THE POLITICS OF FOOD IN THE FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC SPHERES: FROM THE DEVELOPMENT DECADE AND BEYOND, DEVELOPMENT AND ANTIPOLITICS

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The US is a funny place: you can find a homeless person begging for food, an obese person using food stamps, and a multinational corporation that owns ten different brands of soft drinks all on the same street. For most people, food is something of an afterthought, something to think about only when they are eating out, or making their grocery list; however, food is more than just calories or nutrients, food is also a potent political weapon. Food is so powerful that it was the basis for Nick Cullather’s famous article titled “The Foreign Policy of a Calorie.” In Cullather’s article, he argues that in the early 1900s, ‘food’ lost its subjective, cultural, character and had evolved into a material instrument of statecraft.” Essentially, the calorie is not only an empirical, apolitical term but a tool that was often politicized to further the US’ development goals. Based on this sentiment, this paper explores how food was politicized and how the quantifying of food was a form of antipolitics. The 1960s was a juxtaposed decade due to the contrasting essence of foreign development and domestic turmoil. Abroad, US policymakers were allocating millions of dollars to developing new technologies to solve developing nations’ domestic problems, all in the hopes that these nations would side with Western capitalism over Soviet-backed communism. At the same time, however, the domestic scene in the US saw the rise of the civil rights movement, tensions between different racial groups, and rising inequality, with almost one-fifth of Americans living in poverty at the time.

Antipolitics is defined by Cullather as the exclusion of people with inconvenient claims in development programs. One of the ways Americans practiced antipolitics was by using statistics in development programs to “responsibilize” different tasks to the individual, the market, or the state. For example, obesity and starvation can serve as an indicator that the state has failed to provide basic necessities for its citizens, or can be attributed to a personal failure. The nature of antipolitics within development has been studied extensively, as has the failure of development abroad to bring about positive change to a country’s native inhabitants. Literature in the field has evolved over many periods: the first generation of historians studied modernization and development, followed by the second generation of post-Cold War historians who studied the colonialist aspects of the era, and now, recent books seek to provide a holistic view on development without bashing or romanticizing it. Most of this literature, however, focuses on the foreign sphere of development without enough emphasis on the effects of domestic politics. This is a missed opportunity; especially as US policymakers would often use their international experiences as inspiration for domestic solutions. Thus, the goal of this paper is to establish connections between the domestic and foreign spheres of US development through the lens of government policies regarding food in America and the American empire.

Development projects abroad, such as the “miracle rice” program, aimed to
improve food supply. These attempts were strikingly similar to domestic attempts to better distribute food through the Food Stamp Program in the 1960s, a program aimed at improving the nutrition levels of low-income households. The foreign and domestic projects were similar on the basis that both were ideologically important battles. Additionally, policymakers used research statistics to exclude different groups of people, specifically, native rice farmers in the Philippines and poverty-ridden Americans. Lastly, both “miracle rice” and the Food Stamp Program saw policymakers favour short-term stability over long-term transformation. This was a mistake that led the US to support an autocratic regime in Manila, only to incrementally improve access to food domestically.

During the 1960s in the Philippines, rice was used as a means to spread the American brand of modernity and was seen as a way to prevent the spread of communism. A new strain of rice seeds known as the IR-8, more commonly dubbed “miracle rice,” was developed by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines in 1966, a foundation whose aim was to innovate and increase the efficiency of rice production. At the same time, the World Bank had redefined poverty to focus on impoverished groups within nations instead of on poor nations as a whole; however, this strategy was more intrusive as it targeted specific groups that were already marginalized. This shift in strategy reinforced the role of the calorie and food as a tool of antipolitics in American foreign policy, which sought to replace Asian “backwardness” with American modernity. In the Philippines, the miracle of IR-8 was not that it could have solved the Asian famine crisis. Rather, it was that it displaced traditional methods used to grow rice by peasants and ushered in support for authoritarian regimes. In this case study, rice growing became a form of technopolitics; the use of technology to enact strategically important political goals, under the guise of apolitical science and development.

