

A Roundtable on Michael Franczak, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*

Jason Colby, Dustin Walcher, Vanessa Walker, David Farber, Steven L.B. Jensen, and
Michael Franczak

Introduction to Franczak Roundtable

Jason Colby

In recent years, there has been no shortage of scholarly interest in the 1970s. Of the many superb studies that have appeared, I shall highlight but a few of my favorites: Jeremi Suri's *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* gives us a fresh account of Henry Kissinger, the decade's central diplomatic figure; Jefferson Cowie's *Stayin' Alive* explores how the decade's economic and political shifts impacted working peoples in the United States; Tim Borstelmann's *The 1970s* traces the parallel rise of personal liberties and neoliberal economics; and Sarah Snyder's *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War* reframes how we understand the international role of human rights in the late-twentieth century.¹ Yet as Michael Franczak shows us in *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*, we still have much to learn—particularly from history that didn't happen.

Franczak takes as his point of departure the New International Economic Order (NIEO)—a proposal introduced in May 1974 at the United Nations by the Group of 77 developing nations to radically restructure global economic power. Although the plan was never implemented, the challenge it posed to the Bretton Woods system, particularly due to OPEC's rhetorical support, forced a response from the United States and its European allies, which dominated the world's diplomatic agenda for years to come. In exploring that response, Franczak casts new light on familiar issues of the 1970s, such as the oil and food crises, the contested definition of human rights, and the emergence of neoconservatism and neoliberalism as political and economic frameworks, respectively. Using this approach, Franczak convincingly decenters the Cold War in order to excavate the roots of post-Cold War international relations. But he also implicitly opens broader questions, such as How do we deal with unsuccessful initiatives in international relations? As historians, we routinely emphasize context and contingency, but we generally shy away from counterfactual speculation. This is hardly surprising, as our interpretations are expected to rest upon primary evidence, which is unavailable when events *didn't* happen. Yet our certainty as historical narrators often elides the uncertainty with which our subjects experience their times. Put simply, historical actors, unlike historians, don't know how things will turn out, and they often give

a tremendous amount of thought and attention to matters that scholars later ignore—to their detriment. In this book, Franczak reminds us of this pitfall. The NIEO may never have been adopted as a framework for transforming the global economy, but it profoundly influenced discussions and debates that still loom large in international relations. Indeed, he makes a strong case that we cannot understand the developments of the decade without it.

As such, it is hardly surprising that the four reviewers find much to admire in *Global Inequality*. They praise its original perspective on the international questions of the 1970s, and they particularly credit Franczak with highlighting the influence of the Global South's challenge on the priorities and policies of the United States and its allies. Yet they also identify questions they wish Franczak had addressed. David Farber asks "why did the G-77 nations fail to leverage their power, allowing the NIEO challenge to be beaten back so easily?" (8). Stephen L. B. Jensen wonders whether greater attention to the 1960s might have highlighted larger continuities. Dustin Walcher acknowledges that "the fact that the NIEO ultimately failed suggests that U.S. resistance may have been at least partially responsible," but he notes that Franczak is largely silent on the overall efficacy of U.S. policy" (6)—highlighting the need for more research into the diplomacy of the Global South itself. For her part, Vanessa Walker praises Franczak's contribution to our understanding of US relations with both European allies and the G-77 nations in the 1970s, but wonders why Franczak does not draw upon the rich vein of recent scholarship on the role of Congress in shaping US policy, observing that "the lack of engagement with this literature leaves this book's inquiries isolated from a larger conversation about human rights politics, the late Cold War, and the importance of development in U.S. strategic thinking." (6)

Franczak is both reflective and engaging in his response. After acknowledging some of the book's blindspots, he adds to its interpretive framework by connecting it to his current area of international environmental governance, putting *Global Inequality* into a richer perspective. He also includes a thoughtful intellectual autobiography, recalling his early inquiries about why historians had ignored the NIEO. One senior scholar informed him that the NIEO was "interesting as a postcolonial document, perhaps, but never taken seriously by the great powers, resolutely opposed by the US, and thus dead-on-arrival in 1974." But then came Franczak's research. "When I went digging in FRUS for the

Nixon/Ford and Carter years (and later in those presidential libraries),” he notes, “I found something quite different. The NIEO was *everywhere* in US foreign policymaking in that decade, not just in international economic and UN policy discussions in the State Department but also Agriculture, Treasury, and the White House.” Herein lay a lesson for young scholars, within and beyond SHAFR: don’t let the assumptions of established historians discourage you from asking original questions. True, those questions can result in dead ends. But they can also lead you to primary sources that upend accepted narratives and produce new insights on historical developments we thought we understood.

Note:

1. Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021); Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Review of Michael Franczak, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*

Dustin Walcher

Change was a long time coming. There were demands for it at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference, the United States had led the resurrection of a liberal international order that enabled wealthy Western powers to reassert their control over the global economic order, even as their grip on colonial possessions slipped away. Great power control over new supranational economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank served to limit the degree of change in the distribution of power across national borders.

Less economically developed states across the Global South, both long-established and newly independent, bristled at those dynamics. The challenge came in developing a collective response capable of both effecting the redistribution of power within the international system and facilitating economic growth across the Global South.

The United Nations General Assembly provided a forum for such a project, in large part because each member state enjoyed equal voting rights within the body. The large bloc of states from the Global South—the G-77, established in 1964—could set the agenda and frame the terms of debate. Although General Assembly votes lacked the binding power of, for example, a Security Council resolution, for the traditional powers the use of the supranational body as a platform from which to call for substantial revisions to the world order was jarring.

The New International Economic Order (NIEO) was the product of those political forces. Perhaps because it ultimately failed, the NIEO has not received the attention it warrants from foreign relations scholars. Yet the issues at stake—food security, unstable commodity prices, the terms of trade, development assistance, energy access, and sovereign debt—were central to the international politics of the 1970s and early 1980s. The Global South’s demands compelled reactions from successive U.S. administrations—principally from Gerald Ford to Ronald Reagan. Those reactions are the subject of Michael Franczak’s well-written and well-conceived book analyzing the evolution of U.S. policy toward the NIEO and the country’s participation in the North-South dialogue.

Franczak asks two important questions. The first drives the bulk of the book’s narrative: “How did successive US

administrations respond to the South’s challenge, both inside and outside the various economic forums in which the NIEO was debated?” (2). The answer is complicated, and though Washington consistently resisted major concessions designed to address systemic inequality, albeit with varying levels of ferocity, the U.S. position evolved. Moreover, U.S. officials were often internally divided over the necessity or desirability of engaging with the NIEO.

Those internal divisions were especially prominent in the Ford administration. On the one hand, the economic team preached the gospel of market fundamentalism and effectively laid the groundwork for the later neoliberal turn. On the other hand, Henry Kissinger remained most interested in power politics, and, somewhat remarkably, appears as something of a moderate when engaging the NIEO. He was uninterested in making significant concessions, but, as Franczak points out, he understood “that the United States would gain nothing by countering the NIEO with a vision of the market that was unpopular even in developed countries” (55). He also saw opportunities to divide the G-77 by driving a wedge between OPEC states—which benefited from high oil prices—and their oil-importing allies, for whom high energy prices exacerbated economic challenges, including food insecurity.

The basic problem of food availability, which took center stage at the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome, offers an important early example of the Ford administration’s internal divisions. The free market champions, led in this case by Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz, opposed any food aid. Butz held that market incentives were sufficient to manage the global distribution of food.

Kissinger correctly understood that such a message had little chance of resonating in countries with significant numbers of impoverished and hungry people. Frustrated with the zealotry of the message of market orthodoxy, Kissinger declared, “I want to avoid the Protestant missionary approach. I don’t want to preach” (31). Instead, he wanted to maximize political advantage, in this case by driving a wedge between OPEC members and oil importers by highlighting the food issue. He was, in other words, willing to employ economic policy levers in the service of political objectives, whereas for Butz, spreading orthodox market structures constituted a critical foreign policy objective in itself. In that sense, Butz previewed the neoliberal turn.

