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Ideology, Social Science, and Destiny: Modernization and the Kennedy-Era Alliance for Progress

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On 2 March 1961, Walt W. Rostow sent John F. Kennedy a memorandum.

Endorsing a proposal made by Kennedy's Latin American Task Force, the MIT modernization theorist and newly appointed deputy national security adviser told the president that the time was right for launching a new "Economic Development Decade." As he put it, "barring a catastrophe, it is likely that a good many of the countries in the underdeveloped world will, during the 1960s, either complete the take-off process or be very far advanced in it. When take-off is complete a nation may be poor but it is normally in a position to draw its external capital from private commercial sources." Noting Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela as nations that could be weaned off what he called the "international dole," Rostow argued that, through a massive transfusion of foreign aid,...

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