The IRRI’s journey began when they opened a plot of land adjacent to the University of the Philippines campus in Los Baños. Architect Ralph T. Walker, who designed the lab, “made no concessions to either climate or local conventions” as he crafted the American establishment. Specifically, Walker felt his design was a “new type of imperialism” that gave back through “specialized knowledge” to “backward peoples.” Under the context of previous US colonialism and the war in the Philippines, it is impossible to ignore the relationship between empire and development. Many scholars, such as Stephen Macekura, have noted that US development abroad often relied on simplistic and racist depictions of foreign peoples as “backwards” to justify US policymakers’ involvement. In 1957, the head of the US Chamber of Commerce even suggested that communism might lose its appeal if “one-tenth of the People of Asia had ever seen a Sears Roebuck catalog,” which, despite consultations with Sears executives about putting the plan into effect, did not happen. Nonetheless, the Americans hoped that by exposing Filipino farmers to the possibilities of modernity and pushing them to rely on American technology, these ‘backward peoples’ would not be influenced by communism and would turn towards the capitalist ideologies of the West.

Furthermore, the IR-8 was more of a spectacle than a miracle, as it sought to “display [statistical victories…] dramatizing the fruits of modernity.” It is important to note that the US government did not fund the creation of the IRRI. Rather the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations did, to the tune of more than $7 million.
goals for these two foundations, which have a long developmental history, were to introduce a “Manhattan Project for food”; essentially, to leave behind incremental improvements and to search instead for a new, innovative way of growing things. Moreover, American corporations believed strongly in the superiority of their technology, innovations, and ways of doing business, and they saw foreign despot countries as the perfect place to test whether their business model could be exported. It is likely that these radical beliefs are the reasons why, instead of searching for incremental improvements to existing cultivation techniques, the IRRI aimed to uproot and overthrow entire systems of agriculture. Before the scientists in Los Baños had even begun testing the IR-8 in non-lab settings, the miracle had been published and marketed as a statistical victory over the Asian backwardness that had previously existed.

American leaders recognized a clear link between the personal lives of individuals and their impact on the political and economic structure of a nation. Therefore, by changing everything the Filipino peasants knew about farming in their private lives, the Americans believed they would be able to change the entire state into one that was technologically and economically advanced. A New York Times article published in 1967, one year after the commercial release of the IR-8, wrote about how there are “bizarre and ancient customs involved in [the cultivation of rice]” such as “Malaysian women [stripping] to the waist while reaping, believing this will lead to the thinner husks that are easier to thresh.” Though not explicitly stated, traditional rice cultivation and associated rituals were seen as alien and backward. If American policymakers were to have Asian women contributing to the development of a prosperous nation in Malaysia, they felt as though they would need to uproot these rituals. As a consequence, the American belief that technology could revamp an entire country led to both the removal of traditional practices and an overly confident outlook on the implementation of massive structural reform. While technology is important, it is only a small part of the picture of modernization. Pretending that the IR-8 technology was apolitical led to more harm than good.

This entirely new strain of rice, a crossbreed between Taiwanese and Indonesian grains, was purported at the time to produce double the yield as a result of its dwarfism, requiring less spacing between each crop and less greenery per stem. However, a decade or so after the planting of the IR-8, the Los Angeles Times released a newspaper headlined “The ‘Miracle Rice’ Revolution Runs Into Roadblocks.” The article details how the high-yield dwarf variety tasted worse than the original strains of rice, with interviewees of the article stating that they only bought IR-8 rice when they “didn’t have enough money to buy good rice.” More importantly, the dwarf nature of the rice required seeds to be planted close to one another, leaving no space for bullocks to be used. Bullocks were incredibly important to the process, as their hooves prevent the soil from cracking while also leaving behind natural fertilizer as they trot. Before, the bullocks could also snack on the greenery of long-stemmed rice, which was no longer a possibility with the new dwarf strain. Lastly, the article notes that taller varieties of grass are more likely to survive flooding, which is a common occurrence in monsoon-ridden Southeast Asia. What began as a project aimed to modernize rice cultivation through science, ultimately led to an increased reliance on imported or subsidized fertilizers and the need for new irrigation systems, as the new rice strain needed extraordinary amounts of water. Thus, “farmers [had to] discard nearly all of their practices and adopt new techniques for planting, weeding, irriga-
tion, harvesting, and threshing,” which “[required] credit and distribution networks that the region did not have. Ultimately, although “miracle rice” initially grew well because it was created in a lab, in the real world, it only grew well because it was being pushed by American doctrine. Despite an already efficient ecosystem existing in the Philippines, the “big jump” strategy of the IRRI ignored traditional knowledge in favour of American modernity. The strategy was an extension of the United States’ espousal belief in Western technology’s ability to modernize an underdeveloped Asia.