The Ford administration also challenged the G-77 on its home turf: the United Nations. Neoconservative Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who had a short and rocky tenure as U.S. ambassador to the UN, was tapped for the assignment precisely because he was already a vocal critic of countries in the Global South, and Ford and Kissinger agreed that the Third World offensive at the UN was important and demanded a firm response. The fact that Moynihan was also a Kissinger critic was something that could be overlooked, provided that he proved effective at standing up to challenges to U.S. authority at the UN.

Moynihan more than lived up to his reputation, adopting an even more combative posture than Ford and Kissinger authorized—especially on the question of Zionism. That independent streak ensured that he would not last a year in the job. However, as interesting as the palace intrigue between Moynihan and Kissinger was, the more important point for our purposes is that the administration interpreted the G-77 as posing enough of a threat to U.S. interests that it sought out a combative UN ambassador to answer that challenge.

If Kissinger engaged to a greater degree than might have been expected with the NIEO’s concerns—albeit not out of any particular sympathy for them—Jimmy Carter ultimately adopted a more pragmatic stance—despite his compassion for the plight of poorer countries. To be sure, Carter’s background with the Trilateral Commission and

desire to manage an interdependent world were hallmarks of his administration. Additionally, Carter deployed allies with a record of concern about human rights, and the Global South more generally, most notably Father Theodore Hesburgh. However, while Carter was genuinely sympathetic, he insisted on retaining control over the levers supranational institutions used to distribute assistance. The maintenance of U.S. control was ultimately nonnegotiable.

In that critical respect, the United States remained in firm opposition to one of the NIEO's most basic objectives: to redistribute power within the international order. Moreover, despite its rhetoric, the Carter administration lacked a sense of urgency about its stated priority of eliminating global poverty. All in all, Franczak argues, the Carter approach "affirmed the South's status as beggars and recipients of charity rather than as genuine partners in a common project, as Vance and Carter once insisted" (172). The contrast with Kissinger is intriguing. "The irony," Franczak writes, "is that Kissinger may have been less sincere about his concern for the South's plight, yet he was much more willing to meet the South on its own terms in the dialogue. This mattered" (173).

The Reagan administration was neither sympathetic toward the plight of the South nor willing to meet the South on its own terms. As one Reagan Treasury official put it, "[u]ltimately the South wants our money. It's a scam" (182). Together with the Margaret Thatcher government, the Reagan administration hammered nails into the coffin of the North-South dialogue—a coffin that was firmly closed at the Cancún conference in 1981. The onset of the Mexican debt crisis a year later, and the contagion generated across Latin America, provided the opportunity for the Reagan administration to display its callousness toward poorer countries. To provide debt relief, the administration argued, would be to encourage moral hazard (189). Debtor countries should instead adopt austerity measures and throw themselves on the mercy of the market. Nixon and Ford's economic team would be proud.

Franczak's second question is this: "What was the North-South dialogue's legacy for U.S. foreign policy as it moved out of the crisis-ridden 1970s and toward a new era of neoliberalism, reform, intensive globalization, and eventually post-Cold War triumphalism?" (2). It leads him to somewhat opaque conclusions. "Between 1974 and 1982," he writes, "the North-South dialogue transformed U.S. foreign policy, but U.S. foreign policy did not transform the North-South dialogue [emphasis in original]" (187). The NIEO's failure ushered in the era of the Washington Consensus. "By the time the debt crisis hit, the consensus on markets, the state, and development in the United States, the IMF, and the World Bank had moved decisively in favor of the NIEO's greatest critics: the neoliberals and neoconservatives who began the 1970s on the fringes of the foreign policy establishment and came to dominate it in the 1980s and beyond" (190). At least until the 2008 global financial crisis, bipartisan U.S. administrations continued the neoliberal approach that triumphed under Reagan.

Though Franczak concentrates on U.S. foreign policy and consequently explores the dynamics of what is broadly understood as North-South diplomacy, the story he tells points toward other avenues for fruitful research, particularly in the area of South-South diplomacy. The story of countries across the Global South coming together around the NIEO's agenda and the negotiations that process entailed has yet to be thoroughly told. The divergent interests and material conditions within the G-77—a topic Franczak alludes to at critical points—is fascinating and significant in its own right.

The window Franczak opens on inequality, U.S. responses to the NIEO, and the North-South dialogue compels us to revise our macro-narrative of international affairs during the 1970s and 1980s. Cold War-centered

stories of détente, its breakdown, and ultimate Soviet decline remain critical to our overall understanding of the era, but they do not figure prominently in this narrative. Though this is not a book about ideas and policymaking in the Global South, it appropriately treats those dynamics as distinct and important in their own right.

Creating economic growth while rectifying inequality between states was a central strategic objective of the G-77. Though it ultimately failed, the NIEO constituted a frontal challenge to the U.S.-led international order. Consequently, the U.S. response to those dynamics itself comprises a profoundly important subject of analysis. Indeed, the fact that the NIEO ultimately failed suggests that U.S. resistance may have been at least partially responsible, though Franczak is largely silent on the overall efficacy of U.S. policy.

The NIEO comprised a frontal challenge to the underpinnings of the U.S.-led liberal international order. It sought nothing less than a fundamental realignment of resources and power within the international system. Those objectives were, in their own way, as challenging to the United States as anything the country faced in the second half of the twentieth century. Odds were long for success, and more work is needed to thoroughly analyze the dynamics of the NIEO itself. But Franczak clearly demonstrates the extraordinary significance of the issues involved for the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. Understanding international relations in the 1970s and 1980s demands reckoning with the events, ideas, and issues raised in the North-South dialogue.

Basic Human Needs and American Grand Strategy in the 1970s

Vanessa Walker

In May 1974, a diverse coalition of nations from the Global South and the developing world presented the UN General Assembly with a proposal for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). Their proposal sought to challenge Europe's and the United States' control of commodity prices, a symbol of the entrenched power and economic differentials in the existing world order. The NIEO was part of a larger, decade-long effort to rethink the systems that created global inequality, and it had far reaching implications for international relations and U.S. national security.

In *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*, Michael Franczak argues that the response of U.S. administrations from Nixon to Reagan to initiatives like the NIEO transformed U.S. international power in the late Cold War. U.S. responses to the developing world's growing assertiveness, he writes, "became an inflection point for some of the greatest economic, political, and moral crises of the 1970s, including the end of golden age liberalism and the return of the market, the splintering of the Democratic Party and the building of the Reagan coalition, and the rise of human rights in US foreign policy in the wake of the Vietnam War" (3). In particular, Third World challenges to the established economic order highlighted a new interdependence within the international system that required new U.S. policy initiatives.

Franczak uses the renegotiation of North-South power dynamics to reconsider the 1970s as a pivotal moment in the evolution of U.S. grand strategy away from Cold War binaries toward more multilateral approaches to the international system. He writes that the "NIEO brought global inequality to the forefront of US national security,

with lasting and visible effects on US politics and power” (3). Focusing predominantly on U.S.-Latin American relations and on international forums like the United Nations and Conference on International Economic Cooperation (CIEC), he shows that these new challenges from the Global South not only reshaped U.S. relations with the developing world, but also transformed and consolidated U.S. relations with Europe. “Rather than destroying US-European relations, the Third World’s challenge may have saved them, uniting developed countries around a political and economic consensus intended to sustain the postwar order” (37). This, then, is not a simple story of ascendant new powers, but also of consolidating existing hegemonies and structures of power in the international system.

