CHAPTER I

AMERICAN IDEALS, APARTHEID AND
UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY

Americans have always advocated certain ideals or values like equality, liberty and democracy. These ideals and values have been advocated in all spheres of political activity including domestic politics and foreign relations.\footnote{These ideals and values were referred to by Gunnar Myrdal as "the American Creed".} The very genesis of the United States was based on these ideals. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed that "we hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". The same sentiments echoed in the Constitution as well as the Bill of Rights. In the Preamble to the Constitution, the rationale for creating the state was to form a more perfect union, to establish among other things, justice, provide for the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty. In his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln said that the nation was conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.
Opinions differ on what the ideals of American society are, but there appears to be a general agreement that equality, liberty and democracy are among them. More generally the dominant political culture of the United States may be summed up in the seventeenth century liberal philosophy of John Locke, that the government's role is a limited one, intended to protect the individual's life, liberty and property through popular consent, established laws, impartial judges and limited but effective executives. Lockean liberalism has become so pervasive a part of American life that Americans may be blind to what really is ideology.

Equality and liberty were powerful in their appeal to early Americans. The Declaration of Independence mentioned equality even before liberty. It was a moral declaration where Jefferson asserted that everyone is politically equal, that government legitimately can

2. John Locke is considered the spiritual and ideological godfather of the American Revolution. His philosophy of natural rights was political gospel to most educated Americans in the late eighteenth century.


4. In writing the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson was influenced not only by the philosophy of Locke but also by the British heritage, with its traditional concern for the rights of man, and by the colonial experience itself.
receive power only from the people and that the only justification of government is to secure the right of the people to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Even before it became fashionable and acceptable to refer to the United States political system as a democracy, the creeds of equality and individualism were enshrined among the founding concepts of the new nation. When Jefferson penned down the classic phrases of the Declaration, not only was it equality that received the first mention, but the equality so affirmed was that of "all men". No restrictions, exclusions or barriers were contemplated.

The question of slavery inevitably entered the discussions and figured in some of the sectional bargaining between North and South when the Constitution was being drafted at the Philadelphia Convention. Alexis de Tocqueville in the eighteen thirties stated that there was much equality in the United States. He wrote:

No novelty in the United States struck me more vividly during my stay than the equality of conditions. It was easy to see the immense influence of this basic fact on the whole course of society. It gives a particular turn to public opinion and a particular twist to laws, new maxims to those who govern and particular habits to the governed. [6]


But Americans of the late eighteenth century or the first half of the nineteenth century had not made the principle of equality applicable to all inhabitants of the United States. Liberty too was an equally important and compelling value in American ideology. But in the post Civil War years, as before, liberty remained a complex, many sided and ambiguous term. Even at the turn of the twentieth century the idea of liberty or freedom was still more a source of ambivalence than of coherence in the American consciousness.  

Such were American ideals and they were not confined only to the Americans. The United States has consistently made it clear that the ideals which it has adhered to, extend to other peoples and countries. Donald Kagan states:

(W)e Americans have been raised in the tradition of our Declaration of Independence and our Bill of Rights. It is natural for us to assume that our rights are inevitable and to apply them universally, for if they are not valid for all mankind, how can they be valid for us?[8]


It has been pointed out that in the eyes of most Americans, not only should their foreign policy institutions be structured, and function so as to reflect liberal values, but American foreign policy should also be substantively directed to the promotion of those values in the external environment. Furthermore, foreign policy goals should reflect not only the security interests of the nation but also the political values and principles that define American identity. If these values do define foreign policy goals, then that policy is morally justified, the opponents of that policy at home and abroad are morally illegitimate and all efforts must be directed towards overcoming the opponents and achieving the goals.

American ideals as we have observed reflect the highest at the ethical level. Administrations have been constantly reminded to adhere to them in the conduct of foreign policy. But as we shall see, their implementation at home itself has not been successful.

It has been in the sphere of the racial question in the United States that American ideals have become a domestic moral concern. Until the mid eighteen sixties

10. Ibid., p. 19.
slavery existed not only as a pillar of American society but also as the antithesis of liberty and equality. The strain of bondage was not compatible with the American self image of a chosen people engaged in a grand experiment. The rhetoric of ideals was meaningless in the face of such a national disgrace. Tocqueville had observed:

If ever there are great revolutions there, they will be caused by the presence of the blacks upon American soil. That is to say, it will not be the equality of social conditions but rather their inequality which may give rise thereto.[11]

Neither the emancipation of slaves during the Civil War, nor the constitutional amendments of the Reconstruction era improved the lot of the Afro-Americans. The Supreme Court in 1896 decided that racial segregation was legal.12 In the interwar period racial problems that were once considered peculiarly southern, spread nationwide. In 1944, during the course of the war when the United States was projecting itself as the champion of