Further, the intense focus on the statistical success of IR-8 production figures positively reinforced the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. Marcos’ regime, from 1965-1989, worsened the living conditions of the middle and lower classes, leading to large-scale poverty and extreme income inequality. As seen in a Wall Street Journal newspaper article from 1984, the Philippines was the only Asian country reported to have a negative real GDP growth at -4.2%, a serious contraction of the economy by any standard. In the beginning, Marcos advertised himself as a self-sufficient technocratic ruler who cared about modernization by maintaining the illusion of economic achievement. His regime faked harvest figures and exported small amounts of rice publicly while privately importing rice. However, even after the US government and corporations learned of the failures of the IR-8’s ability to generate economic growth, they continued to send gifts of military hardware, troops for civic programs, and private investments, all while funding the Philippines’ largest creditor: the International Monetary Fund. Even with the stunning failure of the development model in Manila, the US government continued to back Marcos for two reasons: the geostrategic necessity of military bases in the Philippines, and a continued commitment to fighting communism globally. Despite hefty goals to promote democracy, US policymakers often had to sacrifice long-term transformation and democratic reforms for short-term stability in implementing development, which was the most likely outcome under a militaristic autocrat. Hence, while Marcos might have been the first, he was certainly not the last populist leader to build his success on the back of US development goals.

For the US, while they were able to thwart communism from sprouting in the Philippines, their development tactics did not lead to the economic growth they foresaw. Rather, development efforts abroad displaced local knowledge and traditions and propped up an authoritarian regime. As a whole, American developmental policies were short-sighted and relied too heavily on science and science’s perceived inability to be influenced by politics. As we saw, science is not immune to the shortfalls of politics. Additionally, this was not the first time US policymakers had put too much faith in science to solve developmental questions.

During the same period in the 1960s and the 1970s, the US underwent a period of domestic turmoil; one of the main problems was food inequality in America. During this period, US policymakers, similar to their strategies in the Philippines, turned to science to define and ‘responsibilize’ hunger as a failure of the individual rather than as a failure of the state. That is, if hunger were to be defined as a social problem, it would detract from the American capitalist dream. Throughout this process, food was inextricably tied to politics and was often weaponized. To better understand the hunger problem in this period of American development, it is important to look at the history of the Food Stamp Program.
There are three major periods of the Food Stamp Program: the initial development period focused on solving agricultural surplus (1955-64), the period of social movements and media coverage (1964-69), and the Nixon period focused on increasing education (1969-73). During the mid-1950s, there was an overproduction of agricultural products by American farmers who had been encouraged to increase their yields during the Second World War. Food stamps, instead of direct distribution, were favoured as retailers complained that direct distribution programs by the government removed demand from retail channels. Even more so, it was unacceptable to many politicians and American citizens that some people were paid to not produce food when urban hunger was still alive and well. One such example of this was when, in 1968, a US senator, was paid $13,000 to not produce food on his plantation. Thus, the food stamps of the early 1960s were created. The program allowed recipients to buy orange stamps which could be used for any food items at full price. After buying the orange stamps, recipients would then receive free blue stamps that could be used to redeem commodities that were in surplus. As a result, retailers increased their sales and recipients were able to pick out the foods they wanted to eat.

However, there were two major flaws with the design of this program: first, the poor would not be able to divert the benefit away from food; and second, the nutritional needs of the recipients were largely ignored. Regarding the first issue, orange stamps could only be purchased at the price level that a household was already spending on food, but with the blue stamps, recipients could receive more food even while spending less money. On the latter issue, nutritional benefits were not considered because the ultimate goal of the program at the time was to add a new channel for distributing excess commodities. For example, during a 1955 hearing, Congresswoman Leonor Sullivan, who led the fight for the Food Stamp Program, said it would be wise to include only semi-perishable food so that the US government could hold grains and other storable commodities until they could be sold at no loss. Both flaws demonstrate that policymakers viewed hunger as a temporary and exceptional circumstance, in the sense that it occurred to worthy individuals who had fallen on hard times and would, thus, not be a permanent problem. It would have been impossible to admit otherwise, as doing so would have been equivalent to admitting that the structural problems of capitalism caused the food inequality in America. Thus, the first iterations of the initiative were meant to be a temporary solution to a temporary problem. This would eventually change as food inequality became less discriminant and the civil rights movement took off in the US.

