CHAPTER 3
THE DISCOURSE OF DEMOCRACY

The contemporary world is not a favorable environment for democracy. We have always preferred the reputation of being democrats to the notorious inconveniences of practicing democracy. Now, we can enjoy the reputation without the inconveniences because we have trivialized democracy to the extent that it is no longer threatening to those in power or demanding to anyone. Democracy spreads because it has been rendered meaningless and innocuous without losing its symbolic value. While it spreads, our world is more repressive.

– Claude Ake, Nigerian Scholar (Adetula 1997, 1)

It is for this reason that we have spoken of destruction of meaning through its very proliferation.

– Ernesto Laclau (1996, 208)

Claude Ake’s commentary illuminates well the discursive currents flowing beneath Nigeria’s democratic transition. As the Clinton Administration promoted democracy in Nigeria, it employed representational practices to enhance the likelihood of its success, by rendering democracy meaningless as a substantive guide to governance while enhancing greatly its symbolic value in both social and economic terms. Most notably, the Clinton Administration engaged in a consistent discourse that naturalized the social and economic costs and benefits it wished to have associated with democratization. This enabled the depoliticization of their efforts of democratic enlargement which limited
grounds for resistance and ensured both Nigeria’s elite and popular acceptance of the U.S.-defined democratic performance.¹

In particular, the Clinton Administration crafted a dichotomous classification scheme pitting Nigeria as a pariah against Nigeria as a democracy, which further enabled the logics of equivalence to empty democracy of its political content. In the Clinton Administration’s discourse, the signifier, democracy, was constructed in social terms and linked to natural economic benefits which hide both self-serving economic interests and the overt expression of political and economic power employed to serve those interests. This particular rendering of democracy (and the very process of that rendering) has been received by the Nigerian population (as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4) and has had the devastating effects of fostering communal conflicts which have taken 10,000 lives in the first four years of the Fourth Republic (as will be demonstrated in Chapter 5).

**A Social Transformation**

In reading the Clinton Administration’s dialogue with Nigeria and its verbal sea of “blah blah blah,” one signifier stands out as particularly significant, both because of its

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¹. The depoliticized nature of democracy’s construction is one of its defining characteristics as an empty signifier. It is important to note here, however, that democracy’s emptiness does not suggest that it is devoid of meaning. In fact, U.S. policy makers had to instill democracy with substantial social and economic meanings in order to eclipse any political content and thus enable the chains of equivalence to be built so essential to the full realization on an empty signifier.
empty state as well as the astounding policy weight assigned to it: the “Pariah.” A full exploration of the representational uses of pariah, exposes the social aspects of U.S.-Nigerian relations and the importance of Laclau and Mouffe’s understanding of social identities to interpret those relations.

Pariah, like democracy is a nodal point which makes possible democracy’s role of empty signifier. Pariah functions both to classify states into presupposed categories and thus enables the logic of equivalences to operate (i.e. democracies are all those states that are not pariahs, and pariahs are all those states that are not democracies), which ultimately empties the signifier, democracy. Most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, the classifications of democracy and pariah accompany a clear positioning establishing the political, economic, and social superiority of the democracy over the pariah.

2. Signifiers such as pariah contain meaning only in that moment that they are applied to label an offending nation. Except when they are applied as one’s social identity, such signifiers have no life of their own. Pariah is rarely defined in U.S. political discourse except by example (“It’s like Cuba, or Lybia, or Iraq”), and if one attempts to define pariah, one quickly sees how empty pariah is. For example, Nigeria, you will soon read, was justified as being labeled a pariah primarily because it was not democratic but so were many other states that did not receive that title. For example, Kuwait was no pariah in 1990, nor was Iraq in the mid 1980s. There emerges a deeper sense that those states branded as pariahs all share one unspoken attribute: their common obstruction of U.S. interests either through sins of commission (Iraq of the 1990s and Lybia of the 1980s) or sins of omission (Cuba not turning capitalist and Nigeria not providing a safe environment for investment). “Pariah” is, therefore, only a label of U.S. disapproval it assigns to states in an effort to manipulate their behavior, whereas other states that might fit every objective denotation of pariah will be spared its designation so long as they remain in the good graces of the United States (Hussein’s pre-1991 Iraq, Pinochet’s Chile, Musharif’s Pakistan).


4. See Chapter 2 for more on the representational practice of positioning.
The Pariah

*Many questions were troubling the explorer, but at the sight of the prisoner he asked only: “Does he know his sentence?” “No,” said the officer . . . “There would be no point in telling him. He’ll learn it on his body.”* (Kafka 1988, 197)

Like Clinton Administration officials, the officer in Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony* attempts to administer justice not just through word alone, but by writing a disciplinary identity onto the body of the accused. The use of the signifier, pariah, to identify Nigeria’s international social identity served as a clear indication of the administration’s perception of Nigeria’s international status prior to Obasanjo’s inauguration in May 1999, and an even clearer indication of the Nigerians’ recognition of that perceived status. The signifier, pariah, contains a fascinating etymological history that sheds additional light on its current use. Tamil in origin (*paraiyan* or “drummer”), the word refers properly to a member of India’s lower caste. With clear connotations of a ranked social division marked by the negative stigma associated with the lower socioeconomic strata, this term is used in U.S. foreign discourse to refer to any state that is claimed to deserve social sanction and isolation.

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5. As members of this caste were brought to Europe for domestic service, the ranked connotations probably accompanied the word pariah. The term gained widespread academic recognition as Max Weber (1950, 1952) applied the term to Jewish economic practices. Hannah Arendt (1944) further explored the idea of the “Jew as Pariah.”
**Partners versus Pariahs – U.S. versus Them**

First and foremost, the use of pariah suggests that there is a clear demarcation separating the pariah state and the non-pariah state as two distinct and socially significant identities. Laclau and Mouffe’s work on social identities explores the intersubjectiveness, contingency, or discursive nature of social divisions, yet in foreign policy discourse, such social divisions are expressed as fact. The gulf that separates the partner from the pariah is unquestionably accepted as a fundamental truth that then enables various violent foreign policies that can be crafted and implemented without the burdens of ethical doubts or a troubled national conscience.

