during a time of great social unrest and upheaval. In his first speech to the nation after taking office as a result of John F. Kennedy's assassination, he passionately pleaded:

“We have discovered that every child who learns, and every man who finds work, and every sick body that is made whole—like a candle added to an altar—brightens the hope of all the faithful. So let us reject any among us who seek to reopen old wounds and rekindle old hatreds. They stand in the way of a seeking nation. Let us now join reason to faith and action to experience, to transform our unity of interest into a unity of purpose. For the hour and the day and the time are here to achieve progress without strife, to achieve change without hatred; not without difference of opinion but without the deep and abiding divisions which scar the union for generations.”

Ronald Reagan also alluded to the abandonment of old forms of prejudice and discrimination in his second inaugural address in 1985:

“As an older American, I remember a time when people of different race, creed, or ethnic origin in our land found hatred and prejudice installed in social custom

and, yes, in law. There's no story more heartening in our history than the progress that we've made toward the brotherhood of man that God intended for us."

In a few cases, presidents referred to progress as a vague notion of moral advance, something beyond the earthly constructs of economic, political, and social concerns. There is perhaps no better example of this sort of abstract conceptualization of progress than the following statement uttered by Bill Clinton in 1997:

"Fellow citizens, let us build that America, a nation ever moving forward toward realizing the full potential of all its citizens. Prosperity and power, yes, they are important, and we must maintain them. But let us never forget, the greatest progress we have made and the greatest progress we have yet to make, is in the human heart. In the end, all the world's wealth and a thousand armies are no match for the strength and decency of the human spirit."

While such sentiments are indeed heartwarming, they are rare within the data, and they cannot negate the smothering abundance of economic and political notions of progress in the inaugural addresses of American presidents. The great majority of appeals to progress place the idea firmly within an economic and political paradigm. In addition, this conceptualization of progress appears in a significantly high frequency in a global context.

It is important to take into account the extent to which global events and circumstances may have affected the amount of times a U.S. president appealed to the idea of progress. Herbert Hoover, in his single inaugural speech in 1929, used the word progress 16 times, the most of any president. Although this speech took place nearly eight months before the beginning of the great depression, there was already a sense that

drastic action needed to be taken to ensure the stability of the American economic and political structure. In this speech, Hoover clearly ties progress at home to progress abroad:

“The United States fully accepts the profound truth that our own progress, prosperity, and peace are interlocked with the progress, prosperity, and peace of all humanity.”

A great deal of Hoover's policies provided the progressive groundwork for what later became the New Deal, enacted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, also one of the presidents most inclined to use the word progress, with a total of 11 uses. To be fair, FDR gave a total of 3 inaugural addresses, while Hoover reached his soaring lead with only one speech. Roosevelt invoked the idea of progress frequently in order to reassure the American public that economic prosperity would once again be within reach, that the country would inevitably overcome the Great Depression and thrive once again. Times of economic doubt and political turmoil seem to lead to more uses of the word progress, as such times would involve a greater need to convince the American public that the country was still on the right track, despite appearances to the contrary. Similarly, we see greater prevalence of progress being conceptualized in a social or moral context in times of social unrest, such as during the 1960s and 1970s under presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon.

There were also significantly more mentions of national progress than global. This pattern indicates that presidents usage of the word progress tend to be mostly centered on the role of the United States, and often give the impression of a belief in American exceptionalism. However, the frequent amount of global conceptualizations of

progress point to an increased perception that that domestic progress is closely connected to the progress of the whole world, and that we have a responsibility to harness our great prosperity in order to bring the rest of civilization up to our own standard of progress. As discussed by Gikandi (2001) and Connell (2007), global political superiority is achieved not only through technological superiority, but also through economic manipulation and, perhaps even more insidious, the global production of ideas. The cultural metanarratives that reinforce the dominant group's position in the social hierarchy must inevitably be disseminated globally, as they are ideas which have taken on a powerful identity in and of themselves and, consciously or not, are essential to perpetuating global systems of inequality. Progress is such an idea.

