

12 – America in the World

Issues:

1. America, as a world power, has a significant amount of influence in the world.
2. The tension between isolation & neutrality v. intervention in America's cultural, economic, and military involvement in the world.
3. America is both loved and hated for its cultural, economic, and military role in the world.

Student Outcomes:

1. Students will understand and be able to explain America's transition from isolation and neutrality to interventionism—militarily, economically, and culturally.
2. Students will be able to describe and explain America's cultural influence in the world.
3. Students will be able to describe and explain why America is both loved and hated around the world.

Note: First day's readings: pages 1–5; second day's readings: pages 6–8.

Students should come to class prepared to teach the other students in the class what they have learned through preparing for the class and be able to provide evidence to support their ideas.

American Foreign Policy

The United States has faced unique challenges in conducting its foreign policy. There has been a desire to conduct internal affairs on the basis of virtue, justice, fairness, and “republican” principles, as well as a desire to conduct external affairs – relations with other nations – on the same principles. But that has never been easy in a world of dictators, secret deals, power politics, intrigue, and aggression. A brief overview of American foreign policy history allows for an understanding of America’s foreign policy dilemma.

Since colonial times and the arrival of the Puritans Americans have exhibited a sense of idealism and mission. For the Puritans this sense of idealism and mission was exhibited in their efforts to reform the Church of England. After Independence from England the sense of mission and idealism was expressed through a desire to share the blessings of democratic and republican principles. As America developed as an industrial powerhouse the sense of mission included an economic element; a desire to share with the world the benefits of the market system. Americans have seen themselves and their ideals throughout history as truly unique in the world. They have felt a desire and responsibility to share the benefits of the uniqueness with others around them, with mixed results.

At the same time, many Americans were concerned over both the ethics of their missionary attitudes and the efficacy of their ideals in a world so unlike America. There have been many debates over the right and wrong of attempts to export the “unique set of principles” that America holds dear to groups of people with completely different principles, and the ability of American ideals to bless the lives of cultures outside of America. There is a fear that rather than blessing the world, American principles may be overwhelmed by others’ failures.

1. What two elements make up America’s foreign policy dilemma?

Early American foreign policy revolved around strict isolation and neutrality, avoiding political or military alliances with foreign nations. Commercial relations were acceptable as long as Americans were not pulled into European affairs and vice-a-versa. George Washington set this policy in the first presidency by remaining a neutral bystander to the military conflicts of Europe and focusing on the internal affairs of the United States. This remained the foreign policy of the United States (with the exception of WWI) until World War II.

“It is our True policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world.” Washington’s Farewell Address

“Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations—entangling alliances with none.” Jefferson’s Inaugural Address

Americans also believed that the United States had a special, paternalistic relationship with other nations in the Western Hemisphere because of our shared colonial heritage. In 1823 President James Monroe engineered the Monroe Doctrine, declaring that America and Europe would occupy separate spheres of influence, and comply with policies of non-colonization and non-intervention. Europe was to have no colonization in the Western Hemisphere and in return the United States would stay out of European affairs. At the time the United States had no means of backing up this declaration militarily, but Europe was too preoccupied to pay attention. Nonetheless, the Monroe Doctrine became a cornerstone of American foreign policy for over one hundred years.

2. What two themes formed the foundation of early American foreign policy? Describe the difference between Foreign policy with regard to Europe and foreign policy with regard to the Western Hemisphere.

Although a sense of mission has been the strongest and most lasting “motivation” for American foreign policy decisions, other “motivations” have also played a role. A spirit of “nationalism,” devotion to one’s nation, has been a contributor. Taken to the extreme nationalism is excessive, intense, jingoist patriotism. Americans have historically believed that patriotism was a positive attribute, sometimes practicing paternalistic nationalism, especially in Latin America (Monroe Doctrine). Seldom, though, has

America taken nationalism to jingoism, except during the Spanish American War of 1898. In the October 1994 *Ensign* Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Twelve Apostles spoke out against jingoism in an article entitled “Our Strengths Can Become Our Downfall.”

Love of country is surely a strength, but carried to excess it can become the cause of spiritual downfall. There are some citizens whose patriotism is so intense and so all-consuming that it seems to override every other responsibility, including family and Church. I caution those patriots who are participating in or provisioning private armies and making private preparations for armed conflict. Their excessive zeal for one aspect of patriotism is causing them to risk spiritual downfall as they withdraw from the society of the Church and from the governance of those civil authorities to whom our twelfth article of faith makes all of us subject.