12. The Supreme Court verdict in the Plessy versus Ferguson case upheld that under the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment a state could provide, 'separate but equal' facilities for Blacks. The 1954 verdict of the Court in the Brown versus Board of Education case overruled this saying that 'separate educational facilities are inherently unequal'.
freedom in the world, Gunnar Myrdal wrote "An American Dilemma", a study prepared for the Carnegie Foundation. The central thesis of the work was that there was a tension between American ideals and reality, between its core values of moral concern, rationalism, liberalism, equality of opportunity and freedom; and the discrimination and inequality that existed. As Myrdal saw it, the American Dilemma was the ever raging conflict between, on the one hand, valuations preserved in the general plane which constituted the American creed where the American thinks, talks and acts under the influence of high national Christian principles and on the other hand the increasing prejudice against particular persons or types of people.

The fifties and the sixties witnessed the Afro-American struggle for civil rights in the United States, the Supreme Court's verdict against segregation and the governmental efforts to grant them civil and voting rights. Despite this there are several unresolved problems. Discrimination at some levels still exists. Though Afro-Americans are legally equal, they are woefully behind economically and in the general condition of

their lives. In some fundamental regards they are now equal participants in the political system. But in more subtle, but no less real senses, they are not able to participate fully. There is considerable prejudice against them, they frequently are not afforded the educational advantages that the average citizen avails of and too often are deprived physically by the lack of adequate diet and medical care. Economically their advances have been less dramatic than in politics and education. Moreover, Afro-Americans are moving towards a sharp class bifurcation -- a prospering middle class and a devastated underclass.15 Manning Marable writes:

> To be Black in America is to live within a fundamental contradiction which rests between the promise of democracy and the harsh reality of racial inequality.[16]

It is paradoxical and tragic as well that a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal should have a race problem. In precise terms the racial conflict is not just a problem for the Afro-Americans but


one for all Americans, a moral dilemma that strikes at the roots of American democracy.

In the realm of foreign policy also, ideals were an important concern. It meant that there had to be a strong moral content in foreign policy. It also raised the question whether a moral policy could be pursued at the expense of a country's other interests. Stupak observes that moralism has been the guiding principle and ethics have been the underlying concerns while liberty, peace and democracy have been the ultimate ends of American foreign policy.17 He also states:

To Americans foreign policy was thought to be the cosmic struggle between right and wrong, the perpetual repulsion of tyranny, the true belief in individual liberty, freedom and equality, total dedication to the rule of law, and peaceful settlement of disputes with an ethical, democratic, missionary zeal undergirded with intense moral idealism.[18]

Erwin D. Canham, editor of the Christian Science Monitor, delivering the Paul Anthony Brick Lectures stated that what Americans seek as a nation surely is the


18. Ibid.
opportunity for all men to choose their own forms of
government freely, to set up institutions of their choice,
and to strive for the fulfilment of their destinies in
ways resultant from their own capacities, potentialities
and ideals. The idea of a unique American mission has
been an important theme in United States foreign policy.
More than most nationalities, Americans have thought of
themselves as destined to bring the blessings of liberty
and self-government to the less fortunate parts of the
world.\textsuperscript{20}

Robert E. Osgood observes that the most commonly
preferred among the national ends related to those
fundamental ideals of western civilization are those
principles of right conduct which apply to personal
relations.\textsuperscript{21} Another kind of ideal almost as frequently
avowed by nations, but of an exceedingly indefinite nature
expresses allegiance to a universal goal, that is, to some
state of international affairs believed to be of benefit

\textsuperscript{19}Erwin D. Canham, \textit{The Ethics of United States
Foreign Relations, The Paul Anthony Brick Lectures}
\textsuperscript{20}Arthur A. Ekirch, \textit{Ideas, Ideals and American
Diplomacy: A History of their Growth and Interaction}
\textsuperscript{21}Robert Endicott Osgood, \textit{Ideals and Self-interest in
America's Foreign Relations: The Great
Transformation of the Twentieth Century}
to all mankind, such as peace, good will and justice among nations or freedom and a decent standard of living for all men. 22

A major issue thus, is the extent to which the United States can uphold these ideals in foreign policy, and the degree to which they would be in conflict with its other national interests. Osgood states that as the United States by virtue of its gigantic power had been thrust into an inescapable position of world leadership, it had to invariably face more and more decisions in which it had to compromise with its ideals in the short run in order to achieve them in the long run. Further, the more conscious of the need for defending and promoting its ideals America became, the more acute this dilemma would grow. Americans would be plagued as never before by the seeming inconsistency between their ideals and their actions. 23

Some scholars argue that moral action would be meaningless if it always demanded a sacrificial or suicidal posture, for then only angels or saints could act morally. Moral action on the part of an individual or nation does not require self restraint to the point of self destruction, but it allows the pursuit of one's