It is also of note that all mentions of progress in a global context are of the economic and political variety. Social and moral conceptualizations of progress are solely used to refer to domestic affairs. It is not inconceivable that progress could have been used in social or moral context to refer to global events in other speeches, such as for example when appeals are made to attempt to spread human rights, equal rights for women etc. to places such as Afghanistan, but it was not apparent from the data used in this study. While our presidents may have been somewhat more cautious in declaring that America's moral and social superiority over other nations requires that national policy be directed toward spreading our moral and social systems globally in order to achieve further progress, there was little shame in stating openly that our economic and political systems were so advanced, so progressive, that their promulgation around the globe was of great importance.

Surely the one implies the other, that only by assuming moral superiority can we

ever feel justified in imposing our other social systems on the civilizations of the world (Cohen and Rogers, 2008). It is not however, evident within the data in question. The following examples illustrate the usage of progress in a global context. In 1901 Theodore Roosevelt made his first address upon taking office and discussed in some detail the matter of how best to deal with the some of the territories recently acquired as a result of the Spanish-American War. He uses progress in a global, political sense when referring to the Philippine Islands:

“In the Philippines our problem is larger. They are very rich tropical islands, inhabited by many varying tribes, representing widely different stages of progress toward civilization. Our earnest effort is to help these people upward along the stony and difficult path that leads to self-government.”

Harry Truman also refers to the need to expand economic activity abroad as a means of catalyzing global progress in his 1949 inaugural address:

“All countries, including our own, will greatly benefit from a constructive program for the better use of the world's human and natural resources. Experience shows that our commerce with other countries expands as they progress industrially and economically.”

And President George W. Bush invokes the idea of progress on a global scale in his 2005 declaration to the oppressive regimes of the world:

“The leaders of governments with long habits of control need to know: To serve your people, you must learn to trust them. Start on this journey of progress and justice, and America will walk at your side. And all the allies of the United States can know: We honor your friendship; we rely on your counsel; and we depend on

your help. Division among free nations is a primary goal of freedom's enemies. The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies' defeat."

Whether in reference to domestic or international developments, American presidents' usage of the word progress exists predominately within economic and political frameworks. The idea of progress as it is presented by U.S. presidents implies the continuous growth of capitalist economic systems and American-style democracy.

Limiting our understanding of progress to a solely economic and political paradigm could in theory prevent social change on a grand scale. Our understanding of progress could potentially hinge upon entirely different axes and be based on ideals such as the goal of environmental sustainability, or spiritual enlightenment, or mass consciousness expansion. Conceiving of progress within the confines of an economic or political paradigm condemns us to exist within the confines of economically and politically based social systems. In the United States today, this would refer to the capitalist system, either with more or less government regulation, and a quasi-democratic state apparatus. Viewing progress from within such a paradigm would serve to discourage any momentum towards something resembling Karl Marx's (1848) idea of a stateless and classless society, for example, or the sort of anarchism described by Bakunin (1916). Nor would it be hospitable to the development of sustainable, renewable, and freely available resources, as this would be contrary to the motives of those who benefit most from a profit-driven capitalist system.

There are no right or wrong answers to the question of where we as a society should be heading, and as this lack of conviction as to the direction of progress becomes

more apparent within political rhetoric and heated presidential campaigns. Widespread disagreement as to what constitutes progress can potentially lead to a breakdown of social cohesion, national unity, and solidarity amongst citizens of America and all the world. Progress is an illusion. But our steadfast belief in the reality, and the great importance, of human progress leads to frequently violent ideological division as to how we should go about achieving it.

8) Conclusion

There is really no easy way to conclude this discussion of progress, as I have only superficially touched on some of the many avenues through which this ideological paradigm can be understood. Lacking from this analysis is an exploration of individual progress as perceived by human beings on a personal level, the sense of growth and change that every human experiences and the role this most certainly plays in our understanding of social progress. Also needed is a thorough application of these theories to the contemporary political environment in the United States and around the world. Surely divisions over the proper course of human progress are embedded in the rhetoric of conservatism, liberalism, collectivism, individualism, and the multitude of other opposing and complementing political philosophies currently in play. To this end, a more in-depth historical analysis tracing the evolution of the idea of progress from ancient times would serve to provide much needed perspective as to its historical longevity. Of equal import would be a study into the methods employed by dominant and influential groups to perpetuate the paradigm of progress and to steer its course.