In November of 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as the President of the United States after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. During his first State of the Union address, he made clear his goals to fight the War on Poverty and his goal of eradicating domestic problems, such as hunger, within the decade. Meanwhile, the Civil Rights Movement had also reached a fervour, with the famous “I Have a Dream” speech, made by Martin Luther King Jr., occurring less than a year prior. There were evermore grassroots social movements taking off and extensive media attention was given to the plight of hungry Americans. During this second period, the importance of non-state groups was essential in lobbying for relief, but new policies further solidified hunger as an individual issue to remove the responsibility from the state.

As already mentioned, many landowners during this time were subsidized
for not growing food. For the predominantly rural South, this meant that workers, who were predominantly Black Americans, had to move to northern cities or were left with little to no income.\textsuperscript{41} These circumstances contributed to the decision of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, an association of Black students dedicated to obtaining equality in America, to distribute food in the rural South in an attempt to alleviate the influx of migrants to Northern communities.\textsuperscript{42} The federal government never made the food stamp program mandatory for counties to establish, which meant that many overlooked the program’s implementation as a means of squeezing the poor out of their jurisdictions.\textsuperscript{43} The main goal of the Food Stamp Program during the first period was to solve overproduction, and with its view that hunger was temporary, the government had made no additional effort to enforce the program at the county level. However, by the mid-1960s, the reactions against hunger and other social injustices were becoming more violent, which meant the situation required national attention.\textsuperscript{44} At the end of 1969, hunger was no longer seen as temporary or exceptional, but as a persistent problem for rural and racialized groups.

It was not only grassroots social movements that contributed to the shifting definitions of hunger. Non-state organizations were able to rally the media to the cause as well. Similar to development abroad, two groups played an important role during the 1960s: the Field Foundation, funded by the family of Marshall Field (of department store fame); and the Citizen’s Crusade Against Poverty, which was backed by the United Auto Workers, church groups, and the Ford Foundation.\textsuperscript{45} The Field Foundation sent many physicians to rural Mississippi in 1967 to examine living conditions. What they found was a sleuth of malnourished children. Similarly, Citizen’s Crusade Against Poverty published a report titled \textit{Hunger USA} that uncovered stories of thousands of black women who had to eat laundry starch for dinner as they had no other form of sustenance.\textsuperscript{46} The report also cited situations where food was withheld during periods of labour shortages to force poor people back to work. Every single one of these stories served to incense the increasing media coverage, which was already on fire during this tumultuous period of civil protests.

Despite this, the US government employed various forms of antipolitics to prevent true progress: namely, defining hunger as a social problem rather than a food problem. First, there was nobody in the government that represented the needs of the hungry and the poor. The Department of Agriculture represented large commercial producers of commodities; an inherent conflict of interest embedded in the system.\textsuperscript{47} Additionally, hunger was not defined as a physiological feeling, but was rather defined using numerical statistics. Specifically, hunger was measured based on two factors: the amount an impoverished family could afford to spend on food and the cost of a minimally adequate diet. A family with a yearly income of fewer than three times the cost of a minimally adequate diet was considered food insecure and impoverished.\textsuperscript{48} A minimally adequate diet was also referred to as the Economy Food Plan, a category devised by Mollie Orshansky of the US Department of Agriculture. The Economy Food Plan was a variety of grocery lists that were created to help low-income households meet the nutritional requirements of a healthy diet, priced at minimal costs, and adjusted based on family type and size.\textsuperscript{49} Nonetheless, one major caveat of this statistical approach to hunger was that the Economy Food Plan was based on a cost-palatability trade-off. The criteria used to determine the plan were: nutritional adequacy, the relative nutritional economy of the different food groups, which mea-
sured how many vitamins one could receive from a certain food group using one US dollar, and the suitability of the food in relation to meal patterns across the US.50 There is a section in the report that states, “because butter and margarine form a large portion of the fats and oils group, the group is an economical source of vitamin A.”51 While the report does note that fats and oils are not great sources for obtaining other vitamins, the data shows that it is the most economical source of calories. The history of the calorific being important in policy discourse and advertising is not a novel idea. Therefore, it is no surprise that an article from *The New York Times*, published in 1973, wrote that “the ‘economy food plan’ on which stamp allotments are based did not provide for a nutritionally adequate diet” and further emphasized that “the stamp allotments were not even enough to…buy the amount and kind of food recommended in the plan.”52 In a similar article in the *Wall Street Journal*, “an Agriculture Department research director [was said to have] admitted in a deposition that….only about 10% of people who spend about the same amount for food as the Economy Diet Plan costs manage to obtain the full recommended daily allowance of nutrients.”53 Therefore, it is likely that participants bought unhealthy but high caloric foods to meet their survival needs. The statistical approach to administration regarding hunger led to incomplete policies that did not address the wide range of issues surrounding food, such as unpalatable and inaccessible options.

