



# **Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America (New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History)**

*Nils Gilman*

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Because it provided the dominant framework for "development" of poor, postcolonial countries, modernization theory ranks among the most important constructs of twentieth-century social science. In *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* Nils Gilman offers the first intellectual history of a movement that has had far-reaching and often unintended consequences.

After a survey of the theory's origins and its role in forming America's postwar sense of global mission, Gilman offers a close analysis of the people who did the most to promote it in the United States and the academic institutions they came to dominate. He first explains how Talcott Parsons at Harvard constructed a social theory that challenged the prevailing economics-centered understanding of the modernization process, then describes the work of Edward Shils and Gabriel Almond in helping Parsonsian ideas triumph over other alternative conceptions of the development process, and finally discusses the role of Walt Rostow and his colleagues at M.I.T. in promoting modernization theory during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. By connecting modernization theory to the welfare state liberalism programs of the New Deal order, Gilman not only provides a new intellectual context for America's Third World during the Cold War, but also connects the optimism of the Great Society to the notion that American power and good intentions could stop the postcolonial world from embracing communism.

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