Rarely is the nature of social division even acknowledged in foreign policy discourse. The label pariah is, instead, simply *used*. Some public statements, however, provide insight into both the admission that there is a division and insight into the profoundly unreflective nature of those declaring these divisions. In 1998, John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, in a statement to the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, recounted the State Department’s recent reconceptualization of the world’s social structure. He claimed that with the end of the Cold War, the “old conceptual

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**From the U.S. State Department’s Daily Press Briefing**


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**REPORTER:** Nigeria - what do you have to say about the general election whereby a bunch of generals got around and held an election?

(Laughter.)

**REPORTER:** That it was generally good.

(Laughter.)

**MR. RUBIN:** That was pretty good, George.
framework of three ‘Worlds’ -- West, East and South -- no longer works” (Shattuck 1998). In its place, he claimed “it is now possible to identify four categories of nation-states. The first is made up of those countries that participate as full members of the international system. The second consists of those that reject the rules upon which the system is based” (Shattuck 1998, emphasis added). Further elaborating on these two primary, classifications he later describes that “in the first category are the world's democracies, our partners and friends. In the second category are the world's pariah states, the focus of sanctions and other negative measures designed to limit their ability to disrupt the international system” (Shattuck 1998, emphasis added).

Having clearly positioned these two identities, there are, he explained, other states in flux (the third and fourth categories) that require U.S. assistance to avoid falling into the pariah camp. He closed his remarks with this plea.

The best way to assure that these countries become full members of the international system prepared to respect and uphold basic human rights is to facilitate the growth of democratic government, civil society, and the rule of law. History demonstrates that free and democratic nations are better partners both in terms of maintaining peace and conducting commerce. Democracies that protect human rights and respect the rule of law are more likely to avoid internal conflict, protect the environment, embrace market economics, and provide a fair and level playing field for American companies. That is why it is in our national interest to support those who struggle for democracy abroad. We could not assure our own security and prosperity without it. (Shattuck 1998, emphasis added)

This closing remark, cannot go unexamined. First, the Assistant Secretary of State presents an image of the “international system” as a social organization dominated by social identities in which a state must qualify for “membership” or the status of a “partner.” Second, the primary criteria for a state’s gaining that membership is found in
the adoption and recognition of that mysterious adjective “democratic.” Third, the catechism of democracy is recited: democracy promises peace, environmental protection, and a market economy. Each new partner provides a “fair and level playing field for American companies,” assists the U.S. “in maintaining peace and conducting commerce,” and without them “We [the United States] could not assure our own security and prosperity without it” (Shattuck 1998).

The imagery of the intrinsically social nature of the democracy and the pariah is not isolated to this statement. Especially when policy makers refer to pariah states they often employ social imagery to illustrate the nature of these relationships. In two press briefings of the U.S. Department of State, James Foley and Nicholas Burns both fell back on such language. Describing Libya’s social status, we learn that “Libya is a pariah state, is isolated, is subject to severe Security Council sanctions – mandated sanctions. Libya cannot hope to rejoin the family of civilized nations until it complies with those resolutions” (Foley 1998). Iran and [pre-liberation] Iraq shared a similar social position. “The outlaw pariah states, Iran and Iraq, will have to then live in bitter isolation, as they

6. The social category of democracy is important because with each new member the U.S. becomes more peaceful and prosperous. The distinction between what the U.S. foreign policy establishment signifies a democracy and the alternative pariah, interestingly enough, likewise became a dominant distinction in U.S. academic political science literature during the Clinton Administration’s tenure. Research on “democratic peace” dominated much of the mid to late 1990s as the discipline’s leading academics proposed, with little initial resistance, a family of theories that suggested that democracies are more peaceful and prosperous than their non-democratic counterparts. See for example Doyle 1983, Russett 1993, Owen 1994, Russett and Ray 1995, Brown et al. 1996, and Elman 1997.
deserve to live, unless they change their own policies or unless they change their own leaders” (Burns 1997).

This matter-of-fact description portrays the pariah as outcasts who suffer “bitter isolation” from the “families of civilized nations.” This description also suggests that such social punishments are the natural consequence of “their own policies.” Like the bad child, they can only “hope to rejoin their family” as they begin to obey the rules set by those who declare themselves to be “civilized.” Such a statement offers an important window into how U.S. foreign policy makers view the world whose essence is that of familial relations, natural standards, and commonsensical justice. This expression of the U.S. foreign policy apparatus may, perhaps, be considered all the more accurate than most when one considers that the pariah and its social markings appear in the loosely prepared responses to unanticipated questions at press briefings.

Writing the Pariah

“Our sentence does not sound severe. Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow. This prisoner for instance”—the officer indicated the man—“will have written on his body: HONOR THY SUPERIORS!” (Kafka 1988, 197)

Many states remain labeled pariahs because they resist the democratic course. According to Secretary Albright, “In Cuba, Fidel Castro continues to justify his pariah status by jailing dissidents and refusing to hold free and fair elections” (Albright 2000). Likewise, one reporter recounts that the loss of democracy was a critical factor in Nigeria falling to pariah status. He claimed: “Nigeria gradually descended to a pariah state six years ago when the US, the European Union, EU, and Japan imposed selective economic
sanctions, following the annulment of June 12, 1993, presidential election believed to have been won by the late Moshood Abiola” (Ojewale, 2000). Also blaming the fall of democracy for Nigeria’s pariah status, one editorial writer claimed that “a depressing sequence of 15 unbroken years of military rule . . . effectively put a pariah tag on the nation. . .”(Johnson 2001).7

Another author explains how the social branding both came and went with the fall and recovery of democracy.

The visit by President Clinton to Nigeria August 28 climaxed the new era of friendship and partnership between the United States and Nigeria which began after the demise of former military tyrant, General Sani Abacha.

