

*We don't have to swim against the currents of the world.
The momentum of history is on our side.*
President Clinton, December 8, 2000

- 9 The sweep of history that took us from Hiroshima in 1945 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 we termed a period of transition (see Albrow 1996: 75-96). It began and ended with references to “a new world order” but the language and imagery of the globe eventually eclipsed other ways of referring to the common condition and prospects of humankind. Global threat, global promise, woven together, became the story of the 1990s employed by the leaders of public opinion to persuade the world that globalization is both history and fate. The early political uses of globalization stories in the Clinton/Gore presidential campaign of 1992 (ibid. 72) became the dominant account of our time later in the decade. This was largely the result of the way a political genius refashioned the globalization story to suit American interests. When, as the Modern Age was emerging in the early seventeenth century, Bishop Bossuet (1687 [1681]) sought to persuade the French prince that universal history was worth studying, he told him it was not for the common people but only for rulers to read (Albrow 1996: 11). Four centuries later, the world’s rulers have turned to writing history for the education of the masses. [1] Commanding the grand narrative of the present has become a major tool of government and Clinton became its outstanding exponent. [2]
- 10 Clinton’s conviction that history was on his side was what used to be called “Whig,” where every past event led necessarily to the present, and the enlightened historian would show us the only way into the future. It demanded close collaboration with the social sciences, since they aimed to uncover the driving forces of change. The public history writers of today are still historicists in Karl Popper’s sense (Popper 1957; Albrow 1996: 97-100). They quarry the social sciences for data, trends and theories and then craft a story that appears to compel certain policy choices. Commanding the direction of history has enormous persuasive appeal. Recognizing that he had allowed himself to be sidetracked at the beginning of his first presidential term, Clinton returned for his second term eager for an underlying big idea. He found a congenial ally in the new British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. In a key meeting at Blair’s country residence on November 2, 1997, the two leaders and their teams converged on a centre-left programme, the Third Way, where globalization became the linking storyline for new policies in a new world (Blumenthal 2003: 308).
- 11 As it happens the crafting of the American version of globalization owed quite a lot to British influence, and arose in the context of some years of extensive exchanges between the American New Democrats and British New Labour. In terms of policy ideas, such as moving people from welfare dependency to work, tax credits, or urban renewal the flow was very much from the US to the UK because the Americans had a four year lead in practice. The British contribution was to the theory of the Third Way and its grounding in globalization. The team Blair assembled for his discussions with Clinton included Anthony Giddens, Director of the London School of Economics. [3] His *Beyond Left and Right* (1994) built on his earlier work on globalization (Giddens 1990; Albrow 1996: 98-9) and helped to persuade Americans that European radical theory could acknowledge the triumph of capitalism and help justify the centrist turn in their own politics that Clinton had initiated. It became another prop to the second term theme of bridge building across the Atlantic. Giddens adopted the American usage of *The Third Way* (1998) to help create a shared progressive leftist outlook and “to transcend both old style social democracy and neo-liberalism” (ibid. 26), not just in the English speaking countries but also more widely into the early years of the new Millennium. [4]
- 12 In January 1998, the White House assembled a “thinkers’ dinner,” one of a series the President hosted, this time with a focus on globalization. He opened it by declaring “I have to be able to tell the story of America in a progressive way” (Blumenthal 2003: 315; Kettle 1998:2-3). The brainstorming that followed underpinned his announcement “we have found the third way” in his State of the Union speech later that month and “we have moved into an information age, a global economy, a truly new world” (ibid. 377). [5] The speech managed to combine a globalization storyline with a litany of domestic achievements and a commitment to strengthening the social security system for the twenty first century (Waldman 2000: 216). It “reinvented” government (Osborne and Gaebler 1993), but it also projected a proactive global role, an extension of American power. Famously for Clinton there was no longer any division between foreign and domestic policies. This was the country that had won the Cold War and was built on the idea of creating the future. If globalization was the way, America had to lead the rest of the world along the path.
- 13 Both the Clinton and Blair versions of globalization perpetuated the Reagan/Thatcher free market verities but sought to soften the harsher nostrums like “there is no alternative” and “there is no such thing as society” with a concern for social justice. But the results of a Third Way approach to globalization depend on the global economic and strategic position of the country concerned. For Britain, throughout the Blair premiership, globalization justified programmes of domestic reform but also, at a

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