Given enough time and resources, it would prove useful to explore the various

ways in which the narrative of progress is spread within and among cultures, looking perhaps at museum exhibits, classroom history textbooks, presidential speeches, or news media outlets. This research can hopefully serve as the groundwork for a broader analysis of the usage of the word progress in political speech. It would be much improved by the inclusion of all US presidents, not just those of the twentieth century, and also perhaps bring in data from state of the union addresses, campaign speeches, and other public appearances in order to broaden the scope of this analysis. Once we have traced the idea of progress more fully, or at least the appearance of the word in political speech, we can more precisely discern when and under what circumstances this word and the idea of progress have been popular language tools invoked by US presidents. Does the usage of the word, the prevalence of the idea, fluctuate according to the sociopolitical landscape? Is progress evoked more in peacetime, for example, or in times of war? These and many more questions could be answered in time, and lead to a better understanding of the role the idea of progress plays as a metanarrative which maintains group cohesion and nationality.

I find myself unsure of what to make of progress as an idea. On the one hand, it would seem self-evident that progress is occurring, given obvious advances in science and technology. However, I tend to side with the recommendations provided by John Dewey, and feel somewhat anxious about the potential for unguided or misguided promulgation of the ideas of development and progress to affect great injustice and suffering on a human scale. As human beings, we truly want to believe that we can progress as a society in the face of even the darkest tragedy, because we inherently cannot give up hope in our own personal ability to better ourselves in the face of pain, to treat

each new day as an opportunity not just to change our lives for the better, but to change the lives of others as well. As Frederic Jameson (1991) states: “It is because that object world, in the throes of industrialization and modernization, seems to tremble at the brink of an equally momentous and even Utopian transformation that the 'self' can also be felt to be on the point of change” (p. 312).

The idea of progress is still resisting extinction, perhaps waiting for a vision that would seem to transcend the relativity of postmodernism. It occurs to me that the ideals behind sustainable development, or at least the broad vision of an environmentally sustainable high-tech society, are compatible with visions of scientific and technological, economic and political, as well as social and moral progress. These types, while having diverged in the past, can indeed coalesce into one stream that provides a positive vision of the future of humanity. Technological progress was sufficient to provide that hope before people were aware of the potential for catastrophic destruction of the natural world, but now that we know of the danger posed by unchecked progress, it no longer provides us with a sense of certainty about the future of our species. We are collectively unsettled, and the idea of progress is shifting once again in order to provide us with the security offered by knowledge that our species will live on in perpetuity. A vision of progress as moving toward total sustainability is the dream that will provide us with that security, but only if we are able to perceive that the process is indeed occurring around us. We conceive of the threats to our planet posed by climate change, deforestation, water pollution etc. not as subjective problems, but as objective ones which have the potential to seriously affect everyone, no matter their culture. Sociocultural relativity plays no part in environmentalism. It is assumed that environmental problems will affect

everyone. For this reason, a vision of progress which incorporates sustainability as its primary goal would appear to have a universal appeal.

This is just one possible alternative to our current understanding of progress in its grandest sense. Our discovery of new ways of thinking about human existence and social development is hindered only by our tendency to cling desperately to older, more comfortable ways of thinking. We must prepare ourselves for the undiscovered horizons alluded to by J.B. Bury (1920), who wrote: “A day will come, in the revolution of centuries, when a new idea will usurp its place as the directing idea of humanity. Another star, unnoticed now or invisible, will climb up the intellectual heaven, and human emotions will react to its influence, human plans respond to its guidance. It will be the criterion by which Progress and all other ideas will be judged. And it too will have its successor” (p. 231).

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