In the early years of the 1970s, this process of consolidation took the form of new policies to leverage food power and commodity prices to court the NIEO coalition while attempting to split them from the OPEC countries and maintain US and European dominance over economic structures. Franczak notes that “for US foreign policy, OPEC’s advocacy for the NIEO upgraded the world food situation from a nuisance to a crisis. It also upgraded the US dominance in global food production from a burden to a powerful tool, at a time when traditional levers of US power were either ineffective or, as in the case of military intervention, potentially catastrophic” (22). Secretary of State Henry Kissinger responded creatively to the NIEO with a willingness to try new government interventions in international markets, such as a global system of grain reserves. These initiatives, designed to keep the United States at the helm of international economic policies, met with a tepid response from the NIEO coalition, which wanted more far-reaching structural changes.

Yet the real challenge to Kissinger’s approach came from within the United States. “For Kissinger,” Franczak writes, “the state’s economic power was above all a political lever, essential for domestic stability and international bargaining” (60). A growing number of officials within the Ford administration, however, advocated for new neoliberal approaches to these international economic problems. Rejecting Kissinger’s proposed interventions in the global economic system, they instead advocated removing “politics from economics by transferring the enforcement of discipline from individual countries to the IMF” (60).

This challenge to Kissinger’s strategy was most clearly embodied by Earl Butz, secretary of agriculture under both Nixon and Ford. Butz openly promoted removing the U.S. government from the management of the world food economy, a position that brought him into direct conflict with Kissinger, whose proposals for commodity programs were designed to win over the NIEO coalition. Butz was joined by other members of Ford’s premarket, antistate or “market fundamentalist” economic team, including Treasury Secretary William Simon and Alan Greenspan, a member of the president’s Economic Policy Board (15–16). The struggles between the secretary of state and Ford’s economic team embodied shifting currents within the Republican Party itself, which was moving away from Keynesianism and toward the neoliberal championing of market forces that would dominate the coming decade.

Moreover, a growing number of U.S. leaders saw this new North-South struggle as symbolic of a large ideological confrontation “between US liberalism and its anti-liberal Third World detractors” (10–11). Here Franczak challenges scholars to think about debates over détente as more than neoconservative antipathy for the Soviet Union. The

neoconservative critique of détente also arose in the context of a perceived need to defend American liberalism from attacks by socialists abroad and the new internationalist agenda within the Democratic Party. Franczak points to Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s tenure as ambassador to the UN as the vanguard of this neoconservative rejection of détente, arguing that “Moynihan’s attacks on antiliberalism and anti-Americanism at the UN brought him wide esteem from other right-wing liberals alienated by the Democratic Party’s apparent embrace of egalitarianism, multiculturalism and nonintervention” (83).

Moynihan’s “combative neoconservatism” further catalyzed an ongoing realignment in American domestic politics and “threatened Kissinger’s attempts to articulate an approach to the Third World that was more in line with western Europe’s” (65). While Kissinger prevailed in the face of Moynihan’s attacks in the short term, the secretary of state’s policies never garnered the necessary support within the Ford administration to be transformative. The limits of Kissinger’s ability to implement his vision revealed the growing power of neoconservative forces in shaping U.S. strategic thinking and the vital role that programs like the NIEO played in shaping the neoconservative foreign policy agenda.

Franczak also highlights how questions of North-South inequality shaped the United States’ growing focus on human rights as a central aspect of its foreign policy, giving much-needed attention to the economic foundations of Carter’s human rights agenda. Scholarship on Carter’s human rights policies has focused overwhelmingly on political rights and bodily integrity. Franczak offers a welcome emphasis on the foundations of Carter’s policies in pressing issues of economic equity, multilateralism, and interdependence. “Though remembered today for its censure of Southern Cone dictators,” he writes, “the [Carter] administration intended its human rights policy to act as a positive incentive as well. State Department officials believed that including basic needs in the definition of human rights would encourage regional cooperation on development and moderate the North-South dialogue” (12). Economic rights and basic human needs, while not getting top billing in administration rhetoric, merited sustained attention “because of their relevance for North-South relations,” and the Carter administration, particularly Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, promoted the concept of basic human needs, as well as social and economic rights, as a core element of the administration’s policies (133).

Franczak focuses much of his analysis of Carter’s policies on Latin America, “where human rights, development, and the North-South dialogue intersected more directly than anywhere else in the world” (117). He attributes much of Carter’s foreign policy vision in the region to two organizations—the Trilateral Commission and the Overseas Development Council. “The Trilateral Commission’s idea of an interdependent world divided not between East and West but between North and South was the starting point for Carter’s post-Vietnam foreign policy,” he declares, “while the ODC’s promotion of a model of development based on meeting ‘basic human needs’ became a major part of his administration’s approach to human rights” (12). Together, these organizations married an emphasis on multilateralism and interdependence with a human rights agenda that promoted a wide range of human rights, including economic and social rights.

Yet like Kissinger, Carter found his policies stymied by a combination of foreign dissatisfaction with the limited accommodations proposed and domestic divides that hampered the administration’s efficacy. Indeed,

Franczak also highlights how questions of North-South inequality shaped the United States’ growing focus on human rights as a central aspect of its foreign policy, giving much-needed attention to the economic foundations of Carter’s human rights agenda.

the parallels that Franczak draws between Carter's and Kissinger's attempts to accommodate the NIEO coalition in light of new forces of interdependence are one of the more surprising elements of his book. While key partners like Venezuela and Mexico were willing to work with Carter and applauded both his human rights and economic initiatives, they were also disappointed with the lack of structural change and the limited control ceded to the Global South in the development and governance of these programs.

"Carter's call for increased economic and political cooperation with the Third World proved persuasive enough in 1976," Franczak argues, "but his seeming inability to deal effectively with multiple security crises . . . as well as a stagnant economy impervious to the tools of the old Keynesian playbook—exhausted public support for development before his administration could really get started" (143).

Reagan's election and his appropriation of human rights for Cold War security imperatives ended the Carter administration's incorporation of basic human needs as part of the U.S. human rights agenda. His election also marked the termination of efforts to share power, however limited, with the developing world in international financial institutions.

Franczak's work raises many important questions and challenges scholars to look at the Global South in order to understand shifts in U.S. grand strategy during the 1970s. Yet it has several puzzling omissions. The most important of these is a more thorough examination of the role that Congress and its politics played in these policies and programs. Franczak often stresses the importance of domestic resistance, including congressional resistance, in limiting the more ambitious responses by various administrations to the NIEO. He writes that "in the age of interdependence, US foreign economic policy was stuck between Congress, beholden to corporate and labor lobbies, and capital, beholden to profit" (135), and he frequently points to poor congressional relations as one of the primary reasons Carter was unable to realize a more extensive reorientation of North-South relations. Yet he almost never presents Congress's specific concerns and responses to particular initiatives. Congress played an outsized role in the development and execution of foreign policy in all three 1970s administrations, and a greater attentiveness to congressional politics and perspectives would have strengthened the analysis in *Global Inequality* in crucial ways.

The reach of Franczak's analysis is also limited by a lack of engagement with recent literature on human rights in the 1970s and with new scholarship on the Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations. In contextualizing his work, Franczak draws primarily on literature from the early aughts. But in the past fifteen years, there has been enormous scholarly production on these topics, fueled by the new sources declassified from the Ford, Carter, and Reagan presidencies. The lack of engagement with this literature leaves this book's inquiries isolated from a larger conversation about human rights politics, the late Cold War, and the importance of development in U.S. strategic thinking.

Although Franczak's account leaves the exact nature of this transformation of U.S. politics and power a bit vague, he ultimately makes a compelling case for the need to bring the Global South into our conversations about U.S. grand strategy in the 1970s. Moreover, he raises important questions about the place of the political economy and international development in human rights scholarship from this period. This work makes clear that scholars should pay greater attention to the developing world and its concerns about structural inequality in understanding the 1970s as a watershed moment for America's global influence.