Under Abacha's dictatorship, Nigeria's relationship with the outside world reached ground zero. The US led the West to treat Nigeria as a "pariah state" and adopted stringent economic and social restrictions against the country. Specifically, US and its European allies banned sales of military equipment and spare parts to Nigeria and placed travelling sanctions on government officials visiting their countries.

The emergence of retired General Olusegun Obasanjo as Nigeria's president in May of last year, following a democratic election held earlier in the country changed all that. President Obasanjo embraced the West politically and economically and showed genuine commitment to changes based on democratic principles. (Nwokedi 2000)

7. It is noteworthy how much of a threat the pariah is made to appear to be. Whereas the Cold War provided an easily identifiable enemy against which the U.S. could compete for influence and power, the post-Cold War era lacked that immediate clarity. The pariah (as predecessor to the terrorist state) may provide a new sense of purpose. Whereas Africa was frequently the battle ground upon which the U.S. and USSR battled for allies and influence, now some policy makers are recasting that competition as between the U.S. and the pariah.
Although pariah carries a social stigma with deep social consequences Nwokedi’s comments also express that this signifier also contains an important political-economic character. This connection was likewise reinforced in the discourse of U.S. officials.

During Susan E. Rice’s opening statement at the confirmation hearing for her future position as U.S. Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, she explained to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that,

U.S. policy in Africa must remain focused on two overarching policy goals. First, we must defend the United States from the real threats to our national security that emanate from Africa, as they do from the rest of the world. These threats include state-sponsored terrorism, narcotics flows, the growing influence in Africa of such pariah states as Libya and Iran, weapons proliferation, environmental degradation, and disease. (Rice 1997)

As part of the effort to counter the influence of pariah states like Libya and Iran, Rice introduced a second goal.

Second, we seek to accelerate Africa’s full integration into the global economy. Fulfillment of this second objective entails simultaneous pursuit of several core activities: promoting economic reform, trade and investment in Africa; maintaining bilateral and multilateral development assistance to Africa; sustaining democracy; promoting respect for human rights; and continuing our efforts to resolve conflicts in order to bring lasting stability to the continent. (Rice 1997, emphasis added)

Again we note how easily capitalism and democracy blend together within this discourse, as well as how effortlessly both are employed to construct solutions to the social problems caused by the pariah. The pariah nations, so identified although never clearly defined, can be marginalized and excluded from the social community by strengthening the ties of the non-pariah states politically to the emerging global democratic club and economically to the global capitalist economy.
Converting the Pariah

If the pariah is the international outcast, and the mark of the pariah is its non-democratic status, then the key to its conversion and thus its admission or readmission to global society is its donning a democratic identity. The Republic of South Africa, for example, appears to have achieved this social transition. Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott, praised South Africa in an address he offered at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg, stating, “Your people have done so much, in a few short years, to transform this country from an international pariah into an international leader. You've given promise and meaning to President Mbeki's idea of an ‘African renaissance.’ More than that, you've earned the admiration and cooperation of the United States” (Talbott 2000, emphasis added).

Nigeria has likewise worked its way into the good graces of the “civilized nations.” Assistant Secretary Susan Rice, remarked that,

obviously Nigeria is a remarkable turn-around story over the last 12 months or more. It was, in effect, a pariah state under the military regime of Abacha and, in a short period of time, has made a remarkable transformation to a democratically elected government. (Rice 1999a)

On a visit to Nigeria’s Rivers State, Senator Russel Feingold, a member of the United States Committee on Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Senate's African Sub-committee, told Governor Peter Odili that “he was happy that democracy has come to stay in Nigeria.” (Igbokwe 2001). By way of context, one California reporter declared in May 2000 that “this time last year, Anambra State, Nigeria, West Africa, was under military rule. Today, the West African state is once again a democracy” (Barrow 2000).
Likewise, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger in a press conference stated that the new socially acceptable Nigeria was now worthy of a presidential visit in 2000. “The visit to Nigeria signals our strong support for the most important democratic transition in Africa since the collapse of apartheid and underscores the opportunities opened by Nigeria's shift from pariah to partner” (Berger 2000). This shift has tangible benefits for Nigerians. Berger explained that:

During the visit the President will convey tangible U.S. support for Nigeria's democratic transition. In two years our assistance program in Nigeria has increased from $7 million to $108 million, and the President will announce some additional support, particularly in the areas of primary education and the fight against infectious diseases. He'll stress the importance of supporting Nigeria's leadership in West Africa and beyond, for democracy, against infectious diseases, against crime, against drugs, and most importantly, for peace. (Berger 2000)

Justifying this support, Berger then tied democracy to peace and prosperity, “This is a make-or-break transition, not just for Nigeria, but for Africa. If Nigeria succeeds, this can help lift the whole region to prosperity and peace. If it fails it can swamp the whole region in turmoil and misery” (Berger 2000).

At a briefing in Abuja during President Clinton’s August 2000 trip during which Clinton showered the country and its leaders with praise, Rice recounted that "we have come a very long way in a very short period of time” (New Pittsburgh Courier 2000, A2). Recalling Clinton’s 1998 trip to Africa when Clinton avoided visiting the military-led Nigeria, Rice continued, “Two years ago, we had nothing to do with the government of Nigeria” (New Pittsburgh Courier 2000, A2).

Charles Rangel, who also accompanied Clinton of the August 2000 trip as leader of the congressional delegation to Nigeria likewise recounts Nigeria’s conversion. He
explained upon his return that, “I was invited by Pres. Clinton to join him in this mission to recognize and salute Nigeria's transition to democracy. The elected government of Pres. Obasanjo has made important strides in transforming Nigeria from a pariah nation into a cooperative partner of the United States” (New York Amsterdam News 2000, 2). Another journalist credits the Clinton administration for the transition in Nigeria’s international status and discontinuing the punishments that accompanied their former pariah status. He claimed that, “the Clinton administration . . . has moved quickly to end the country's pariah status, under which it was denied military and economic aid” (Farah 2000a).

