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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
Summer Challenge Program

**INTERNATIONAL POLITICS:  
US FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS DISCONTENTS**

Session 1 (15-26 June 2015)  
*Class time:* Monday-Friday, 9:30 AM-11:30 AM, MUG 203  
*Office hours:* By appointment

**Course Description:**

The purpose of this course is to a) educate you on the major themes and debates surrounding the United States' engagement with the world since the nation's founding in 1781; and b) provide you with a critical framework for assessing current global problems facing American policymakers. Through lectures, discussions and projects, we will debate the historical lessons of US foreign policy and how best to apply them to 21<sup>st</sup>-century problems. At the end of this course, you should be able to understand and critically assess the major historical events and ideologies that have shaped US foreign policy, what role the US plays on the global stage, how or if American power should be deployed, and the implications of that power (both geopolitically and for specific nations).

**Course Materials:**

The Summer Challenge Program will provide you with the following course book:

**Walter A. McDougall**  
***Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776***  
**New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1997**

While the course book focuses almost solely on the history of US foreign policy, we will not neglect the present—you will be expected to apply the book's historical lessons to current problems. To that end, please make sure to closely follow international news coverage

throughout the course. While you are welcome to read any reputable news source of their choosing, the following publications and accompanying websites are highly recommended:

The *New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com/>  
The *Economist*: <http://www.economist.com/>  
*Foreign Affairs*: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>  
The *Atlantic*: <http://www.theatlantic.com/>  
The *Financial Times*: <http://www.ft.com/>  
The *Washington Post*: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

### **Course Requirements:**

Class attendance and participation are both essential components of this course. You are expected to not only attend daily sessions but also to actively participate in all class discussions and activities. It is absolutely crucial that you always remain courteous toward your fellow students and treat differing opinions in a mature and respectful manner. If you feel you're unable to express an opinion or speak freely in class, please come talk to me at your earliest opportunity.

You are also expected to keep up with the assigned reading; our discussions will be based on and enhanced by the assigned readings, and it is essential that you come to class prepared.

### **Class Presentations:**

You will work in groups of 2-3 on a final presentation analyzing a current US foreign policy problem and proposing a specific course of action. (You will present your analysis and proposed response as if you are presenting to a US president in an attempt to convince him/her to take your advice and implement the action you propose.) With assistance from the instructor, each group will select a different problem that reflects the interests of the students. The presentations should be structured as follows, though more details will of course be provided in class:

*Foundations/Background Information:* You should provide the necessary background/historical information to contextualize your problem and inform the audience as to what precisely is going on and what has happened up until the moment of your presentation.

*Statement of the Problem:* After having provided the audience with the necessary background information, you should then clearly identify the problem at hand. What is the nature, and what are the different philosophical and political dimensions, of your problem?

*Proposed course of action/Policy recommendations:* You should then apply what you have learned in the course to suggest a response to the problem at hand. Your proposed response should be based on a careful assessment of multiple possible courses of action and the benefits and drawbacks of each. The recommendation you make does not have to be perfect—in fact, it almost certainly will not be—but it should account for both short and long term consequences

and implications (for US power, national security, relations with certain countries or international organizations, etc.)

Each group will present their analysis and policy recommendation to the entire class on the last day of the course (Friday, 26 June). Presentations should last approximately 20 minutes and include PowerPoint slides. (You will also be expected to answer questions from the audience about your problem.) I will provide time in class for you to work with your group on your chosen problem.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE:**

### ***Monday, 15 June 2015:***

#### **Introduction to the Study of International Politics and US Foreign Policy**

##### *In-Class Discussion:*

- What is the global reputation of the US? How does the rest of the world view US power and its ability to solve global problems? How did we get to this point?
- How would you define President Obama's foreign policy? How does it differ from President Bush's?

*Homework (reading):* McDougall, "Introduction," pp. 1-12.

### ***Tuesday, 16 June 2015:***

#### **In the Beginning: US Foreign Policy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

##### *In-Class Discussion:*

- What did the world look like to the newly independent United States in 1776?
- What were the biggest foreign-policy problems facing this new nation?

*Case Study/Focus:* The American response to the French Revolution

*Homework (reading):* McDougall, "Liberty, or Exceptionalism (so called)," pp. 15-38.

### ***Wednesday, 17 June 2015:***

#### **"Exceptionalism" and "Isolationism": 19<sup>th</sup> Century Principles, Part I**

##### *In-Class Discussion:*

- How did the idea of "American exceptionalism" get started? What did it mean in the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century?
- What does the idea of "American exceptionalism" mean in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Does it still apply? Did it *ever* apply?

*Homework (reading):* McDougall, "Unilateralism, or Isolationism (so called)," pp. 39-56.

### ***Thursday, 18 June 2015:***

#### **"Exceptionalism" and "Isolationism": 19<sup>th</sup> Century Principles, Part II**

##### *In-Class Discussion:*

- How did the US behave toward major European powers throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Why?

- Do you think the United States should adopt a more “isolationist” strategy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Why, and what would be the benefits and drawbacks of such a strategy?

*Case Study/Focus:* The War of 1812 and the Monroe Doctrine

*Homework (reading):* McDougall, “Progressive Imperialism,” pp. 101-121.

**Friday, 19 June 2015:**

### **American Imperialism**

*In-Class Discussion:*

- Was the US hypocritical in its actions during and preceding the Spanish-American War? How did the US’s new status as a “world power” affect its foreign policy?
- Is it still fair to classify the US as an imperialist nation (or a nation with imperialist tendencies)? Why or why not?

*Case Study/Focus:* The Spanish-American War

*Homework:* McDougall, “Wilsonianism, or Liberal Internationalism,” pp. 122-146.

**Monday, 22 June 2015:**

### **Liberalism vs. Realism, Part I**

*In-Class Discussion:*

- What are the principles of liberal internationalism?
- What was President Wilson’s vision for global affairs after the First World War?
- Do you see President Wilson as a visionary, or do you believe he was naïve and misguided? Why?

*Case Study/Focus:* World War I

*Homework:* Work on your presentations.

**Tuesday, 23 June 2015:**

### **Liberalism vs. Realism, Part II**

*In-Class Discussion:*

- What are the principles of realism?
- How did the US’s global position—and its worldview—change after the Second World War?
- Has the US adopted a more liberal or a more realistic foreign policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

*Case Study/Focus:* World War II

*Homework (reading):* McDougall, “Containment,” pp. 147-171; and “Global Meliorism,” pp. 172-198.

**Wednesday, 24 June 2015:**

### **Containment and the Cold War**

*In-Class Discussion:*

- Why did the US feel threatened by the political ideology of Communism?
- What principles dictated the US’s decision to get involved in Vietnam?
- Was the US war in Vietnam a mistake? Why? Has the US made similar foreign policy mistakes since then?

*Case Study/Focus:* The Vietnam-American War

*Homework (reading):* McDougall, "Conclusion: A Delightful Spot," pp. 199-222.

***Thursday, 25 June 2015:***

**Wrap-Up: The 21<sup>st</sup> Century World; Group Work**

*In-Class Discussion:* What have we learned? Is the US "good," "bad," or "ugly" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century international arena?

*Homework:* Work on your presentations.

***Friday, 26 June 2015:***

**Student Presentations**