The United States and the New International Economic Order: The Dog That Didn't Bark

David Farber

According to conventional wisdom, Americans were reeling in the 1970s. The nation had lost the Vietnam War. Nixon had resigned to avoid sure impeachment. The OPEC oil embargo and subsequent oil shocks had forced Americans to face their dependence on foreign nations. Stagflation had ravaged paychecks and torn at the very fiber of the American dream. The Iran hostage crisis had shattered Americans' faith in their global power. This litany of despair led many Americans to fear that their nation had lost its way. *New York Times* editorial page editor John Oakes worried that "we as a people seem . . . to be foundering in uncertainty, to be unsure of ourselves in our relationships to each other and the world at large."¹

Such public lamentations were commonplace throughout the era. And in response to the turmoil of the decade, Americans turned on their leaders. In less than seven years, from August 1974 to January 1981, the United States went through four different presidents. A *Time* magazine cover story, "In Quest of Leadership," joked bitterly that if a space alien landed in the United States and demanded that he be taken to our leader, no one would know what to do.²

While not painting over the broad strokes of this dark national portrait, in recent years a number of historians have challenged this picture of the 1970s.³ Thomas Borstelmann, in *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (2010), argues that Americans were indeed reeling in the 1970s, but more significantly, the nation also underwent fundamental and long-lasting changes.

First, Borstelmann argues that in the 1970s, Americans broadly accepted "formal equality" for the first time in the nation's history. The brutal racial and gender hierarchies that had previously ruled the American people were no longer legal; rapid change, he insists, ensued. Second, he argues that in the 1970s, Americans—and, indeed, much of the world—increasingly embraced "free-market economics as the preferred means for resolving political and social problems."⁴ These twin engines of change produced a neoliberal era that sanctified individual choices, a merit-based society, and, at the same time, gross economic inequality.⁵

In a related vein, Daniel Sargent, in *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (2015), portrays the era not as a time of American despair and absent national leadership but instead, as his title indicates, as a nervy era of elite-led global strategic transformation. Above all, he argues, American leadership maneuvered "to cede the responsibility for managing the world economic order it has exercised since the 1940s—not to foreign nation-states but to integrating markets."⁶ Sargent insists that it was this rapidly accelerating "interdependence" (as most elites then referred to what we now call globalization), more than domestic crises, that drove historic change in the 1970s and created the strategic limits within which American policy elites operated.

This historiographic turn is both embraced and deepened in Michael Franczak's important new book, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s* (2022). Franczak, like many authors of the new U.S.-oriented histories of the 1970s, focuses readers' attention on the advent and meaning of interdependence or globalization. His work, however, is among the first to assess how interdependence in the 1970s affected U.S. relations not with the most economically developed nations with which it competed, most notably Japan and Germany, but instead

with the Global South nations upon which the United States depended for natural resources and profitable capital investment.

In taking on this broad subject, Franczak makes a pointed argument. He claims that “policy debates and decisions in the North-South dialogue were pivotal moments in the histories of three ideological trends—neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and human rights—that would form the core of the United States post-Cold War foreign policy”(3). All three of these U.S.-led trends, even U.S. human rights policy, Franczak concludes, contributed to “the reconstruction of an essentially Anglo-American market-based world system that had very little to do with the [economic redistribution goals of the] NIEO [New International Economic Order]—the political, economic, and intellectual defeat of which enabled the new system’s development and spread” (13). This U.S. government-led defeat of the NIEO, a policy regime championed by a host of Global South leaders, is at the heart of Franczak’s re-conceptualizing of the history of U.S. foreign policy and globalization in the pivotal decade of the 1970s.

Franczak argues that the defeat of the Global South’s economic redistributionist demands in the 1970s and the United States government’s embrace of neoliberalism was by no means a certainty. Nor, he insists, was the eventual defeat of the NIEO without consequences for U.S. foreign policy. He writes in his lucid introduction that “the NIEO convinced realists in the Ford administration and liberal internationalists in the Carter administration of the necessity of North-South cooperation on energy, food, and other commodities, but it also galvanized neoliberals who sought to return international economics to the free market” (3).

Franczak portrays the international 1970s as an era of almos—it was a time when the Global South almost formed an alliance; it was a time when the United States government, pressured by the South, almost conceded that the gross economic inequality in the Global South produced by a long history of merciless exploitation by imperialist and neo-imperialist powers had to be rectified by redistributionist measures; it was a time when global power was almost radically rebalanced. But as he explains, none of those efforts came to fruition. The dog didn’t bark. Instead, the United States and other key nations rejected the zero-sum statist redistributionist approaches championed by the advocates of NIEO and instead embraced market-based approaches to global development.

This account of “almost but not quite” begins on May 1, 1974, with the unveiling of the New International Economic Order at the United Nations General Assembly. The NIEO doctrine was championed at the UN by the G-77, the group of developing nations that had formed a decade earlier after the first United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and had demanded “a new and just world economic order.”

That decade-long demand had been given a new salience by the increased number of nations that had joined the G-77 and, critically, by the success of the oil embargo sprung on the world by Arab members of OPEC. The subsequent quadrupling of oil prices revealed the potential power natural resource producers had over the global economy and most especially over wealthy nations. Venezuelan president and OPEC leader Carlos Andres Perez laid out the implications of the embargo: “What we aim is to take advantage of this opportunity when raw materials,

and energy materials primarily, are worth just as much as capital and technology in order to reach agreements that will ensure fair and lasting balances” (2). Deng Xiaoping, speaking for Mao at the UN, threw China’s support behind the NIEO and the effort to leverage the Global South’s resources to gain a greater share of the world’s wealth: “What was done in the oil battle should and can be done in the case of other raw materials” (7). The game was afoot.

On the U.S. side, Franczak makes it clear that the irrepressible Henry Kissinger expected to be the frontman during the last years of the Nixon administration and throughout the Ford presidency. And Kissinger meant to play ball with the NIEO rebels, even as he slyly maneuvered to limit OPEC nations’ economic power and influence. In 1975, he explained his game plan to the dubious U.S. ambassador to the UN, Daniel Patrick Moynihan: “Our

Franczak portrays the international 1970s as an era of almos—it was a time when the Global South almost formed an alliance; it was a time when the United States government, pressured by the South, almost conceded that the gross economic inequality in the Global South produced by a long history of merciless exploitation by imperialist and neo-imperialist powers had to be rectified by redistributionist measures; it was a time when global power was almost radically rebalanced.

basic strategy must be to hold the industrialized powers behind us and to split the Third World . . . Bloc formation in the Third World can be inhibited only if we focus attention on practical measures in which they have a tangible stake” (74). To do that, Kissinger was willing to offer—or, at least, to appear to offer—the non-OPEC nations of the Global South an array

of concessions, including support for their exports, IMF guarantees, and promises of direct capital investment in their nascent industries.

Franczak hedges on how serious Kissinger was in making such offers. To some extent Kissinger meant what he said, especially when it came to providing direct support, including food relief, to the Global South. But Franczak provides powerful evidence that Kissinger never meant to facilitate a new international economic order. Instead, “his goal was to hold on to the old one” dominated by the United States (77). Still, Kissinger was willing to play ball with the NIEO advocates.

Franczak’s portrait of Kissinger complements current historiographic trends.⁷ The Kissinger seen here is far from the monster portrayed in Greg Grandin’s old school polemic, *Kissinger’s Shadow* (2015), for example, or in many earlier biographies. Rather, he is shown as an able strategist, a flexible and pragmatic if not always economically sophisticated realist who is willing to yield a little to anyone when measures are needed to maintain American power. Franczak also underscores that during his years working under both Nixon and Ford, Kissinger had a great deal of leeway in managing U.S. relations with the Global South. His years in power, which ended only in January 1977, marked the high point in the NIEO advocates’ negotiations with the United States for global rebalancing.