Further, the Food Stamp Program functions on a self-help system, which is reflective of the state’s attempt to use statistics to shift the blame of hunger onto the individual, demonstrated by the requirement that recipients had to “purchase” food stamps to receive additional ones.54 This made the program easier to support economically, but it also shows that US policymakers were more worried about their government budgets than the thousands of hungry people. Because of these financial concerns, policymakers tried to limit stamps in an effort to push people to participate more in the workforce. This fear of state dependency has a long history. Beginning with the English Poor Laws of the 1500s, public assistance has always been designed to provide minimal support for fear that state dependency would lead to needy citizens.55 The fear of dependency has always outweighed nutrition, health, and social consequences in domestic policy discourse.56

When Orshansky was devising the Economy Food Plan, she assumed that all food was to be prepared at home, even though going grocery shopping, planning healthy meals, and cooking food were extremely taxing tasks.57 This tidbit reveals that the measurements used in the creation of the Economy Food Plan viewed hunger as a personal problem: if individuals made better decisions, such as being more conscious when grocery shopping and cooking all their meals at home, they would not be hungry. When the distribution system formally ended in the mid-1960s, an article published in *The New York Times* wrote that “even the low-priced stamps appear to be too costly for many Mississippi Negroes” with “36,000 poor [unable] to transition to the stamp system.”58 Ultimately, the Food Stamp Program cemented hunger as an individual’s lack of access to calories, rather than a structural issue related to income inequality or a lack of access to nutritious and palatable food in poor areas. Thus, the self-help nature of the initiative overlooked the people who needed relief the most.

During the Johnson administration, small changes were implemented to the Food Stamp Program. Still, policymakers continued the rhetoric that the poor were hungry because they were ignorant, meaning that the solution lay in education rather
than direct assistance.\textsuperscript{59} When President Nixon was inaugurated in 1969, his stance on the program was to enact short-term measures that were relatively inexpensive so that he could keep inflation under control, such as only allowing the poorest families access to food stamps.\textsuperscript{60} However, the one program Nixon kept from the Johnson era was nutritional education programs for the poor to Johnson’s reforms.\textsuperscript{61} Similar to the self-help nature of the food stamp program, defining hunger as the result of a lack of education allowed policymakers to responsibilize hunger as the poor man’s fault. Nixon was quoted to have said that “many Americans who have enough money to afford a healthful diet do not have one.”\textsuperscript{62} Education is an individual’s responsibility, not a state’s problem, which meant Nixon did not have to admit hunger was a political issue that required political solutions. It was this assumption that led to only incremental reforms to the food stamp program during Nixon’s terms.

This is why half a year into his first term, Nixon announced the White House Conference on Nutrition, which aimed to improve the Food Stamp Program and solve hunger by meeting with different stakeholders. However, the conference was criticized for being unrepresentative of the poor, with less than 20 delegates from the National Welfare Rights group cleared to attend, even though the agricultural industry had many representatives present.\textsuperscript{63} During a speech at the conference, Nixon remarked: “On the one hand, we are dealing with problems of income distribution. On the other hand, with problems of education, habit, taste, behavior, personal preferences, the whole complex of things that lead people to act the way they do, to make the choices they do.”\textsuperscript{64} Therefore, taking into consideration the self-help nature of the program and the fear of dependency, characterizing education as the missing link allowed policymakers to absolve the state of blame. They believed that even if Economy Food Plan dependents were not able to meet their nutritional requirements, it was because they were not educated enough to spend their money well, not because the plan itself was flawed.

In the same remark, Nixon asserted that “[w]e are the world’s richest nation. We are its best educated nation. We have an agricultural abundance that ranks as a miracle of the modern world. This Nation cannot long continue to live with its conscience if millions of its own people are unable to get an adequate diet.”\textsuperscript{65} It is important to note that the 1960s were also known as the “Development Decade,” characterized by a strong desire to fight poverty, backwardness, and most importantly, communism at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{66} In the early 1970s, economist Kermit Gordon wrote that, “contemporary American society is, in a sense, a split-level structure. Its political and social institutions provide universally distributed rights and privileges that proclaim the equality of all citizens. But its economic institutions rely on market-determined incomes that generate substantial disparities among citizens in living standards and material welfare.”\textsuperscript{67} If American policymakers cannot solve the issue of hunger domestically, it would have confirmed Gordon’s thesis that government intervention is necessary for there to be more equity and less disparity between its citizens, which would also confirm that centrally controlled economies have merit. In the American fight against communism, hunger became more than just a domestic issue, it became a global development issue.

