America In The World: Benevolent Giant or Just Another Superpower?

Credit Hours: 4

Prerequisites: None

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The United States is unlike any previous world power both in the beliefs on which it was founded and in its geographical situation, surrounded by oceans and far removed from the conflicts in which it intervenes. From the moment of its birth, America has told a story about itself: That it was not simply a nation among nations but a beacon of democracy and individual freedom. As it became a world power at the end of the 19th century, the U.S. began to deploy its wealth and force abroad to advance its national interests, as other great powers did--but also, or so it said and its people deeply believed, to shape a more peaceful, democratic and just world order. The United States continued to pursue that self-assigned mission through two world wars and the Cold War. And yet it is also a hegemon--a dominant power--and shapes the world to its perceived interests, as all hegemons do. Over the last century, critics have never stopped accusing the U.S. of hypocritically pursuing narrow interests in the name of global good. Perhaps they have now been proved right, for in Donald Trump the American people elected a president who ridicules all higher aspirations and wants nothing more than to win all contests for wealth and power.

This class will examine a series of critical points--war, colonialism, the founding of global institutions, interventions abroad--in order to understand the tension between America's idealistic global mission and the brute fact of its power and dominance.

Teaching and Learning Methodologies: The class will be taught almost entirely in group discussion, with lectures kept to a bare minimum. Students will be expected to have thought about the readings, and to be prepared to talk about them in class. Six classes will end in debates that pit teams of two to three students against one another, with other students serving as critics and judges.

Requirements: Reading, as below. Class participation. Debate preparation. Students will write short (4-500 words) reading responses every week and three papers of 3-4 pages in length (in lieu of a reading response).

Grading: Class participation 20%, debate 20%, weekly papers 60%. In general, class participation will be assessed not on the volume of what you say, but on the depth of your engagement with the reading.
Assignments:

Class 1--Founding Faiths
Washington’s Farewell Address,
https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp (From "Observe good faith and justice towards all nations..." to "It is an illusion, which experience must cure.")
John Quincy Adams July 4, 1821 address: https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/july-4-1821-speech-us-house-representatives-foreign-policy
The Monroe Doctrine, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29465 (from "It was stated at the commencement of the last session..." to end)
George Herring, From Colony to Superpower, pp. 134-58

Class 2--The Spanish-American War and Colonialism

Herring, pp. 299-316
Robert Beisler, Twelve Against Imperialism, 139-64
Tony Smith, America’s Mission, 40-59

Debate--Was the American presence good or bad for the Philippines?

Class 3--Wilson and the League of Nations

Herring, pp. 410-35
Woodrow Wilson, “A World League For Peace,”
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=65396
Wilson, the Fourteen Points speech,
https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson’s_Fourteen_Points
Henry Cabot Lodge, Speech against the League of Nations, —
http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/lodge_leagueofnations.htm
Henry Kissinger, World Order, 257-69

Debate--Was the League of Nations a good idea gone wrong, or a pipe dream that Wilson should not have pursued?

Class 4--Cold War and Containment 1946-60

Herring, pp. 595-601 (to "...as confirmation of Soviet expansionism.") 611-619 (to "...$6 billion appropriation in June.") 623-6, 635-9 (to "...would soon put it back on the table.") 651-60, 664 (From "The United States’ credibility...")-667 (to "...with the Soviet Union itself.")
Truman speech on the Truman Doctrine,
http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/harrystrumantrumandocctrine.html
George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,”
http://www.historyguide.org/europe/kennan.html
Paper Due

Class 5--Building the Liberal World Order

John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, pp. 116-44
Stewart Patrick, *The Best Laid Plans*, pp. 267-92, 326-33

Class 6--Kennedy and Vietnam

Herring, pp. 702-10, 716 (from "Kennedy devoted more attention. . .")-29, 736-745, 751-9
President Kennedy Inaugural Address, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkinaugural.htm
Hans Morgenthau on Vietnam, "We Are Deluding Ourselves in Vietnam," http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/vietnam/hans%27.htm

Class 7--The Cold War 1970-90

Herring, pp. 829-838, 845 (from "The Carter Administration is remembered. . .")-855 (to "...and nuclear non-proliferation."), 858 (from "No single event. . .")-871, 881-8 (to "...its economy in shambles."), 893-7 (to "...for Soviet propaganda.")

Debate--Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan were both "Wilsonian" idealists, though in very different ways. Which one did more good for the world--or less harm?

Class 8--Bosnia, Haiti, Rwanda

Nancy Soderbergh, *The Superpower Myth*, 277-90
Debate--Does the United States have the obligation to intervene abroad in order to prevent or stop mass atrocities?

Class 9--Regime change in Iraq and the Freedom Agenda

Robert Mann, *Rise of The Vulcans*, 310-21, 336-44, 351-53
James Traub, *The Freedom Agenda*, pp. 99-109 (down to ". . .throughout the Middle East."), 116-43

Paper Due

Class 10--Israel/Palestine

Obama's 2009 speech in Cairo--

Debate--Should the U.S. continue to support a two-state solution?

Class 11--Barack Obama and the limits of force

Derek Chollet, *The Long Game*, pp. 68-78, 127-147
Obama interview in *The Atlantic*, from beginning to "...there are good reasons why it does not apply."
Class 12--The Coming Struggle With China


Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning, in *Foreign Affairs*,
https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-02-13/china-reckoning

Erwin Prasad, "Which country is better equipped to win a U.S.-China trade war?”,
https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/which-country-is-better-equipped-to-win-a-us-china-trade-war/

Class 13--What (if anything) is Donald Trump's foreign policy?

Robert Blackwill, "Trump's foreign policies are better than they seem,"
https://cfrd8-files.cfr.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/CSR%20084_Blackwill_Trump_0.pdf, pp. 1-7, 21-41, 44-6

Chad Brown and Douglas Irwin, "Trump's assault on the global trading system,"

Kelly Magsamen, "Destroying the foundations of American foreign policy,"

Paper Due

Class 14--America Good, Bad or Indifferent?

Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire*, pp. 7-54

https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-twilight-of-the-liberal-world-order/
Ikenberry--224-40

Debate--Is America a benevolent hegemon or just another superpower?