The idea, which entered Western consciousness several centuries ago, that black people are less than human, made possible the Atlantic slave trade, during which perhaps 40 million people died. Beliefs about racial inferiority, whether applied to blacks or Jews or Arabs or Orientals, have led to mass murder.

The idea, presented by political leaders and accepted by the American people in 1964, that communism in Vietnam was a threat to our "national security" led to policies that cost a million lives, including those of 30,000 young Americans.

The belief, fostered in the Soviet Union, that "socialism" required a ruthless policy of farm collectivization, as well as the control of dissent, brought about the deaths of countless peasants and large numbers of political prisoners.

Other ideas—leave the poor on their own ("laissez-faire") and help the rich ("economic growth")—have led the U.S. government for most of its history to subsidize corporations while neglecting the poor, thus permitting terrible living and working conditions and incalculable suffering and death. In the years of the Reagan presidency, "laissez-faire" meant budget cutting for family care, which led to high rates of infant mortality in city ghettos.

We can reasonably conclude that how we think is not just mildly
In debates on the military budget there are heated arguments about whether to spend $300 billion or $500 billion. A proposal to spend $100 billion (thus making $200 billion available for human needs) is like the r or f in a multiple-choice test—it is missing. To propose zero billion makes you a candidate for a messiah institution.

On the question of prisons there is debate on how many prisons we should have. But the idea of abolishing prisons is too outrageous even to be discussed. We hear argument about how much the elderly should have to pay for health care, but the idea that they should not have to pay anything, indeed, that no one should have to pay for health care, is not up for debate.

Thus we grow up in a society where our choice of ideas is limited and where certain ideas dominate. We hear them from our parents, in the schools, in the churches, in the newspapers, and on radio and television. They have been in the air ever since we learned to walk and talk. They constitute an American ideology—that is, a dominant pattern of ideas. Most people accept them, and if we do, too, we are less likely to get into trouble.

The dominance of these ideas is not the product of a conspiratorial group that has deviously plotted to implant on society a particular point of view. Nor is it an accident, an innocent result of people thinking freely. There is a process of natural (or, rather unnatural) selection, in which certain orthodox ideas are encouraged, financed, and pushed forward by the most powerful mechanisms of our culture. These ideas are preferred because they are safe; they don't threaten established wealth or power.

For instance:

"Be realistic; this is the way things are; there's no point thinking about how things should be."

"People who teach or write or report the news should be objective; they should not try to advance their own opinions."

"There are only two wars, but also just wars."

"If you disobey the law, even for a good cause, you should accept your punishment."

"If you work hard enough, you'll make a good living. If you are poor, you have only yourself to blame."

Freedom of speech is desirable, but not when it threatens national security.
However, government surveillance and threats are the exception. What normally operates day by day is the quiet dominance of certain ideas, the ideas we are expected to hold by our neighbors, our employers, and our political leaders; the ones we quickly learn are the most acceptable. The result is an obedient, acquiescent, passive citizenry—a situation that is deadly to democracy.

If one day we decide to reexamine these beliefs and realize they do not come naturally out of our inborn feelings or our spontaneous desires, are not the result of independent thought on our part, and, indeed, do not match the real world as we experience it, then we have come to an important turning point in life. Then we find ourselves examining, and confronting, American ideology.

That is what I want to do in this book.

I will be dealing with political ideas. When political ideas are analyzed—issues like violence in human nature, realism and idealism, the best forms of government or whether there should be government at all, a citizen’s obligation to the state, and the proper distribution of wealth in society—we are in the area of political theory, or political philosophy. There is a list of famous political thinkers who are traditionally used to initiate discussion on these long-term problems, including Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Madison, Rousseau, Marx, and Freud.

There are endless arguments that go on in academic circles about what Plato or Machiavelli or Rousseau or Marx really meant. Although I taught political theory for twenty years, I don’t really care about that. I am interested in these thinkers when it seems to me their ideas are still alive in our time and can be used to illuminate a problem. Readers wanting to know more about some of these writers and the literature will find references in the endnotes of this book. I will assume that our job is not to interpret the great theories, but to think for ourselves.

I will go back and forth from theory to historical fact (including very recent events), hoping to clarify issues of urgent concern to our time. I will not be too respectful of chronology, but will wander back and forth across the centuries, from Machiavelli to Kissinger, from Socrates in an Athenian prison to a Catholic priest in a Connecticut jail, making whatever connections I find useful.

There is in orthodox thinking a great dependence on experts. Because modern technological society has produced a breed of experts who understand technical matters that bewilder the rest of us, we think that
indeed, it is impossible to be neutral. in a world already moving in
certain directions, where wealth and power are already distributed in
certain ways, neutrality means accepting the way things are now. it is
a world of clashing interests—war against peace, nationalism against
internationalism, equality against greed, and democracy against elitism—and it seems to me both impossible and undesirable to be neutral
in those conflicts.

writing this book, i do not claim to be neutral, nor do i want to be.
these are things i value, and things i don’t. i am not going to present
ideas objectively if that means i don’t have strong opinions on which
ideas are right and which are wrong. i will try to be fair to opposing
ideas by accurately representing them. but the reader should know that
what appears here are my own views of the world as it is and as it should be.

i do want to influence the reader. but i would like to do this by the
strength of argument and fact, by presenting ideas and ways of looking
at issues that are outside the orthodox. i am hopeful that given more
possibilities people will come to wiser conclusions.

in my years of teaching, i never listened to the advice of people who
said that a teacher should be objective, neutral, and professional. all the
experience of my life, growing up on the streets of new york, becoming
a shipyard worker at the age of eighteen, enlisting in the air force in
the second world war, participating in the civil rights movement in the deep
south, cried out against that.