President Obasanjo, spoke frequently of Nigeria’s shedding its pariah status. On the first year anniversary of democratic rule, he announced that among the great challenges he faced at the beginning of his terms were that “internationally, Nigeria had become a pariah state shunned by many countries, tolerated by a few, and treated with contempt and condescension by all” (Obasanjo 2000). Within one year, however, he boasted that one of his administration’s great achievements was that:

By all indications, we can now proudly claim to have now been accepted by the international community. We have taken up our rightful place among the comity of nations. We now enjoy the confidence of our development partners and major international organisations, such as the World Bank and IMF. It is our intention to work on this positive relations for the benefit of our overall development strategy. (Obasanjo 2000)

Once again the social imagery of “acceptance” and “community” are employed. Democracy enabled acceptance – acceptance to the community of political players and economic powers. This acceptance, in turn, carries potential benefits to Nigeria’s economic development.
As further evidence that the Nigerian government was sufficiently concerned with its social position in the international community, the Nigerian Government hired (at great expense) the lobbying firm Goodworks International to "work to reverse Nigeria's negative image through effective representation of Nigeria's interests in the US" (Akande 2001). After paying an initial $500,000 retainer fee, the Nigerian government pays an additional $60,000 each month for the services (Akande 2001). Goodworks, which describes itself as "Global Advocates," "Business Activists" and "Visionary Capitalists," was closely tied to former U.S. Ambassador, Andrew Young, a close friend of President Obasanjo, who was believed to have been coordinating the central portion of Obasanjo’s economic policy (Akande 2001).

**Nigerian Democracy as a ‘Vital’ U.S. Economic Interest**

One might wonder why the Clinton Administration conjured this beast called the pariah. The answer is found by understanding what the discourse makes possible. The naming of the pariah as the dangerous, untouchable outcast can justify many policy responses that might otherwise not be explained so easily. This naming can easily justify the punishments enforced through political isolation and economic sanctions. It can also justify a conversion, even one requiring great expense, that otherwise might not be accepted so easily by a more skeptical global and domestic audience.

With General Abacha’s death in 1998, the Clinton Administration recognized an opportunity to actively seek that conversion and vigorously promote democracy in Nigeria through both word and deed. No official public communication from the United
States to Nigeria during that time failed to mention democratic transition thus defining this particular aspect of U.S.-Nigerian relations as its premier focal point in public discourse. How democracy was defined and how the Clinton Administration consistently framed democracy’s essence in economic terms and associated with rewards is, however, noteworthy for several reasons.

First, the United States’ interest in Nigeria and in Nigerian democracy is noteworthy both in its magnitude and its predominantly economic nature. Regarding the magnitude of U.S. interest in Nigeria, perhaps no evidence makes as compelling a case that Nigeria had become a vital U.S. interest as did the results of the U.S. State Department’s 1999 drug certification process. During this consideration of countries that produce or export illicit drugs to the United States (which determines which countries are eligible for financial aid), Nigeria was declared as not having lived up to any of the standards of eligibility. Nigeria was the source of 30% of US heroin imports (Rice 1999) and throughout 1999, “there were no major trafficker prosecutions or arrests . . . nor were there any extraditions in response to outstanding U.S. extradition requests. Corruption was widespread and potentially effective counter-drug laws were generally not enforced” (U.S. Department of State, 2000).

These accusations were potentially damning given Undersecretary Thomas Pickering’s uncompromising claim in December 1998 that: “in fact, the U.S. under our own legislation cannot provide any assistance . . . until the government is certified to be cooperating with us on counternarcotics goals . . . . Nigerian Government action is necessary before we can revisit the certification issue” (Pickering 1998). Despite these
strong words, the substantial legislation that underlies them, and Nigeria’s absolute lack of cooperation, the Administration chose to make Nigeria an exception, arguing that a “decision not to certify Nigeria would block assistance that the new democratically-elected government needs to meet these challenges, seriously damaging the prospects for success of stable, transparent democracy in Nigeria” (White House, Office of Press Secretary, 2000). In other words, although the U.S. government could not legally aid countries not certified as cooperating with U.S. counternarcotics efforts, and although Nigeria (one of the world’s greatest obstacles in this effort) had done nothing to warrant certification, the Clinton Administration gave them aid anyway because they meet some extrajudicial, unwritten standard of “vital interests.”

What are the reasons for this recently acquired vital national interest? According to White House and State Department documents, the interest is predominantly economic. Ambassador Howard Jeter explains,

A democratic Nigeria is key to a stable and prosperous West Africa, an invigorated Africa, and to U.S. national and economic security. Nigeria is our second largest trading partner in all of Africa. American companies have invested over $7 billion in the country’s petroleum sector; we import approximately 40% of Nigeria’s oil production, and Nigeria supplies nearly 8% of our total oil imports. (Jeter 1999)

In 1997, U.S. exports to Nigeria totaled $814 million, and Nigerian exports to the U.S. (mostly oil) totaled more than $6 billion (Rice 1998). Echoing Jeter’s statement, Rice announced that “we have a great stake in Nigeria's success. It is the largest country, in terms of population, in Africa. It has the potential to be an economic powerhouse. It provides 8 percent of our imported oil. It has $6 billion worth of American investment on the ground in Nigeria” (Rice 1999a).
This fits well into the broader picture of U.S. foreign policy toward Africa generally. President Clinton remarked at the opening of the National Summit of Africa in February 2000 that, among other reasons, the United States must be involved in Africa, “Because we want to broaden global growth and expand markets for our own people . . .” (Clinton, 2000). Secretary of State Madeleine Albright speaking publicly in Abuja, Nigeria on October 20, 1999, exhorted Nigerians by saying that “Nigeria is important to the United States and the world because you have the potential to be an economic powerhouse for Africa and global markets” (Albright 1999).

With an even more candid explanation, Assistant Secretary Susan Rice clarified the nature of U.S. interests in Africa generally. “Still, the United States’ share of the African market is small—only 6%, making it the largest untapped market for the U.S. in the world” (Rice 1999b). Furthermore, Rice explained that,

Almost 50% of Africans are under the age of 15. These are young people who can develop fierce brand loyalties for everything from soft drinks to blue jeans. Africa, a market of approximately 700 million potential consumers, truly represents the last frontiers for U.S. exporters and investors. (Rice 1999b)

In more detail, Assistant Secretary Rice, upon announcing the coming inauguration of the U.S.-Nigeria Joint Economic Partnership Committee, clarified the U.S. economic interests in its relationship with Africa.