Patriotism is a strengthening principle, but when taken to the extreme it can be divisive and harmful.

Imperialism, the policy and practice of forming and maintaining an empire through conquest and the domination of economic or political affairs in underdeveloped or weaker nations, has also played a role in American foreign policy. This is seen throughout American history in the Westward Expansion of the United States and the relocation of Native Americans; the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, in which the United States annexed Mexican-owned Texas; the Spanish-American War of 1898; and the acquisition of several islands in the Pacific. This imperialism was not planned, but economic imperialism is evident in America’s past.

3. Although a sense of mission has been the strongest and most lasting “motivation” for American foreign policy decisions, what other “motivations” led to foreign policy actions?

In 1914, Europe and much of the world entered into World War I. President Woodrow Wilson, consistent with America’s long standing commitment to isolation and neutrality, urged Americans to remain “neutral in thought and in action.” In time, neutrality became increasingly difficult. American shipping bound for Germany was blockaded by the British Navy and shipping bound for England or France was sunk by German U-boats. American civilians became casualties of war when the ships on which they sailed were sunk. And European governments engaged in political intrigue and espionage here in America in an effort to disrupt our ability to support the opposite side. President Wilson attempted to negotiate a peace between belligerents but European governments seemed intent on destroying each other. Eventually, Wilson determined that if the United States was to have any influence on what the world looked like after the war, the United States would have to participate militarily in the War.

Wilson entered the war not to punish our enemies but to “make the world safe for democracy.” Peace after the war was to be based on Wilson’s 14 points, which included open covenants of peace, freedom of the seas, free trade, arms reduction, and the formation of the League of Nations.

4. How did our sense of mission involve the United States in World War I?

With the end of hostilities in November of 1918, Wilson met with American allies in Versailles, France to negotiate a peace treaty based on the principles set forth in the 14 points. Unfortunately for Wilson, the allies were more interested in punishing Germany for starting the war than making the world safe for democracy. Eventually, Wilson negotiated away most of what he wanted in order to secure the acceptance of a League of Nations. Wilson returned home disappointed in what he had failed to achieve and yet confident that the League of Nations could later recover those parts of his original plan lost at Versailles. He presented the Treaty to the senate for ratification.

The Senate, however, was less interested in “making the world safe for democracy” than in keeping America free from “entangling alliances.” The Senate refused to ratify the treaty, preventing the United States from joining the League of Nations.

5. How did America’s commitment to isolationism and sense of mission actually come in conflict with each other during the senate debate over ratification?

Following World War I, America reduced the size of its military and retreated to its earlier position of isolation and neutrality. Most Americans, frustrated with the lack of real change as a result of World War I, vowed never to participate in another foreign war. Despite this vow, American interest in foreign affairs, and efforts to provide moral leadership, can be seen in the Washington Naval Conference (1922) and the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

World War II began in Asia in 1931 and in Europe in 1939. The United States did not become involved directly until Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. WWII changed American conceptions of its role in the world in very significant ways. The United States was once again swept into a conflict it did not create nor in which it desired to participate. Americans had to lay aside their notions of isolation and assume a new leadership role in the world. It was not something the United States set out to do, nor did the American people campaign for the job. The United States was faced with an increasingly difficult challenge to maintain its sense of right and wrong while at the same time maintaining its commitment to freedom and the right of self-determination.

American objectives upon entry in World War II were to rescue the world from military aggression and tyranny and restore the territorial integrity of the invaded nations. The United States sought total defeat of the Axis Powers so that post-war world could be made much safer in the future. After the war was won America sought the rebuilding of Germany and Japan for the same reasons. It did not seek to create a colonial empire, thereby holding to their original objectives.

6. What were America's goals and objectives for entering WWII? How did America seek to obtain those goals?

At the end of World War II America's foreign policy position changed significantly. As the world's greatest "super power" Americans felt a responsibility to prevent another world war from happening again. For the most part the ideals of isolation and neutrality were replaced by a new sense of "mission" to protect America's allies and the world from future military aggression. In 1945 the obvious potential aggressor from the American perspective was the Soviet Union, our allies in WWII. An atmosphere of fear, suspicion, and competition rose quickly between the United States and the Soviet Union. Americans feared that communist expansion and aggression would destroy world freedom, but since communism could not be destroyed without starting World War III, United States policy shifted to "containment," limiting communism to its current sphere of influence. This period of time is known as the Cold War. To accomplish this new mission, America entered into a number of military alliances including NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), SEATO (South East Asia Treaty Organization), and ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, United States Alliance).