22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p.438.
interests provided such interests are subjected to rational examination and provided they are related to the interests of others over a long period of time.\textsuperscript{24} Charles Frankel states that American political and moral principles are not applicable everywhere and are not wanted everywhere. And if they were applicable and wanted, they would still be beyond human powers to implement everywhere.\textsuperscript{25}

To what extent then can the United States interact with another country on the basis of its ideals? Strictly speaking the United States should at all costs stand by its ideals and have nothing to do with a country which violates them. Some scholars would question the rationale of such a policy by arguing that a foreign policy committed to normal relations only with virtuous regimes that protect human rights and to hostility towards governments that violate them would be either excessively dangerous or hypocritical. They point out that most regimes now in place have violated the American notion of human rights to a considerable degree and a


nation seeking consistently to oppose such regimes would have few friends and many enemies.26

The ideals that Americans upheld were being violated in South Africa. In that country the Blacks who were the majority were strangers in their own land. A White minority was in control of the country and they dictated the fate of the majority. Ever since Europeans began settling in that part of the continent, Blacks were through different means, controlled by a system created and dominated by the former. In the early days of European settlement, land was plentiful around the Cape that its acquisition by the newcomers did not present a serious problem for the Hottentots and Bushmen who constituted the indigenous population. The problem of land ownership really cropped up as the European frontier was extended far to the east and the north in areas densely populated by the advancing Bantu peoples. The British government which was in control decided to create reserves for natives after the middle of the eighteenth century. In some parts of South Africa, White farmers occupied land at their own option without any regard for the needs of the African population. In other parts the

native population had largely been exterminated or driven out through war.\textsuperscript{27}

The creation of reserves in the first place, gave European areas protection against possible encroachment by Africans who were completely excluded from those areas except as wage earners and tenant labourers working for Europeans. Secondly, by restricting the area of land available as reserves, the Europeans were able to force large numbers of Africans off the land who therefore formed a much more ready source of cheap labour for use by the Europeans than might have been the case if the Africans had been allowed to retain large areas for their subsistence. Thirdly, by deliberately scattering the reserves over a large area in relatively small units rather than large compact blocks the Europeans succeeded to a large extent in destroying the unity and solidarity of the African populations. Finally, the reserves served as a convenient shock absorber, affording a place where aged and infirm Africans could retire after years of useful employment outside without becoming a charge on the state.\textsuperscript{28}

The South African policy of apartheid is usually traced to 1948 but the foundations for it were laid

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\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., pp.166-167.
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much earlier. As seen, land came to be controlled by the Whites. The control of the other aspects of life thus became easier. Blacks were reduced to a permanent class of proletariat and exploited as a labour force in agriculture and mining. The traditional social structure of the Blacks was shattered. Laws were enacted by which the inequality between the Blacks and Whites was enshrined in the written laws of the land. The Blacks were deprived of their livelihood and were left only with their labour which was adjudged cheap by the Whites. Thus by 1948, segregation and subjugation of the Blacks had already been in existence.

The hardening attitude of the South African regime against the Blacks assumed its most dramatic and vicious form in 1948 when Prime Minister Malan summed up the Nationalist government's racial policy as one of "apartheid", an Afrikaans word meaning separateness. By it the government was determined to bring about a complete separation of the Whites and nonwhites, based on the obnoxious doctrine of white racial superiority and a deliberate policy to prevent any kind of fusion among the different sections of the nonwhite population.

The distinctive characteristic of the apartheid era that began in 1948 was the introduction of tighter, more
systematic, more comprehensive and strictly enforced control by the state over Blacks in their movements to urban areas and in their employment and residential opportunities. What distinguished apartheid legislation was that the previous ad hoc segregationist measures were amended, supplemented and combined within a political ideology that had been pursued with a single mindedness of purpose.  

From 1948 onwards the South African government brought into existence scores of laws which were aimed at keeping the Blacks in a state of perpetual bondage and subjugation. The philosophical tenets of apartheid were to protect the white race against any philosophy, policy or attack which might endanger or undermine its continued existence. To ensure this, separation had to be effected at all levels. This, the regime found, could be achieved through impregnable legal barriers as well as physical distance and the imponderable force of custom. Magubane writes:

Throughout history those classes that exploit and dominate others have tried to find theoretical and ideological


weapons to supplement their physical domination. They propagate these ideologies in all the institutions of society in order to convince themselves and the oppressed classes that inequality is inevitable, the natural state of human society.[31]

As the Whites had established a permanent settlement in South Africa, they wished to deny national status and citizenship to the indigenous population. The settlers therefore needed a theoretical justification by which they could deny the national autonomy of the societies they had conquered. An examination of the dogma of apartheid, especially its total rejection of equality and the right to self determination of the African, reveals the elaboration of this tendency.32