In the post-Kissinger years, other trends, interests and events diminished the already limited influence of the NIEO advocates. Some resistance to the economic demands of the Global South was offered by Moynihan, whom Franczak credits with bringing a neoconservative approach to the fore during his short tenure as UN ambassador under Gerald Ford. Moynihan certainly rejected the somewhat fashionable U.S. sympathy for the governments of developing nations that was prevalent on the U.S. Left in the early and mid-1970s. He also rejected what he called the “authoritarian majority in the [UN] General Assembly,” and he saw little need to meet the various demands of the G-77, whether economic or geopolitical, halfway—or, really, in any way.

While Franczak does not emphasize the point, Moynihan’s public disdain for the proclamations and

demands of the G-77, and the Global South more generally, was widely popular among the American electorate. While such popular sentiments meant little to Henry Kissinger or to many members of the national security elite, the politicians who ultimately commanded such operators *did* recognize the relevance of public opinion—a factor that Franczak, along with many of us who write about foreign relations and national security, too often downplay or even ignore.

Well before the advent of the Reagan administration, U.S. foreign policy had turned directly against the kind of demands laid out in the NIEO of 1974. The Carter administration did not even offer the kind of lip service that Henry Kissinger had. Franczak convincingly lays out the Carter administration's plans:

First, Carter downgraded the developing countries' emphasis on global structural inequalities in favor of addressing the immediate (and less political) problems of basic human needs. Second, Carter brought back the Trilateral Commission's optimistic plan for joint OECD-OPEC funding for development, which had largely failed when Kissinger tried it. Third, Carter promised to transcend the North-South dialogue by rejecting slogans and instead improving regional and bi-lateral relations, especially with the richer countries in Latin America (113).

Franczak explains that Carter, unlike Kissinger, was genuinely concerned about creating a more moral, human-rights based international system but that his vision differed fundamentally from the demands outlined by Global South supporters of the NIEO. Carter believed that state-guaranteed individual freedoms would lead to economic progress within nations, while, Franczak concludes, the G-77 nations emphasized the need “for the economic rights of states” (116). In this critical sense, the Carter administration's approach to international economic reform, while far more humane, was much closer to the approach that would be taken by the Reagan administration.

The Reagan administration, as is well known, categorically rejected the underlying premises of the NIEO. This rejection was bluntly laid out by Reagan ally Margaret Thatcher: “The intractable problems of Third World poverty, hunger, and debt would not be solved by misdirected international intervention, but rather by liberating enterprise, promoting trade—and defeating socialism in all its forms” (186). Less than a decade after the unveiling of the NIEO at the United Nations, neoliberalism ruled Anglo-American elite policymaking, as it would well into the twenty-first century.

Overall, Franczak clearly charts the narrative arc of American foreign policy elites' approach to the Global South-led NIEO challenge to the economic power of the “North.” He makes the case, as well, that for at least a few years, American policymakers took the NIEO challenge seriously and placed North-South issues on the front burner. He also, throughout the text, shows American policymakers' misgivings about and downright opposition to the statist international economic reforms laid out by the NIEO advocates during the 1970s.

Thus, while a figure like Earl Butz, secretary of agriculture under both Nixon and Ford, is rarely given a star turn by historians of the era, Franczak portrays him as a stalwart market-oriented champion of American global agricultural interests and an able opponent of Kissinger's accommodating stance toward the redistributive demands of the Global South. Franczak shows little sympathy for Butz or other anti-NIEO U.S. policymakers, but he has nonetheless contributed to an accounting of neoliberal—or simply pro-market—advocacy within U.S. policymaking elites—advocacy that took place well before the

inauguration of Ronald Reagan.

Less well explained in *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s* is what happened within the Global South. Why did the G-77 nations fail to leverage their power, allowing the NIEO challenge to be beaten back so easily? In 1974, following OPEC's demonstration of its power, members of the G-77 really *did* think they could force rich nations to redistribute economic wealth. As Pakistani UN official Sartaj Azizi recalls, “We all felt very good and we agreed that . . . the New International Economic Order could become a reality in a few years.”⁸ While Franczak ably explains the twists and turns of U.S. foreign policy elites' approaches to the NIEO, he does not write much about the NIEO advocates' countermoves or changing economic perspectives.

Franczak cannot really be faulted for the relative absence of the Global South perspective. He never claimed he was writing such a book, and researching an international history of North-South relations in the 1970s would be extremely difficult and time consuming. (It would probably require an international team of scholars, and even then, source material would likely be a huge problem).⁹ Still, readers of *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s* might be frustrated both by the relative lack of the NIEO side of the North-South conflict during the 1970s and early 1980s and by the author's decision not to explain more fully why, during that time, the G-77 nations did so little to ally with each other and counter the power of the world's wealthy nations.

Although more analysis of the Global South's perspective and tactical moves would have usefully enlarged the scope—and obviously the scale—of *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*, Franczak has captured a critical moment in the balance of global power. Even as Americans in the 1970s often felt under siege both domestically and internationally, he has done well to remind us that American hegemony during that era was tested, but it was not by any means defeated.¹⁰

Notes:

1. For this quote and many like it, see David Farber, “The Torch Had Fallen,” in *America in the 70s*, ed. Beth Bailey and David Farber (Lawrence, KS, 2004), 10–11.
2. Farber, “The Torch Had Fallen,” 11.
3. Two very different sorts of books introduced a range of these complexities: Bailey and Farber, *America in the 70s*; and Niall Ferguson, Charles S. Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel J. Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge, MA, 2011).
4. Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton, NJ, 2012), 4.
5. This story of a bipartisan turn to neoliberal ideas and policies in the U.S. domestic sphere is convincingly carried forward in Lily Geismer's *Left Behind: the Democrats' Failed Attempt to Solve Inequality* (New York, 2022).
6. Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford, UK, 2015), 2.
7. See, for example, the contextualized Kissinger portrayed in Jeremi Suri, *Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).
8. Quoted in Paul Adler, *No Globalization without Representation* (Philadelphia, PA, 2021), 27.
9. I am looking forward to reading a related collaborative effort edited by R. Joseph Parrott and Mark Atwood Lawrence, *The Tricontinental Revolution: Third World Radicalism and the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK, 2022).
10. My thanks to Beth Bailey, Richard Immerman, and Sheyda Jahanbani for their thoughtful comments on this piece.

Review of Michael Franczak, *Global Inequality and US Foreign Policy in the 1970s*

Steven L. B. Jensen

Which version of the United States will show up at United Nations meetings, conferences or international summits is a question that time and again has befuddled UN officials and diplomats from other states that have been involved in negotiations in multilateral forums. The recent dramatic political shifts—within a brief time frame—from the Obama to the Trump and Biden administrations were felt across the whole United Nations system and have been just one example of how far the pendulum can swing when it comes to U.S. multilateral diplomacy.

Consistency in diplomatic engagements can be a source of credibility and effectiveness. The United States has not always been characterized by being consistent, instead its inconsistencies could frequently be mitigated somewhat by the political, military and financial weight that the country carried within the multilateral system itself. There was political leverage to conduct everything from course correction to mere symbolic gestures—e.g., statements in support of the status quo—in real time in front of the eyes of the international community. There is without a doubt a larger history about the United States and the United Nations that can be written from these perspectives.

With *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*, Michael Franczak has written a rich and wide-ranging book that goes to the heart of these patterns of U.S. engagement. It covers the period from 1974 to 1982, a relatively short time period that nevertheless contained enough international upheaval to enable a reshaping of U.S. foreign policy related to the domains of global economic order, development aid and humanitarian responses.

The thematic areas covered in the book, which include the global food crisis (1972–1975), the New International Economic Order (NIEO) process, debt, energy, science and technology, human rights, basic needs and more, illustrate the range of Franczak's analysis. Major international conferences and summits effectively serve as hooks to capture the evolution of strategies and policy positions within the different U.S. presidential administrations. These major gatherings include the 1974 World Food Conference, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) sessions (1972, 1976 and 1979), the Conferences on International Economic Cooperation (1975 and 1977) and the Cancún Summit (1981). This approach helps to highlight interactions with external actors that were in dialogue with and/or challenged U.S. views throughout the period in question.