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8. More than a year earlier, Senator Russell Finegold, the ranking member of the African Affairs subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee used almost identical language: “Nigeria has the potential to be an economic powerhouse on the African continent, a key regional political leader, and an important American trading partner.” (Finegold 1998).
Each of us also has a tremendous security and economic stake in Africa. Today, the U.S. exports 45 percent more to Africa than to all of the countries of the former Soviet Union combined. Over 16 percent of our imported oil comes from the African continent. Throughout Africa, East Coast companies from Kodak, AIG, Lucent Technologies to IBM are significantly investing or establishing a strong presence in the region. In an era where one-third of our GDP growth is dependent on exports, we cannot afford to leave any foreign market untapped. The fact is, Africa is a market of 700 million potential consumers already buying $6 billion ($6,000 million) worth of American products annually and supporting thousands of U.S. jobs right here in the Atlantic region. (Rice 1999b)

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa with more than 120 million people, fits well within this economic definition of vital interests.

United States’ interests in Nigeria were typically framed in terms of optimistic potential, but the Clinton Administration was also acutely aware of the potential consequences of a non-democratic Nigeria disrupting the United States’ global economic goals. Consistent with the bleak picture painted in the counter-narcotics documents above, the U.S. Department of State’s 1998 report on international financial crimes described Nigeria in similarly dangerous terms.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a hub of money laundering and criminal financial activity, not only for the West African sub-region but increasingly for the entire continent. . . . Nigeria is Africa's most significant narcotics transshipment point. The shift of some drug trafficking and money laundering operations to neighboring West African countries has not resulted in a decline in activity in Nigeria. Nigerian trafficking and money laundering organizations have proven adept at devising new ways of subverting law enforcement efforts and evading detection. Nigerian organizations succeeded in altering and even expanding their smuggling efforts, primarily through Nigeria's porous land borders. The success of the money laundering organizations in avoiding detection and prosecution has led to an increase in financial crimes of all types, including money laundering, bank fraud, and advance fee fraud. (U.S. Department of State 1998)
Despite the efforts of the IMF and regional intergovernmental organizations, the report continues:

Illegal financial activities continue unabated. Nigerian money laundering organizations have quickly adapted to increased monitoring of financial transactions and have found new ways to avoid detection. Some have altered and expanded their operations to include businesses in neighboring countries which act as fronts. The large sums involved in financial criminal activity in Nigeria have resulted in a situation where criminals are better funded than law enforcement agencies. (U.S. Department of State 1998)

Given the positive economic potential of good relations and the potentially negative economic consequences of bad relations, it should not be surprising that the Clinton Administration was eager to reintegrate Nigeria into the global capitalist system. The most socially acceptable way to sell capitalism at this moment in world history and in the current state of Northern cultural norms was to wrap it tightly in democratic packaging. Democracy can mask otherwise less acceptable economic goals, however, only when it is marketed in a form that is not too burdensome to the consumer nor in any way inhibitive to the economic goals it promises to fulfill. As Michael Cox argues the point:

Ultimately [Clinton] always viewed democracy promotion as a policy instrument to advance American power rather than as a moral duty. Thus if he supported the cause of democracy, he did not do so for idealistic reasons, but because he felt this supported US national security and American’s economic goals in the wider international system. (Cox 2000, 221)

The Clinton Administration marketed democracy to the Nigerian elite and Nigeria’s general population in economic terms, relatively shallow in political content, and in the guise of being easily attainable.
A Speedy “Transition”

“Wouldn’t you care to come a little nearer and have a look at the needles?” The explorer got up slowly, walked across and bent over the Harrow. “You see,” said the officer, “there are two kinds of needles arranged in multiple patterns. Each long needle has a short one beside it. The long needle does the writing, and the short needle sprays a jet of water to wash away the blood and keep the inscription clear.” (Kafka 1988, 200)

As evidence of the political shallowness of democracy and its easy attainability, it is worth observing how quickly and relatively effortlessly Nigeria turned the corner from pariah to partner as policy statements containing definitions of and referring to the attainability of democracy likewise shifted. Initially the obstacles seemed insurmountable.

In a State Department press briefing, James Foley declared as late as March 27, 1998 that, “To suggest that anything that is going on in Nigeria today is tantamount to the beginnings of a free, fair electoral process - credible electoral process - is really illusory and unfounded” (Foley 1998). Later he defined “true civilian, democratic rule” as one which must include “free political activity, release of political prisoners, freedom of the press and free, fair and transparent elections” (Foley 1998). Earlier that month, Secretary Albright had defined democratic transition in similar terms. Speaking of General Abacha’s rule, she stated:

He must allow a real transition, not a phoney or a cosmetic one. If Nigeria’s promise is to be realized, political prisoners must be released, the harassment of NGOs and human rights monitors must end. A free press must be allowed. And there must be a true election, conducted under fair elections, resulting in civilian rule. (Albright 1998)

Not long thereafter, Assistant Secretary Susan Rice provided another daunting definition of democracy.
Our road map for measuring democratic progress is universal and unwavering. A credible transition would include a transparent and participatory process; unconditional release of political prisoners; provisions for free political activity and party formation allowing all those who wish to run to do so freely; freedom of association, speech, and the press; unrestricted access to the media by all candidates and parties; impartial electoral preparation; and elections open to all. (Rice 1998)

Given these statements, which indicate so clearly the assigned difficulty of democratic transition and the great distance that Nigeria must travel to arrive at this destination, it is very revealing to note the amazing speed at which this transition actually then occurred. Furthermore, the speed of this transition likewise reveals much regarding the empty state of democracy. As late as 12 March 1998, Assistant Secretary Rice stated,

Let me state clearly and unequivocally to you today that an electoral victory by any military candidate in the forthcoming presidential elections would be unacceptable. Nigeria needs and deserves a real transition to democracy and civilian rule, not another military regime dressed up in civilian clothes. (Rice 1998)

Yet within fourteen months Nigeria had impressed the global community sufficiently to be declared a democracy, having executed a series of free and fair elections for which Nigeria was offered a series of immediate social and economic rewards. In the words of one Nigerian observer, “The giant of Africa which become a pariah under Abacha suddenly became the new bride” (Mulero 1998).

