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**BOOK REVIEW: UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN HEGEMONY**

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**ABSTRACT**

American hegemony refers to the dominant political, economic, and military position of the United States in the world since the end of World War II. The influence of American culture has become increasingly widespread in all aspects of life and has attracted the attention of academics, including American Studies scholars. The book entitled *Understanding American Hegemony* written by Kasiyarno is a work that explains American hegemony from the perspective of American Studies. The theoretical framework of this book departs from the Interdisciplinary approach, namely US hegemony from the perspective of culture (cultural hegemony), history and political science (international relations), economics, military, and regional (regionalism). *Understanding American Hegemony* is a book that emphasizes the study of how the U.S. experience grows and develops abroad and the reaction of the world or world community toward U.S. policies in disseminating its cultural values abroad. Besides, this book is expected to enrich American studies not only in its regional scopes but also in the direction of the study.

**Keywords:** *American hegemony; American power; American Studies; Book review; Culture*

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In *Understanding American Hegemony*, Kasiyarno, a researcher on American cultural hegemony as well as a practitioner in the world of education, explores the United States' experience which expanded and developed in other countries, as well as how the rest of the world or the international community reacted to the policies pursued by the US in the process of exporting its cultural values. He argues that this book will make a

tremendous contribution to American studies as an academic discipline. Moreover, it can be viewed as a new perspective in American studies (Kasiyarno, 2022). This book consists of seven chapters that exclusively discuss American Hegemony from the theory to the practice in the American Studies context. This book begins by reviewing the definition of hegemonic culture. Hegemonic culture refers to the dominant culture that exists

within a society or community, which shapes and controls individual beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors in that society (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 1). This culture is often maintained and reinforced by those in power and is seen as the normative way of life that everyone is expected to adhere to.

The picture of the ups and downs of hegemonic state power in history is illustrated by Modelski (1978) in a graphical form where the hegemonic power of the United States after the Second World War, especially after the Cold War, is the greatest in the history of modern civilization. As a consequence, hegemonic culture has both positive and negative effects on society. On the one hand, it can provide a sense of stability and shared identity, as people are united by common beliefs and practices (Krige, 2018). However, it can also lead to marginalization and oppression of those who do not conform to the dominant culture, as they may be seen as deviant or inferior.

It is important to recognize the existence of hegemonic culture and its effects on individuals and society as a whole. By understanding and acknowledging the dominant culture, we can work to create a more inclusive and equitable society where diverse perspectives and experiences are valued and celebrated.

*Understanding American Hegemony* is a book that cannot be split from the influence of Antonio Gramsci's work. In this book, the author explains that Gramsci's theory of hegemony provides a crucial lens for understanding how dominant groups maintain their power and control over society (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 8). According to Gramsci, hegemony refers to the ability of

the ruling class to exert influence over the beliefs, values, and norms of society, creating a sense of consent among the masses of the existing social order. This is achieved through the dissemination of dominant ideas through various cultural institutions such as the media, education, and the arts (Davidson, 2007; Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 12).

Critics of Gramsci's theory argue that it downplays the role of economic factors in shaping social relations and overemphasizes the agency of cultural institutions in shaping public opinion (Galeota, 2004). However, hegemony theory remains a powerful tool for understanding how power operates in society and how dominant groups maintain their control. By recognizing the importance of culture and ideology in shaping social relations, Gramsci's theory offers a valuable framework for analyzing the complex interplay between power, culture, and resistance in contemporary society.

In the second part of the book, the author explains the "American Dream, Myth, and Illusion" and deeply discusses the relationship as well as the implementation of those three things that have shaped the identity of the American nation. Kasiyarno describes that the American dream, for many Americans, is an integral part of their own identity and a vital function in American culture (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 23). It represents the belief that anyone, regardless of their background, can achieve success and prosperity through hard work and determination. However, the American Dream is not without its issues, and there are growing concerns that it is becoming increasingly difficult for individuals to achieve upward mobility in the U.S. Furthermore, the American Dream can be

seen as a form of cultural imperialism, as it has been exported to other countries as an ideal to be emulated. This can contribute to the spread of American hegemony and global cultural homogenization, as other cultures are expected to adopt American values and ideals (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 30).

Meanwhile, Illusion and Myth have played a significant role in the context of American hegemony, shaping the dominant U.S. culture and contributing to the perception of the U.S. as a global superpower. This is the idea that the U.S. is unique among nations, with a special destiny and mission to spread its values and ideals to the rest of the world (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 35). This illusion has been used to justify American military interventions and the spread of American influence around the world, despite the negative consequences of these actions for many people.

In the third part of this book, the author describes American exceptionalism in which the United States is inherently different and superior to other nations. In this part, the author argues that American exceptionalism is often associated with the belief that the U.S. has a special mission to spread its values and way of life to the rest of the world (Kasiyarno, 2022). Besides, the author also explains the influence and the essence of Alexis de Tocqueville's work in defining American exceptionalism. This country, he said, "is particularly distinctive in applying the ideas and institutionalization of region and politics from Western culture since it displays more social egalitarianism and high social mobility" (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 40). The founding fathers were inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment, which emphasized reason, individualism, and the

importance of human rights. They believed in the concept of natural law, which held that all people had inherent rights that should be protected by the government. They also believed in limited government, with power divided among different branches and levels of government (Schweizer, 2022,).

These ideas, as well as the founding fathers' commitment to freedom and democracy, have been seen as a contribution to American exceptionalism. However, it is worth noting that American exceptionalism has been subject to debate and criticism, with some arguing that it has been used to justify imperialism, exceptionalism, and a lack of accountability in American foreign policy.