it seems to me we should make the most of the fact that we live in
a country that, although controlled by wealth and power, has openings
and possibilities missing in many other places. the controllers are gam-
ing that those openings will pacify us, that we will not really use them
to make the bold changes that are needed if we are to create a decent
society. we should take that gamble.

we are not starting from scratch. there is a long history in this
country of rebellion against the establishment, of resistance to or-
thodoxy. there has always been a commonsense perception that there
are things seriously wrong and that we can’t really depend on those
in charge to set them right.

this perception has led americans to protest and rebel. i think of the
boston bread rioters and carolina antebellum farmers of the eighteenth
century; the black and white abolitionists of slavery days; the working
people of the railroads, mines, textile mills, steel mills and auto plants
who went on strike, facing the clubs of policemen and the machine guns
of soldiers to get an eight-hour workday and a living wage; the women who refused to stay in the kitchen and marched and went to jail for equal rights; the black protesters and antiwar activities of the 1960s; and the protesters against industrial pollution and war preparations in the 1980s. In the heart of each movement brains are set stirring with new ideas, which live on through quieter times, waiting for another opportunity to ignite into action and change the world around us.

Dissenters, I am aware, can create their own orthodoxy. So we need a constant reexamination of our thinking, using the evidence of our eyes and ears and the realities of our experience to think freshly. We need declarations of independence from all nations, parties, and programs—all rigid dogmas.

The experience of our century tells us that the old orthodoxies, the traditional ideologies, the nearly tied bundles of ideas—capitalism, socialism, democracy—need to be untied, so that we can play and experiment with all the ingredients, add others, and create new combinations in looser bundles. We know as we come to the twenty-first century that we desperately need to develop new, imaginative approaches to the human problems of our time.

For citizens to do this or their own, to listen with some skepticism to the great thinkers and the experts, and to think for themselves about the great issues of today's world, is to make democracy come alive.

We might begin by confronting one of those great thinkers, Niccolò Machiavelli, and examining the connection between him and the makers of foreign policy in the United States.
CHAPTER TWO

Macchiavellian Realism and U.S. Foreign Policy: Mean and Ends


3. Ibid., Chap. 6, p. 56.

4. In the period after World War II, the term "realism" became known among theorists of international relations as meaning the recognition that "material interest" and "power" predominated in the foreign policy of nations. Political scientists Hans Morgenthau made this the center of his theory, explained in his book Politics Among Nations (Knopf, 1948), which became the most influential textbook of the postwar period. The "realist paradigm" is discussed at length and criticized in John Vasquez, The Prince of Power Politics (Karger, 1982).

5. Editorial, Wall Street Journal, Apr. 8, 1985. This same week, the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts rejected such "redemptions" when it overruled the appeal of a prisoner against nuclear weapons for "meeting, saying that the traditional public practice of using "disobedient conduct" or "violent" means as a check on unwarrantable power threatened rights of free speech and assembly.

6. Scholars, as is their habit, have always argued about Machiavelli and what he "meant," although the language of The Prince is quite simple and direct. Political philosopher Leo Strauss, in his Thoughts on Machiavelli (Free Press, 1959), believes that one cannot read Machiavelli directly, that we must look for hidden meanings. This approach is strongly criticized by Robert McShea in "Leo Strauss on Machiavelli," Western Political Quarterly, (Dec. 1969), who says, "The theory of concealed teaching and the rules for reading is used by Strauss in the exploration of Machiavelli's text with the intent for finding what that thinker purports to say that for reading preconceived notions into his writing."

7. The British political philosopher Isaiah Berlin has written about Machiavelli in The New York Review of Books, March 18, 1968, that he believed "one needed a ruling class of brave, resolute, intelligent, gifted men who knew how to seize opportunities and use them, and citizens who were adequately protected, patriotic, proud of their national epiphanes of mastery, pagan virtues. That is he Rome one must covet and conquer the world... Decadent states were conquered by vigorous invaders who retained the virtues." Berlin takes a kindly view of Machiavelli, saying that Machiavelli recognized the Christian virtues, which are different, but "leaves you to choose." This seems right to me. A writer who argues so powerfully for those "pagan virtues" hardly has a hand in our choosing. Of course, we can still choose, but he has tended the argument so it push our choice his way. J. H. Hexter, Yale historian, noted Machiavelli's chief concern is to state clearly, "the state," as "an instrument of exploitation, the mechani sm the prince uses to get who he wants." J. H. Hexter, "The Loom of Language"
Chapter One: Introduction: American Ideology

1. When Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union, he clearly grasped the idea that the giant American corporations had learned long ago: one did not have to monopolize the field to maintain control and allow for a role of competition within the oligarchic way to dominate. And so to institute some socialist "pluralism."

2. Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, in their book Manufacturing Consent (South End Press, 1989) argue powerfully that the function of the media in the United States today, not only in the United States "is to maintain and defend the economic, social and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and world." They document this with examples of how the press created certain historical images, with the Tex offensive during the Vietnam War, the litany against the Iran-Convoy affair of the Reagan years.

3. "God, Noble, in a remarkable essay, "Editors and Experts: Winning Papers (July-

4. All the does not believe consumers were alone but solve the problems in the area. "Others from the political spectrum cannot supply the deficiencies of the consumer."

5. La Le Cred, The Russian House (Kempf, 1982), 207.

Walter Benjamin, written in 1933 and 1934, the idea of "humanism, man, and art" which makes this point. Heussberg, in his book from