The international community offered many social rewards immediately upon the inauguration of President Obasanjo. In June 1999, just days after the inauguration, the G-8 issued a press release from their summit stating that “the G8 warmly welcomes Nigeria’s return to civilian rule and democracy,” and that the “G8 will assist. . .the reduction of poverty” (G-8 1999). The British Commonwealth, for example, had
sanctioned Nigeria and suspended her from the Commonwealth years earlier but promised Nigeria that on the very day of the civilian government’s inauguration, Nigeria would be readmitted. Indeed, the transformation was instantaneous. The day after the inauguration, the Commonwealth General-Secretary announced that: “Nigeria is not only back fully in the Commonwealth, Nigeria’s standing internationally at the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity and all other international organizations has been fully restored.”

Japan likewise indicated it might lift sanctions on Nigeria stating that, “Now that the completion of the transition to a civilian rule is done...” the Japanese government will study extending appropriate assistance to Nigeria’s effort for reform and development.” It should seem remarkable that civilian rule and international acceptance are such absolute conditions that they can be “done” or “fully restored” respectively. One might instead argue that the only democratic transition that can ever be “done” is not a very substantial one, and relations can only be “fully restored” if their restoration depends upon either the perception of being done or a conscious attempt to communicate doneness.

Like the international community, the Clinton Administration offered Nigeria a series of social and economic rewards, sealing their conversion to a democratic social identity. Susan Rice, for example, stressed the rewards of such a transformations claiming that “Secretary [Albright] is very committed to showing that the American hand of partnership is a real one” (Rice 1999a). In a Washington Report, the author portrayed the changing U.S.-Nigerian relations by describing democratic Nigeria as “An English-
speaking nation with relatively friendly relations with the United States, [which] was recently earmarked for additional aid by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright” (Johnson 2000).

Just two weeks after the new democratic government’s inauguration, the United States restored military ties, which had been severed in 1995. On December 22, 1999, the U.S. government lifted its ban on direct flights to Nigeria, and in very social terms the U.S. Secretary of Transportation stated: “I am deeply gratified to see a government chosen by the Nigerian people earning the trust and respect of the world” (White House 1999). Secretary Albright announced to an audience in Kano (Nigeria’s largest northern city) that “President Clinton and Congress have nearly quadrupled our assistance to Nigeria” (Albright 2000). On February 16, 2000, the U.S. Trade Representative and Nigeria’s Vice President signed a “trade investment framework agreement” (White House 2000). At a press conference with the visiting President Obasanjo, President Clinton claimed that there was much the United States would do to support Nigeria. Of the three points he mentioned all were concretely economic benefits for Nigeria – stimulating trade and investment, relieving the “crushing debt burden” and supporting Nigeria’s regional peacekeeping efforts, for which the US had already provided $11 million in assistance that year (Clinton 2000b). On 11 September 1999, Susan Rice announced plans to soon inaugurate the U.S.-Nigeria Joint Economic Partnership Committee to support economic reform efforts being undertaken by the Obasanjo government (Rice 1999b).
With the advent of democracy a change had immediately occurred in Nigeria’s international social status as well. In addition to receiving the warm welcome of the G-8 and the prodigal feast of the Commonwealth, Nigeria even received a Papal blessing. Speaking just before the new government’s inauguration, Under Secretary Thomas Pickering stated in social imagery that under Abacha, Nigeria was “isolated from the community of nations” but that after elections and cooperation with the World Bank and IMF the “international community is impressed, enthusiastic, and ready to assist” (Pickering 1999). Pickering concluded his speech titled “Nigeria Returns: America Responds” with more social imagery “Nigeria is not alone. . . . Nigeria, in just 9 months, has moved from a position of alienation in the international community to a place where Nigerian hopes for democracy, prosperity, and a better life correspond with our own vision” (Pickering 1999, emphasis added).

The Economics of Transition

A second explanation of the speed by which Nigeria donned its democratic social identity is found in an examination of the economic components of democracy’s construction. There emerges a clear conflict of interest for that country (U.S.) which seeks both to set the standard for democracy as well as ensure that Nigeria hastily achieves that standard, thereby enabling the U.S. to reap the economic gains in a socially acceptable manner. Consequently, where a definition of democracy is provided beyond the elements of a “real,” “true,” or “credible” transition as defined by Rice, Albright, and Foley, that content tends to stress an economic element of democratization.
In February 2000, Secretary Albright tied an economic element to her definition of democracy. “Elections, moreover, are but one note in the democratic symphony. A full orchestra is required, including markets that reward initiative” (Albright 2000). In an earlier speech Secretary Albright referred to Nigeria’s “democratic path, which is also the path to prosperity and social progress for the Nigerian people” (Albright 1998). Assistant Secretary Rice agreed.

Recent history has taught us that economic reforms go hand in hand with democracy. A person's entrepreneurial spirit is unleashed when he or she enjoys political freedom as well as economic incentives to produce. But democracy fosters the conditions necessary for economic growth and promotes the very stability necessary for development. (McLymont 2001)

Under Secretary Thomas Pickering presented a similar economic component to democratic reform. “Our interests have been consistent across the decades. The United States would like to see a Nigeria that is democratic and ably governed by civilians; a Nigeria with a good human rights record; a prosperous Nigeria that is committed to a market economy” (Pickering 1998).