Each and every apartheid law was designed with this purpose in mind. Under the Population Registration Act 1950, the central racial classification law, sometimes described as the cornerstone of apartheid, every person was assigned to one of the races. John Dugard states that this act was par excellence an example of a statute which


32. Ibid., p.225.
provided humiliation and a sense of inferiority among those obliged to submit to investigation into their family history, social habits and physical experience. He continues:

> What could be more humiliating than an enquiry into the precise racial admixture of one's parents, the colour of one's friends one keeps and the extent to which one's hair, fingernails, lips and other physical features incline towards caucasian or negroid?[34]

The country was racially divided according to the Group Areas Act 1950 which provided for the establishment of racial ghettos in which ownership and occupation of land were restricted to a specified population group. Eighty seven per cent of the land was allotted to Whites who constituted eighteen per cent of the population and the remaining land was divided among the Blacks. The native reserves were called Homelands or Bantustans. The homelands policy also known as grand apartheid envisaged the separate development of South Africa's Blacks. It began in the early years of National Party rule when homelands were created out of the existing 264 African


34. Ibid., p.63.
reserves, accelerated in 1959 and reached its peak in 1976 with the granting of independence to Transkei.

The homelands policy has been criticised on several grounds. One criticism was that by laying heavy stress on tribal divisions that appeared to be fading, the government in effect pursued a course of divide and rule. Another criticism was that the homelands, often scattered into bits and pieces of land rather than contiguous territory; in most cases were not truly the original tribal lands but instead poor and inadequate substitutes for the large areas of South Africa once held by Africans. The strongest criticism however has been that the homelands policy rested on a fiction -- namely that Africans residing in "White" areas were temporary workers rather than a permanent integral part of South African society. Viewed in this light, the homelands policy became a device for assuring a continuous supply of African labour while avoiding the granting of full political, civil, economic and social rights to the African workers and their families.  

Laws were enacted to permit the government to label almost any activity it disapproved of as illegal, with

strong enforcement procedures. The Suppression of Communism Act 1950 (later renamed Internal Security Act and amended in 1976 and 1982) covered organisations and individuals who engaged in activities which would endanger the security of the state and the maintenance of public order.

To keep racial lines from blurring further, legal prohibition against marriage and sexual relations between Blacks and Whites was proscribed through the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 1949 and the Immorality Act of 1950 and 1957. The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act 1953 allowed any person in control of public premises to reserve separate and unequal facilities for different races and placed curbs on the power of courts to declare such reservations invalid. This resulted in separate and substantial unequal amenities for different races in all spheres of life -- buses, trains, restaurants, libraries and parks to mention but a few of the more obvious facilities. The apparatus of apartheid was enriched by a plethora of laws which were designed to be all encompassing, all pervading and affecting all aspects of South African life. As Graham Leach observed, apartheid was:

... not just about which races can sit in which train compartments, who can visit which cinema, who can use which lavatory. It is about the way a whole
society is organised. What has happened in South Africa since 1948 represents some of the most formidable social engineering that the twentieth century has witnessed, a system that has set in progress vast movements of population, that has led to hundreds of thousands of people being uprooted, that has created an army of functionaries whose task it is to enforce the whole order. It is a system of government founded upon a master plan, which because it is based on colour, has aroused the opprobrium of the world.[36]

It was towards this situation in South Africa that the United States was reacting -- towards a society which was multiracial as its own, and where racial discrimination was legalised. There was a strong moral or ethical issue involved and the question was raised as to what United States policy towards a country practising racial discrimination should be. This was also influenced to a large extent by United States interests in South Africa. Many liberals believe that international respect for basic human rights forms or should form an essential element in an emerging sense of global community -- a concern which should serve as the cornerstone of American foreign policy. 37 On several grounds liberal critics of


American policy found the nation's diplomatic record of caution, passivity and ambiguity on African racial issues indefensible. From an ideological perspective it contravened United States avowed belief in principles like democracy, freedom and equality, making a mockery of the nation's claim to lead the "free world". Verbal interventionism against South Africa by American policymakers as well as official unwillingness to bring American power to bear upon African racial disputes caused Blacks to doubt the genuineness of foreign sympathy for their cause and created the impression that the whole issue was an international nightmare.

By the nineteen seventies South Africa had developed into a serious foreign policy issue for the United States. At several levels of government in the United States there was high sounding rhetoric, critical of apartheid and of the South African regime. But when it came to policy implementation, actions did not match words. The United States was expected to take strong measures against the South African government because apartheid was the antithesis of equality, liberty or democracy, and

38. Ibid., p.61.
recognized the inherent inequality of races. South Africa became an area where United States foreign policy faced a dilemma -- the inability or unwillingness to do what it proclaimed to the world. The American dilemma was thus, not only confined to the handling of its own racial problem, but also concerned its policy towards South Africa. On the one hand United States foreign policy had to reflect its ideals and on the other such a policy could not be detrimental to its interests.