The wide cast of characters diversifies the narrative as Franczak tracks the North-South and Trans-Atlantic dimensions of the story. The main actors on the U.S. side are Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Jimmy Carter, Theodore Hesburgh, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Ronald Reagan, as well as numerous officials and advisors in the various presidential administrations during the period covered. In supporting yet still critical roles we find a wide number of Global South actors, such as the Algerian foreign minister, Abdelaziz Bouteflika; the Jamaican prime minister, Michael Manley; and presidents Carlos Andrés Pérez from Venezuela and José Lopez-Portillo from Mexico, as well as European politicians ranging from European Community president Sicco Mansholt

from the Netherlands to Helmut Schmidt, Willy Brandt and Margaret Thatcher.

In one scene dating back to 1969, Kissinger is quoted as telling Chile's foreign minister that "Nothing important can come from the South. The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes to Tokyo. What happens in the South is of no importance." Valdés' response was: "You know nothing of the South" (43–44). The coarseness of Kissinger's viewpoint aside, the exchange feels emblematic of U.S. policy positions covered throughout the book. They often missed the point raised and allowed major global issues to drift rather than address them. In the end, the United States reached a different political destination from the great variety of international public policy ideas or humanitarian crisis response proposals that were put forward during the 1970s by entrenching the neoliberal economic system that became apparent from the early 1980s. To a hammer everything becomes a nail.

Franczak tracks this trajectory and uses it to reach a very fair conclusion. "Contrary to prominent US foreign policy boosters and critics alike, I conclude that the greatest threat to the United States global leadership and prosperity is not Americans' populism or isolationism but the gross maldistribution of income facilitated by political elites over the past four decades" (13). Inequality thereby sits at the core of both the short-term and long-term aspects of this 1970s story.

Franczak has a keen eye when it comes to observing how little changed in the global domain, while pinpointing what actually did change in other arenas. The latter relate mainly to U.S. politics and society itself. "Although US foreign policy did not change the NIEO's character, the NIEO changed the character of US foreign policy. Policy debates and decisions in the North-South dialogue were pivotal moments in the histories of three ideological trends—neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and human rights—that would form the core of the United States' post-Cold War foreign policy" (3).

Franczak thereby gives significant historical weight to the NIEO, but it is one of the best features of the book that the NIEO story is not presented in isolation but in a much broader contemporary context. Interestingly, as Christian O. Christiansen has documented, the specific term "global inequality," featured in the book's title, appears to have been birthed in the context of the World Food Crisis of 1972–1975.¹ Franczak does not seem to be aware of this conceptual connection, but he convincingly elevates the importance of the food crisis in how we should understand the global history of the 1970s. I also found his dual analysis of the food and energy crises of the early to mid-1970s particularly illuminating. It enlarges our picture of the decade.

While Franczak broadens the contemporary context, his approach could have benefited from more historical depth—particularly from engaging more with the 1960s as a historical backdrop. The need for additional explanatory background here points me to a larger discussion about how the international history of the 1970s should be written. There is a tendency towards histories that are rather self-contained within that decade. However, it is worth having more of a debate about how engaging with U.S. multilateral diplomacy in the 1960s—through the political ecosystem of the United Nations—would provide us with a more systematic analysis of U.S. diplomacy and foreign policy engagements in the 1970s.

It is sometimes a little too easy for historians of U.S.

diplomacy to break up stories in different pieces based on presidential administration timelines. They should do more to recognize that a large part of the world observes and engages with the United States through a “continuity lens,” viewing the nation as a longtime state actor in the multilateral system. The global issues that Franczak examines have more longevity and continuity within this system than the typical U.S. chronologies and historiographical approaches indicate. Perspectives matter here.

Two examples can help illustrate this point. Many of the 1970s international political actors from the Global South and from Europe mentioned in the book were actually trying to respond to political questions or challenges raised earlier by the United States at the United Nations. In 1961, John F. Kennedy had, with much rhetorical fanfare, declared the 1960s the “Development Decade.” During the second half of the 1960s, the international community was already exhausted trying to deal with the implications of this proposal. As the 1968 UNCTAD Report *Towards a Global Strategy for Development* stated in its opening paragraph, “A development decade without a development policy. No wonder its results have been so meagre, for actually there was no policy at all—in the sense of a series of converging measures involving concerted action by the industrial centres and the peripheral countries to tackle the problem of development.”²

The laborious task of negotiating and defining global development strategy and policy, while addressing the multitude of emerging crises as identified by a variety of state actors, seemed to have had much less high-level attention in different presidential administrations. It was much easier to find ways of delegitimizing someone else’s points, including their risk analysis of pending multiple international crises, than to engage in frank political problem-solving. On this matter, Franczak certainly offers a critical assessment of U.S. foreign policy within the time frame he focuses on, but his coverage of substantive issues could benefit from a look further back in time.

A good example of the importance of looking further back in history is the New International Economic Order process. It does not belong solely to the 1970s; its history is longer and involves serious and deep-seated issues that had been troubling the international system for well over two decades. The NIEO was an imperfect response to these issues. We might look somewhat differently at some of the global actors – e.g. from the global south - and policy proposals involved in trying to reform the international economic order if earlier decades were more carefully examined. Greater attention to this deeper history would also enable us to say more about the fluctuations and inconsistencies in U.S. multilateral engagements and the political costs they incurred for the United States and for the international community.

My second example relates to the centrality of human rights in 1970s U.S. foreign policy and in U.S. engagements with Global South actors. It was a key group of states from the Global South that during the 1960s brokered the political, diplomatic and legal breakthrough for international human rights. It was their determined efforts that secured the international recognition for human rights that the United States relied on during the following decade.

These Global South actors saw the international human rights project as playing a vital part in mutually benefiting broader issues such as collective security, peacekeeping, reform of international trade and aid and multilateralism itself. The United States contributed remarkably little to this political breakthrough for human rights. Nevertheless, there was, as Franczak

shows, a striking degree of condescension from U.S. diplomatic actors on human rights across several of the U.S. presidential administrations in the 1970s as they asserted ownership of the project (and claimed, as it would turn out, that they had originated it).

The connection between the 1960s and 1970s here is that the failure of diplomatic and political imagination in one historical context can have a spill-over effect on a later period. Opportunities and progress were not consolidated and carried over. Part of the reason is that the United States during the 1960s was still not yet ready for an international human rights project with what it entailed. This would only come gradually. This is also an aspect of the global history of the 1970s that Franczak could have given more attention to.

Franczak’s analysis of the Carter administration’s promotion of the basic needs strategy for development shows the strength of the book’s approach, which entails moving across a range of policy initiatives and areas. He writes that “key developing countries remained unconvinced that Carter’s emphasis on basic needs was not a tactic to avoid a discussion of structural issues” (144). There is plenty of evidence that this skepticism had merit. When G77 proposals emerged on establishing a separate commission on debt, the U.S. response was that it was “Washington’s hope that ‘the North-South dialogue would address the real issues of development [i.e., basic needs] rather than engage in sterile rhetoric’” (155).

It may be that the debt commission proposal was not the best approach to negotiations, but to reduce the positions of a wide range of international leaders to mere “sterile rhetoric” and to confidently assert that the “real issues of development” could be reduced to “basic needs” shows a failure of diplomatic imagination and serious shortcomings on the part of the messenger here—i.e., the United States. It should be mentioned that there would be plenty to criticize the Global South or European counterparts for. However, that is not the focus of this story.

The main focus of *Global Inequality* is American foreign policy in the 1970s. And on this topic Michael Franczak has written a stimulating book, rich in detail, which convincingly places global inequality—and how it is produced and ignored—at the center of the story. Franczak shows that global inequality is an important part of the political legacies of the 1970s.