One reporter, Rosalind McLymont (2001), likewise expressed a clear relationship between democracy and economic development. Focusing especially on the Nigerian case, she described the perceptions of both political and economic leaders of the democratic wave in Africa. In this excerpt describing “Africa’s Economic Renaissance” she reported:

U.S. government and corporate decision-makers alike are pointing excitedly to signs of invigorated commitment to Africa's democracy. The most telling signs, these decision-makers say, are South Africa's transfer of power . . . and Nigeria's inauguration of a democratically elected president, Olusegun Obasanjo, for the first time in decades.
A commitment to democracy heralds an enabling environment for private enterprise, Washington reasons, it also heralds the promise of huge market opportunities for U.S. goods and services and tremendous opportunities for U.S. investors. (McLymont 2001)

It is clear early on in the article that “Africa’s Economic Renaissance” is directly tied to improved U.S.-Nigerian relations made possible by Africa’s democratization. Furthermore, she claimed, the United States stood to reap great economic benefits from African democratization. She continued,

“At no time in history has the climate in Africa been more favorable for U.S. companies to do business,” stated the Corporate Council on Africa, an influential Washington, DC, nonprofit organization of corporations and individuals who strive to “improve the interaction between the U.S. and Africa's private sectors.”

The Council said that Africa, the second largest continent in the world, offers the combined potential of 750 million people, vast natural resources and untapped markets.

“The continent's invigorated commitment to democracy and to economic modernization makes it even more appealing,” stated the Council, whose membership includes the likes of Archer Daniels Midland Co., 3M, Bechtel Corporation, Caterpillar Inc., The Boeing Airplane Co., Motorola and The Limited Inc. (McLymont, 2001)

Then she disclosed how attuned private interests in the United States had been to this renaissance and how closely their economic interests were tied to Africa’s democratization. Finally, she closed:

Earlier in the year, in a move that enshrined President Clinton's policy of economic engagement with democratic Africa, the U.S. Congress passed the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, popularly known as AGOA, to allow free access to the U.S. market for made-in-Africa products. Though in no way a panacea for Africa's economic woes, it was Washington's big reward for what it calls a rolling tide of democracy in Africa. (McLymont 2001)
According to this assessment, U.S. foreign policy makers treated the AGOA as a reward for Africa’s democratization.

The discourse binding economic prosperity to political democracy is not new, nor is it entirely unique to U.S.-Nigerian relations and their shared discursive sphere. One of the defining turns of U.S. foreign policy under the Clinton Administration was the resurrection and adaptation of Kant’s liberal thesis, fusing democracy and capitalism to a Fukuyaman “End of History.”

In Clinton’s seminal statement of his national security strategy articulated in the 1996 White House document, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, Clinton presents three guiding goals of U.S. foreign policy: U.S. security, U.S. prosperity, and promoting democracy abroad. The compatibility and unity of these three goals is best articulated in an introductory paragraph which states:

> We believe that our goals of enhancing our security, bolstering our economic prosperity and promoting democracy are mutually supportive. Secure nations are more likely to support free trade and maintain democratic structures. Free market nations with growing economies and strong and open trade ties are more likely to feel secure and to work toward freedom. And democratic states are less likely to threaten our interests and more likely to cooperate with the United States to meet security threats and promote free trade and sustainable development. These goals are supported by ensuring America remains engaged in the world and by enlarging the community of secure, free market and democratic nations. (Clinton 1996)

Academics, on the other hand, have explored much more carefully the relationships between democracy and capitalism in their more nuanced and varied manifestations. For example, Gabriel Almond’s summary suggests that what is now proclaimed as the natural and given order of things by U.S. foreign policy officials, is not
necessarily so (Almond 1991). Democracy and capitalism manifest both reinforcing and contradictory characteristics. Expressing these same concerns with less ambivalence, the prolific fields of Marxist and Dependencia literatures demonstrate how liberal democracy and free-market capitalism are often at odds in both theory and practice. Nevertheless, with a dearth of alternative discourses sufficiently empowered to challenge the new hegemony, these alternative discourses remain primarily on the academic and theoretical planes.

By reinforcing these explicitly verbally constructed confines of ‘democracy,’ U.S. policy has provided through its non-verbal communications additional content to what democracy has become in the U.S.-Nigerian relations. Despite all the theoretical promises of democratization which accompany democracy as its natural consequences (i.e. that democracies are inevitably more peaceful, more powerful, and more wealthy), U.S. policy makers have also promised many more tangible and immediate rewards as well. Despite any good intentions these promises might have contained, the implicit content of such promises became the most crucial text contributing to the discourse of democracy.

**Economic Promise or the Rewards for Good Behavior**

_Blood was flowing in a hundred streams, not mingled with water, the water jets too had failed to function._ (Kafka 1988, 224)

Complementing the discourse presented above which privileges what we might call the economic content of democracy, are the more overt attempts to influence the rational calculus by which political decisions are made. An open and publicized series of
promised rewards have been offered for Nigeria’s conforming to the minimally defined requirements of democracy described above. Unfortunately, the promise of these rewards, ostensibly effective in their ability to affect behavior yet inert in any capacity to affect meanings, has instead reinforced the most dangerous interpretations of democracy while affecting behavior on only the most superficial levels.

The most immediately relevant of these policies began when Nigeria’s elections were nullified in 1993, and the United States imposed sanctions and halted all development aid. Soon thereafter the U.S. cut military ties and banned all direct flights to and from Nigeria. By 1999, however, with the appearance of democratic transition underway, the United States turned the spotlight on numerous carrots it might offer a democratic Nigeria. In March 1999, Thomas Pickering promised that “If Nigeria can stay the reform course, substantial multilateral assistance and debt relief become real options” (Pickering 1999). On a visit to Kano, U.S. Ambassador Williams Twaddell promised that if Nigeria returned to democracy, sanctions would be relaxed.