As US policymakers were fighting to find a way to fill the stomachs of the hungry, a similar, yet vastly different, problem was taking root in society. The problem of obesity was hard to ignore. By the time the 21st century rolled
around, America had become a state of dichotomies: hosting many who were hungry while, simultaneously, hosting many who were morbidly obese.

Half a century after the Food Stamp Program launched in 1965, the world looks vaguely strikingly familiar, with rising global food prices, persistent hunger among the poorest countries, and concerns over whether the global food supply will be adequate for the growing population. But now, the US, and other developed nations, are also seeing steadily increasing Body Mass Indexes (BMIs) for their citizens. Obesity, just like hunger, is extremely costly for the state; the US has doubled the percentage of its GDP spent on healthcare from 1970 to the early 2010s, with the rise in obesity contributing to one-third of that increased expenditure. Similar to the problem of hunger, obesity is a policy failure of the state in two regards: the individualization of the phenomenon and the use of statistics to downplay the problem.

First, the individualization of obesity occurs in both popular media and the medical community through the use of the lifestyle model, which stipulates obesity as a result of personal choices, similar to other diseases such as AIDS and heart disease. This is why obesity in the US is usually associated with gluttonous behaviour and a lack of self-control, despite the studies that show there are many social issues tied to obesity. Two social factors that affect obesity are the increased density of calories in food and a lack of access to healthy food options. From 1985 to 2000, Americans increased their caloric intake by 12%. 90% of this increase came from added fats, sugars, and grains to their diets. It was also in the mid-1970s that the Nixon government industrialized agricultural production to create a surplus of corn, which was then used to mass develop high-fructose corn syrup. As a result, the American government-initiated subsidies for refinement of corn. Many residents in low-income neighbourhoods and many residents in low-income neighbourhoods, primarily African Americans, had high rates of obesity as they had less access to supermarkets with nutritional items, such as fruits and vegetables, at reasonable prices. Research has shown that those who regularly go to higher-end grocery stores had obesity rates that were one-third of those who regularly shopped at lower-end grocery stores, which tend to carry cheap and unhealthy foods. Yet, the government does not subsidize healthy food in grocery stores in these low-income neighbourhoods, the same way it subsidizes corn refinement for high-fructose corn syrup producers and manufacturers. Policymakers use statistics as a form of antipolitics to force citizens to shift the underlying responsibility to the citizen, which was covered previously, and to exclude those with inconvenient claims. In 2007, the US Department of Agriculture eliminated the word “hunger” from its assessments and replaced it with the term “food insecurity.” While this may seem innocent enough, collecting data on food insecurity is much easier than collecting data on hunger—a physiological condition—even though it is the real underlying problem. This switch removes the politically sensitive and emotion-eliciting word “hunger” in favour of a more rational term. It is similar to how obesity is defined by one’s BMI, even though this measurement is inadequate, fails to take into account hereditary factors, and is not reflective of the social problems an individual faces. Food and hunger have never been simple domestic issues that could be easily solved with measurable goalposts; on the other hand, obesity has global implications. If the US cannot solve its obesity dilemma, its hegemony will come into question as developing nations look for more sustainable
After the release of documentaries such as *Supersize Me*, it is impossible to ignore how food both impacts and is impacted by politics. Abroad, there was a clash between the modern way of growing rice versus the traditional way that was seen as backward. The use of numbers and data in the IRRI lab proved that the IR-8 produced better yields but did not take into account the detrimental impact it had on Filipino farmers and their existing systems. Thus, as Cullather writes, statistics “translated the vernacular customs of food into the numerical language of empire,” a language that spoke about food “without reference to taste, ethnic tradition, or social context.” Domestically, it was evident that the government used many tools to responsibilize the hunger epidemic to the individual. By doing so, it absolved the state of its structural deficiencies. The historical definition of hunger attempted to be as narrow as possible to avoid defining it as a social issue. The media continues the tradition nowadays by blaming obesity on lifestyle choices while the government continues its erasure of hunger and the hungry from its lexicon. Food has always been a powerful political tool to project American modernity, hegemony, and power; and until the technocratic element of development is removed, American policymakers will continue their attempts to solve political problems with an apolitical mindset.

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