Notes:

1. Christian Olaf Christiansen, “The Making of Global Inequality: A Conceptual History, 1945–1980,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 16, no. 2 (Dec. 2021): 83–107.
2. TD/3/Rev.1: UNCTAD (1968). “Towards a Global Strategy for Development, Report by the Secretary-General of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to the Second Session of the Conference”, United Nations Publications, New York, p. 1.

Author’s Response

Michael Franczak

I would first like to thank David Farber, Dustin Walcher, Vanessa Walker, and Steven Jensen for their thoughtful engagement with my book, and Andrew Johns for organizing and making this roundtable possible. SHAFR has been my scholarly home for nearly a decade now, especially since two postdocs (2018–22) and a career change took me farther and farther away from history departments and historians. SHAFR friends and colleagues

were instrumental at every step of the process, from the first revisions of a still-warm dissertation to the last look at final proofs. Thus, it is a tremendous honor to have *Global Inequality* the subject of a roundtable by my SHAFR colleagues—the audience I had in mind while I wrote the book, and whose estimates of its contributions I value the most.

Two things led me to write *Global Inequality*. The first was serendipitous. I entered a PhD program in 2012, having written an undergraduate thesis on the U.S.-UK construction of the post-World War II global economic order (“multilateralism with an American face,” as I called it). The following year, researchers in the Treasury Department stumbled across gold: the previously unseen “Bretton Woods transcripts,” which gave us, for the first time, an accurate account of what was said, by whom, at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference establishing the IMF and World Bank.¹ Contrary to the old story—the one I had just reproduced—developing countries spoke loudly and often at Bretton Woods. Dollar hegemony, quotas and voting power, protections for the poorest countries: these were evergreen issues! And they were baked into the heart of the postwar economic order, at the top of which sat the United States. As David Walcher, speaking of the NIEO, opens his review: It was a long time coming.

The second thing that convinced me to write *Global Inequity* was reading and discussing the newest books in U.S. foreign relations and international history as a Ph.D. student. In 2013–14, when I was looking for a dissertation topic, there was a rash of new books that analyzed the 1970s as a distinct decade and a turning point for U.S. foreign policy. With the notable exception of Daniel Sargent’s *A Superpower Transformed*, the NIEO never merited more than a cursory mention in these works.² Why?

One answer (given to me by a senior scholar) was that there was not much more to say: the NIEO was interesting as a postcolonial document, perhaps, but was never taken seriously by the great powers, was resolutely opposed by the United States, and was thus dead on arrival in 1974. However, when I went digging in FRUS for the Nixon/Ford and Carter years (and later, in those presidential libraries), I found something quite different.³

The NIEO was *everywhere* in U.S. foreign policymaking in the 1970s, not just in international economic and UN policy discussions in the State Department, but also in the Agriculture Department, the Treasury Department, and the White House. It consumed the energies of Henry Kissinger in the last two-and-a-half years of his career, desperate as he was to restore legitimacy to the U.S.-led order, and it prompted the inclusion of social and economic concerns in Jimmy Carter’s human rights policy. It was at the World Bank; it was at the think tanks; and it became linked to issues as disparate as the Panama Canal and apartheid. The question I had to answer, then, was: What did it all mean for U.S. foreign policy?

As I completed the dissertation and then the book, working on the NIEO became a much less lonely endeavor. Over the last decade, the NIEO has gone from virtual obscurity to a regular subject of panels at SHAFR and the AHÁ.⁴ I frequently meet younger colleagues who are writing dissertations on different aspects of the NIEO, from country- and region-specific studies to related processes like the New International Information Order. As the reviewers point out, key questions about global South politics and alliances remain, and I discuss some of them below.

What’s more, scholars’ rediscovery of the NIEO has turned a new generation of activists and leaders on to its ideas and spirit. The left-leaning group Progressive International recently launched a global process to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the New International Economic Order, including plans to develop a twenty-first century

NIEO that the G77 can bring to the UN General Assembly in 2024.⁵

I am pleased that each reviewer found something different to like in *Global Inequality*. For David Farber, the “star turn” given to Earl Butz and other anti-NIEO policymakers shows that neoliberalism in U.S. foreign policy was on the way “well before the inauguration of Ronald Reagan.” While Farber describes *Global Inequality* as an “account of almost but not quite,” Vanessa Walker sees a story of “consolidating existing hegemonies and structures of power in the international system.” Walker also finds that *Global Inequality* brings “much needed attention to the economic foundations of Carter’s human rights agenda,” which was my intention. Stephen Jensen finds the “dual analysis of the food and energy crises . . . particularly illuminating” and thinks the basic needs chapters showed the book’s strength “in moving across a range of policy issues and areas.” Finally, Dustin Walcher compliments the use of global inequality as a framing device (or “window”) for understanding U.S. foreign policy and international affairs in that decade, which means the book delivers on its title.

Each reviewer also identifies one or more areas where he or she feels the book falls short. Most directly, Walker identifies “several puzzling omissions” in *Global Inequality*, namely, the role of Congress and “engagement with recent literature on human rights in the 1970s and new scholarship on the Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations.” On Congress, which played such an important role in developing and advocating for the basic needs paradigm, I plead guilty. On human rights and the Ford, Carter, and Reagan administrations, my response is more complicated. In articles for *Cold War History* (2018) and *Diplomatic History* (2019), I use key episodes from the Ford and Carter chapters to mark interventions in the literature on Carter and human rights, the oil crisis, neoliberalism and neoconservatism, and the new history of the 1970s.⁶ Moving these discussions from chapters to articles was a narrative choice (though, I realize now, perhaps not the wisest). I hope readers interested in those debates can see past this defect (and find my articles!).

Others identify omissions of content or perspective which could have strengthened the book. Jensen wishes that I had engaged more with the 1960s as a backdrop. I do, too. Referring to the lack of U.S. leadership in human rights during that decade, he writes perceptively that “the connection between the 1960s and 1970s here is that the failure of diplomatic and political imagination in one context can have a spill-over effect on a later period.” He also notes that the NIEO “does not belong solely to the 1970s”—although this is precisely why I started *Global Inequality* in July 1944, at the Bretton Woods conference. Indeed, in the introduction I sketch the 1950s and 60s origins of “North” and “South” as concepts within U.S. foreign policy, which I consider a novel contribution to the history of the NIEO, North or South.

Finally, Farber suggests that some readers “might be frustrated . . . by the relative lack of the NIEO side of the North-South conflict during the 1970s and early 1980s.” Walcher also wishes the book said more about the “diverging interests” within the G77—the OPECs and the “no-PECs”—that cracked the NIEO coalition apart. He writes that “the story of countries across the Global South coming together around the NIEO’s agenda and the negotiations that process entailed has yet to be thoroughly told.” While it is true that the South’s story has not yet been told, *Global Inequality* in fact distinguishes itself from other works on the NIEO by telling the (American) story *through* the negotiations.

Major North-South negotiations the book covers include the UN Conference on Trade and Development of 1972 (UNCTAD III), the UN Sixth Special Session and

World Food Conference (1974), the Seventh Special Session (1975), the CIEC (1975-77), UNCTAD IV (1976), UNCTAD V and the UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development (1979), and the Cancun Summit (1981), as well as various UN General Assembly meetings, OPEC summits, and pre-UNCTAD G77 preparatory meetings wherein the G77 perspective and concerns are elaborated. Thus, in addition to Global South heads of state like Carlos Andres Perez, Global South technocrats like UNCTAD secretary-generals Manuel Perez-Guerrero (1969-74) and Gamani Corea (1974-84) take their place in the story alongside Kissinger and Brzezinski.

There is one more element of North-South politics that *Global Inequality* missed and that consumes me now: global environmental governance. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration struggled to convince “key developing countries” like India, Brazil, and especially China to join its climate change agenda. Those countries did not disagree with the global consensus on climate change (as spelled out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, founded in 1988), which was that the Earth was warming because of human activity and disaster would ensue unless measures were taken immediately to curtail emissions. But they did reject Washington’s insistence that they, too, pledge to prioritize a problem that rich countries created during some two hundred years of industrial growth and prosperity.