In the fourth part, the author explains American Creed and Brand which both are very fundamental in nature. The author argues that the idea of Alexis de Tocqueville about the success of America in implementing democracy triggers the American Creed (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 50). There are five aspects namely; freedom, equality, individualism (respect for individual rights), defense of people's rights (populism), and laissez-faire. The American Brand, on the other hand, is a set of values and images associated with the United States, both domestically and internationally. It includes elements such as the American flag, iconic landmarks such as the Statue of Liberty, and symbols of American culture such as Hollywood movies, fast food chains, and consumer brands (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 53).

In the fifth part of this book, the author shows how the United States get involved in the psychological war. The author explains that the end of the Cold War not only caused the United States to lose its toughest

competitor in the race for global domination but also impacted the underlying concepts of American foreign policy, which had been applied for decades (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 55). In this part, the author explains psychological war into five issues, there are; Global Anxiety Management, Global Information Control, Post-Cold War Information Dissemination Strategy, Spreading the idea of “Rogue States”, and Spread the failed states’ idea: Postcard from Hell”. In Global Anxiety Management, the author argues the end of the Cold War was the victory of President Ronald Reagan. Reagan stated his conviction that the Soviet Union was not as powerful as many had assumed (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 60). Reagan publicly voiced his opposition to the development of the Soviet Union's Marxist-Leninist doctrine and threatened to stop it by military force if necessary. America increased the opposition of people in the territory of the Soviet Union in Poland on purpose. In Global Information Control, the author explains the expansion of America's overseas information operations to make them more viable.

The Voice of America (VOA) increased its language broadcasts, while Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty strove to break through the Iron Curtain in the Eastern Bloc. Then, in the Post-Cold War information dissemination strategy, the author shows that the general principle for controlling US information following the end of the Cold War consists of three things: first, the ability to quickly identify all forms of threats, both medium- and long-term; second, the ability to personally identify anyone involved in terrorist activities and acts; and third, the ability to implement all emergency management, protection, response, deterrence, prevention, and detection measures based on risk and information (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 62).

In “Spreading the Idea of “Rogue States””, the author describes that the idea of “Rogue States” typically refers to countries that are perceived to be acting outside of international norms and behaving in a way that is deemed threatening to global security. This concept has been used to justify various actions, including economic sanctions, military intervention, and other forms of pressure on targeted countries.

In “The Spread the Failed States Idea: “Postcard from Hell””, the author explains that the concept of “failed states” describes nations that are unable or unwilling to offer their residents protection and essential services, which leads to a breakdown in governance and social order. A “Postcard from Hell” is a theatrical method of depicting the terrible circumstances that might develop in such states, such as poverty, violence, and humanitarian disasters (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 65).

The term “failed states” is still frequently used in policy circles to refer to nations suffering serious difficulties, despite criticism that it is overly basic and reductive (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 69). We may aid in bringing attention to the urgent need for action to address the main causes of state failure and support individuals affected by these conditions by emphasizing the concept of “Postcard from Hell”.

According to the author, in the context of American Studies, this type of categorization is nothing more than a tactic to extend the domination of Western countries, particularly the United States, throughout the world. Although there are still numerous humanitarian issues in various Asian and African countries, this categorization has

overlooked the Western world's role in diminishing the power of third-world countries through colonialization and imperialism (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 70). "Postcard from Hell", which depict numerous social inequities and political instability in Asia and Africa, has also covered an important fact: the same thing is happening on various dimensions in Western countries.

In the sixth part of the book, the author describes how Americanization promotes democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression around the world. The process of "Americanization" stresses the alteration of cultural identity, which may emerge from an appreciation for American subjectivity and civilization or from a compulsive need to adopt American culture to benefit from what America has to offer (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 73). Moreover, in the context of Americanization, the author explains the phenomenon that has brought cultural resonance and has gained the attention of many publics, activists, observers, and cultural experts is so-called McDonaldization (Kasiyarno, 2022, p. 74). McDonaldization unmistakably introduces new ideals to Asian countries, particularly in the model of business organization, consuming culture, and consumerism.

What is remarkable is that McDonaldization, as part of America's global industry, may have a negative impact on local markets and threaten an uncompetitive foreign sectors. Because the bulk of foreign industries cannot compete with the force of the U.S. industrial economy, American dominance is necessarily harms the local market (Kasiyarno, 2022, p.77). The concept of cultural globalization expresses the belief that "Americanization or Westernization is highly significant in affecting many cultures

in third world countries and former Soviet Union areas" (Moody, 2017). Therefore, in various writings and analyses of hegemony in American studies, cultural hegemony is often seen as having a close relationship with cultural imperialism. The dominance of American culture can lead to the loss of local cultural traditions and the homogenization of global culture. It is important to have a critical and nuanced understanding of American cultural imperialism and its impact on global cultural diversity.

To summarize, The United States is one of the most powerful political entities in the world, with significant influence over global affairs. Its political power stems from a variety of factors, including military might, economic strength, diplomatic relationships, and cultural influence. American hegemony refers to the United States' dominant position in the global political and economic order. Its origins may be traced back to the Post-World War II period, when the United States emerged as the world's superpower, and it has since been sustained through a combination of military, economic, and cultural might. Americanization, or the dissemination of American culture, values, and habits, has been a critical component in the preservation of American hegemony. While some regard Americanization as a beneficial force that promotes democracy, human rights, and freedom of expression, others see it as a type of cultural imperialism that weakens local cultures and reinforces American supremacy. Finally, the impact of American hegemony on the world is complicated and multifaceted, impacted by a variety of economic, political, and cultural elements.

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