This political-economic nexus has continued to be reinforced, thereby maintaining the role of economic rewards as proof of the legitimacy of the political transition. Commenting on the news that trade between Nigeria and Great Britain had grown ten percent between 1998 and 1999, the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Graham Burton, explained that “Britain was willing to invest more in Nigeria because of the country’s large market and improved investment climate which came as a result of democracy” (Udeala 2001, journalist phrasing). Placing such a claim firmly in the context of national identity and international social relations, Burton added that "Nigeria
is our trading partner. I am happy that democracy has changed the perception of our people about Nigeria. There is no doubt that the trade volume between Britain and Nigeria will increase in years ahead” (Udeala 2001). In response:

Prince Adeyemo told Vanguard during a reception for the outgoing British envoy that the trade volume between the two countries increased not only because of democracy but also because of the measures adopted by Sir Burton to consolidate on the relations between the two countries. He called on the federal government to improve on infrastructural support services and beef up security in the country. He noted that with democracy in place, the foreign investment inflow in the country is expected to increase. (Udeala 2001)

Finally, Prince Adeyemo mentioned that he “blamed the low bilateral trade volume between the two countries in the past on military dictatorship in Nigeria, which did not make the atmosphere conducive to foreign investment” (Udeala 2001). Such exchanges make for some curious reading when only the expected disciplinary lenses are utilized (the political and economic, rather than the social). Whereas a typical reading of economic theory might cause one to focus on objective conditions (good infrastructure and secured property rights), Burton’s early statements suggest that economic rewards are to be reaped due to the nations’ improved social relations. Prince Adeyemo seemed acutely aware of this social origin of the economic rewards.

On his visit to Nigeria’s Rivers State, Senator Russel Feingold, a member of the U.S. Committee on Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Senate's African Sub-committee, expressed hope to Governor Peter Odili “that the visit to Rivers State would foster gainful economic relationship between the US and Nigeria” (Igbokwe 2001). Such words seem to echo the social nature of this democratic dividend. Democratic institutions do not bring trade and wealth. Instead, good social relations with a U.S.
Senator do. When the purpose of the conditioning was to strengthen good economic relations, then naturally the conditioner (U.S.) would continue to offer explicit rewards (not those naturally occurring rewards) as long as the desired behavior was sustained.

Other rewards were offered in President Clinton’s August 2000 trip to Abuja, Nigeria. In speaking with President Obasanjo, Clinton claimed that he was committed to “ease the burden of debt and promote trade and investment in a way that brings more of the benefits of prosperity to people who have embraced democracy” (White House. Office of the Press Secretary 2000). Likewise in a visit to “the people” (Kabugi 2000) which involved a small jaunt 12 miles from Abuja (Nigeria’s capital city) to the small farming village, Ushafa, he stepped out of his black limousine, and stated in English (his words were then translated into the local Gwari language) "We support your democracy. We want to help you build your economy, educate your children and build a better life in all the villages of this country" (Kabugi 2000). During his visit he was inaugurated as a Chief and titled Dan Massani of Ushafa, which means "the most learned person of Ushafa" (Kabugi 2000). In those brief words for which he was proclaimed the village’s “most learned person,” Clinton again promised support for democracy, but that support was expressed to the people in an entirely economic nature.

In a similar vein, U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria Howard Jeter announced in June 2001 that the United States would begin training three new battalions in addition to the two already trained. As part of the United States’ “hand of friendship” the U.S. was offering training to “restore the capacity and pride of Nigeria's military institutions” (Onuorah, 2001). Linking that cause to democratic transition, he stated that,
“Domestically, the Nigerian armed forces are turning in the same new direction as the nation – a fundamental democratic and political transition that, I assure you, will make this country greater, more prosperous and more stable in the future” (Onuorah, 2001). Military training was being offered as a reward to Nigeria and with the promise of more economic prosperity in the future.

Linking Nigeria’s democratic image explicitly to its internationally bestowed rewards, Panafrican News Agency’s Paris correspondent reported that “if Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo ended his visit to Paris this week assured of both support and investments, no doubt the credit goes to the emergence of democracy in the populous African nation” (Nabakwe 2000, emphasis added). Referring to aid and support promised by France, President Obasanjo announced that "where necessary, we have received immediate response. You can count on milk and honey as a new democratic dispensation is gaining ground in Nigeria" (Nabakwe 2000, emphasis added). In summarizing the lessons Obasanjo expressed on this trip, the reporter concluded that:

Obasanjo's remarks indicated that Western governments are willing and ready to assist African countries where governments demonstrate concrete commitment to practice democracy and good governance. Hence, such move to embrace democracy attracts support from Western countries, judging by the overwhelming encouragement given to Obasanjo by the French authorities and the private business sector. The investments that each African country is seeking to attract for the improvement of the socio-economic conditions may also be assured for countries willing to embrace democracy. (Nabakwe, 2000)

Another curious sign of the new U.S.-Nigerian relations was found in an account of Nigeria’s Anambra State Governor Mbadinuju’s trip to California where he “addressed the State Senate and State Assembly regarding Nigeria's new Democratic
government, international trade, business and commerce” (Barrow 2000). However, despite the reference to democracy and fact that he met with political leaders, all of the recorded discussion involved economic relations. Finally, Governor Mbadinuju, visited the Anambra State associations of Sacramento and Southern California, organizations of Anambra State natives living in the United States, hoping to help them form “a lobby group as the Jewish community has and begin to fight for and create economic trade and international relationships” (Barrow 2000). While there, he met with Senator John Burton to discuss “establishing relationships between Anambra State and major corporations. . . [and] the possibility of a trade tour.” In a meeting with the “representative of Silicon Valley,” Senator John Vasconcellos, they discussed a “possible computer donation and the establishment of an international Web site for the Anambra State” (Barrow 2000).

These statements and their accompanying behaviors taken together provide a picture of United States officials from the White House, Congress, and the State Department who are all eager to bestow upon Nigeria economic rewards for adopting democratic institutions. Such statements are compatible with the discourse described earlier in which democracy had been thinly defined in economic terms and largely emptied of political substance to depoliticize its promotion. These statements are also consistent with the general construction of an economic calculous that might very

9. At this point politics and economics are so muddled that “representative of Silicon valley” might refer to the political representative of the people of that region, or an economic representative of the Silicon Valley’s corporate interests. As it is used here, the meanings seem interchangeable.
effectively be employed to manipulate behavior. Nevertheless, that behavior can only be
effected if these communications were heard as well as spoken. The next chapter will
support just how much this discourse was shared.