Clinton argued that stopping climate change could not happen without commitments from North and South, and he warned that by 2030 China would surpass the United States as the world’s largest source of emissions. Yet the United States was already responsible for a quarter of the world’s emissions, Chinese officials countered, consuming and polluting multiples more than even its European counterparts. The Clinton administration insisted that there was no inherent conflict between stopping climate change and stimulating economic growth but promised little in the way of new aid. The G77 and China were unpersuaded. Were rich countries not just kicking away the ladder to keep poor countries from climbing too close?

Clinton’s frustration would have been familiar to American presidents and policymakers in the 1970s, when global environmental governance emerged. At the 1972 World Environment Conference in Stockholm, 113 nations established the UN Environmental Program (UNEP), the first international organization of its kind. The Nixon administration was a strong supporter of the conference as well as a strong UNEP, promising \$100 million over five years for a new Environment Fund for “activities such as monitoring and cleanup of the oceans and atmosphere.”

The G77 was suspicious of the rich countries’ agenda, however, and almost did not attend the conference at all. They were persuaded by the efforts of its chairman, Maurice Strong, a charismatic Canadian and UNEP’s founding director. “If the developing countries sit out the conference, it would leave the hands in the issues of the industrialized countries,” Strong told Indian leader Indira Gandhi, who represented her country in Stockholm.

The price of the South’s cooperation was that trade and development issues dominated the conference agenda and gave the new organization a practical and normative mandate to include them. Indeed, it is the reason why UNEP is located in Nairobi, not Geneva: the Kenyan delegation lobbied hard, against the North’s advice, to locate UNEP in the South, with the hope that South nations could become equal partners in the production of environmental knowledge and governance of global public

goods. Russell Train, head of the U.S. delegation, reported back to Nixon: “We consistently opposed ‘politicizing’ of the Conference with war and similar issues, and had good success, given the makeup of the Conference. We also consistently opposed using the Conference as an excuse for new development ‘add-ons.’ However, it is evident that it is not possible to discuss environmental protection with the LDC’s [sic] completely outside the context of development objectives.”⁷

We know what happened next. That same year, crop failures and the depletion of American grain reserves by an ill-considered deal with the Soviet Union launched the Third World into its most severe food crisis ever. In October 1973, citing rising prices for food from developed countries, members of OPEC started an oil price revolution and quadrupled the price of the oil they sold to the West. In October 1974, one month before the World Food Conference, UNEP publicly threw itself behind the NIEO in the Cocoyoc Declaration, reaffirming the development-first nature of global environmental politics.⁸

By the end of the decade, a combination of Northern opposition (led by the United States) and Southern division (OPEC vs. the “No-PECs”) had left the NIEO on the ropes. The knockout punch came in 1979, when the U.S. Federal Reserve drastically raised interest rates (the “Volcker shocks”) to stop inflation. It worked, but at the cost of a massive debt crisis that began in 1982 in Latin America and spread into Africa and parts of Asia. The result was a “lost decade of development” for many countries.

The counter-NIEO movement had had its intended effect. Ronald Reagan adopted a generally hostile attitude toward the UN, which many Americans—including some Democrats—shared. At home, the Reagan administration utilized its own Environmental Protection Agency to remove financial and other regulatory restrictions to boost domestic energy supply and consumption. On the eve of the Latin American debt crisis, Barbara Ward, founder of the International Institute for Environment and Development, lamented that “some leaders in the West are starting to abandon the concept of our joint voyage on Spaceship Earth, and to dismiss any concern for the environment or development as ‘do-goodism.’”⁹

The push for sustainable development was still alive around the world—the Brundtland Commission’s landmark report was published in 1987—but it was dead, for now, in Washington. UNEP did score a major victory in the 1987 Montréal Protocol, which phased out the use of chlorofluorocarbons. “The Montreal protocol is a model of cooperation,” Reagan said after signing it. It was “a monumental achievement,” the “result of an extraordinary process of scientific study, negotiations among representatives of the business and environmental communities, and international diplomacy.”¹⁰

It was also a painless decision for rich countries. Less harmful substitutes had already been developed, and even chemical megapolluter DuPont dropped its use. Hence Reagan’s praise at a time when U.S. policy toward the WHO, UNESCO, and other UN agencies was openly hostile. The decision proved that American administrations were not averse to multilateral cooperation on the environment—as long as it didn’t cost much, in foreign aid or domestic surcharges. Such stipulations would define U.S. policy toward global climate change negotiations in the 1990s and beyond.

There is one more element of North-South politics that *Global Inequality* missed and that consumes me now: global environmental governance. In the 1990s, the Clinton administration struggled to convince “key developing countries” like India, Brazil, and especially China to join its climate change agenda.

Notes:

1. https://centerforfinancialstability.org/brettonwoods_docs.php.
2. Notable works on the 1970s which do not take up the NIEO include Charles Maier, Niall Ferguson et al, *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: A New Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Daniel Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Christian Caryl, *Strange Rebels* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American International Power in the 1970s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
3. I thank SHAFR for the role it played in this breakthrough. With a Samuel Flagg Bemis dissertation research grant, I spent five happy weeks in Atlanta picking the Carter Library clean. There, I benefited from being the first person interested in the NIEO and the issue of basic needs to access the newly updated State and NSC files on the Remote Access Capture machine. I can confirm that while the physical Carter files on the NIEO are limited, in the RAC machine I found a fully text-searchable treasure trove of new material, from which I was able to reconstruct key details of subjects like the Carter-Perez relationship and the impact of Overseas Development Council officials. (This material then led me to the papers of ODC chairman Rev. Theodore Hesburgh at Notre Dame, which—again by chance—I was the first to look at when they were made public after his death, via a grant from Notre Dame’s Hesburgh Library.)
4. For U.S. policy toward the NIEO across administrations, see Michael Franczak, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s* (Ithaca, NY, 2022). For the NIEO and Europe, see Giuliano Garavini, *After Empires: European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South 1957–1986* (Oxford, UK, 2012). For the NIEO and OPEC, see Christopher R. W. Dietrich, *Oil Revolution: Anticolonial Elites, Sovereign Rights, and the Economic Culture of Decolonization* (Cambridge, UK, 2017); and Garavini, *The Rise and Fall of OPEC in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, UK, 2019). For the NIEO’s larger role in Global South politics and thought, see Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), especially chapter 5; and Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland, CA, 2021). For prominent European neoliberals’ (or “ordoliberalists”) opposition to the NIEO, see Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Rise of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), especially chapter 7 and the conclusion. For the NIEO and global human rights movements, see Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), especially chapter 5.
5. See <https://act.progressive.international/nieo-collection/#collection-00> for the introductory essay and table of contents. The December 2022 launch in New York was attended by several G77 diplomats, including Munir Akram of Pakistan, the country that was the outgoing G77 chair. Later that month, the UNGA adopted resolution A/77/445 DR, “Toward a New International Economic Order,” with a vote of 123–50–1. In January 2023, Progressive International will host a congress in Havana (Cuba is the incoming G77 chair) to discuss the resolution, proposals, and a way forward.
6. Franczak, “Human Rights and Basic Needs: Jimmy Carter’s North-South Dialogue, 1977–81,” *Cold War History* 18 (4), 2018: 447–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2018.1468437>; and “Losing the Battle, Winning the War: Neoconservatives versus the New International Economic Order, 1971–82,” *Diplomatic History* 43 (5), Nov. 2019: 867–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhz043>.
7. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve01/d324>.
8. “The Cocoyoc Declaration,” *International Organization* 29, no. 3 (1975): 893–901, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706353>.
9. Maria Ivanova, *The Untold Story of the World’s Leading Environmental Institution: UNEP at Fifty* (Cambridge, MA, 2021), 157.
10. <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-signing-montreal-protocol-ozone-depleting-substances>.

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