7. What became America's main mission during the Cold War?

The existence of nuclear weapons during the Cold War made possible the total annihilation of life on the planet, encouraging regional conflicts rather than world wars. Both sides were "forced" to participate in a "nuclear arms race" to ensure neither side would have the upper hand in weaponry.

America became involved directly or indirectly in several regional conflicts. Two of the most important of these conflicts in terms of resources and men involved were Korea and Vietnam. In the wake of World War II both of these nations were left geographically divided based on Soviet and American influences. In both areas, forces allied with the Soviets sought to end the geographic and political divisions using military power.

8. What was America's goal during the Cold War? How was America's Cold War mission evident by its defense of South Korea in the early 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s?

America sought to prevent what it saw as communist aggression and expansion in its defense of South Korea in the early 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s. Wrought with tragedy and disaster, these conflicts taught the United States difficult but necessary lessons: Before engaging in a war it is important to understand the true nature of the conflict, the land, and the people involved. Many of the tragedies of the Korean and Vietnam wars occurred because of misunderstanding and ignorance of the land, people, and country. North Vietnamese guerilla tactics are a prime example of this ignorance; Some conflicts, even when there is a noble purpose, cannot be nobly resolved; The government must have achievable objectives

and clearly communicate them to the people. The Vietnam War was a period of political unrest throughout the country. Promises were made to the American people that were never kept and reports were given out with fabricated or omitted numbers, spreading distrust and anger among the citizens. Without a plan and clear objectives it is difficult to convince the American people to support a war. Even with careful planning, when the people are dissatisfied with government and war, they have the ability to vote in a leader who will end the fighting, making it difficult for democracies to sustain long wars.

9. What lessons did the United States learn from the Korean and Vietnam Wars?

In the post-Cold War era, the United States faces new challenges. “Bandit” nations and renegade terrorists using chemical weapons and terrorists activities to bully others are difficult to fight. With its many diverse groups terrorism is comparable to trying to kill the Herculean hydra. Other challenges come with the expectation that the United States must “broker” peace whenever conflict arises in other areas of the world. A sense of responsibility, whether real or imagined, wanted or not, follows the United States in all foreign affairs or world participation.

10. What new challenges face The United States in the post-Cold War era?

America’s Cultural Influence in the World

Since the end of World War II America has had a profound economic and social influence around the world. American music, American clothing styles, and American business, as well as the English language, has become the world’s standard to some extent.

11. What reflections of this influence around the world can you identify? Describe what you see to be the positive and negative impacts of that influence.

[End of first day’s readings.]

Conclusion

Joseph Smith gave this warning about the Constitution of the United States and the role of the members of the Church in preserving it.

“Even this nation will be on the very verge of crumbling to pieces and tumbling to the ground and when the Constitution is on the brink of ruin, this people will be the staff upon which the nation shall lean, and they shall bear the Constitution away from the very verge of destruction.”

12. What does Joseph Smith say that Church members will do in regard to the Constitution?

In trying to understand our responsibilities as members of the church in defending the Constitution and in bearing it away from the verge of destruction, several quotes may be instructive. These statements seem to indicate that the danger to America will not come from outside forces, nor will it come from our government leaders. It will come instead from the American people themselves as they fail to practice the type of “public virtue” described by the patriot philosophers.

“Whence shall we see the approach of danger? Will some trans-Atlantic giant destroy us at a single blow? Never in the trial of a thousand years will the nations of Europe or of Asia leave a track on the Blue ridge mountains or take a drink from the Ohio. If destruction be our lot, then we must be its authors and finishers. As a nation of free men we will live forever; or die by suicide.” Abraham Lincoln

“But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department, consists in giving to those who administer each department, the necessary constitutional means, and personal motives, to resist encroachments of the others. Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to controul the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controuls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to controul the governed; and in the nest place, oblige it to control itself. ***A dependence on the people is no doubt the primary controul on the government;*** but experience has taught us the necessity of auxiliary precautions.” James Madison, *Federalist No. 51*³

“Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law--to do your business by the voice of the people.

And if the time comes that the voice of the people doth choose iniquity, then is the time that the judgements of God will come upon you; yea, then is the time he will visit you with great destruction even as he has hitherto visited this land.” Mosiah 29: 26-27.

¹ Quoted in the following: Ezra Taft Benson, *The Constitution, A Heavenly Banner* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1986) 28. See also Ezra Taft Benson, “Our Divine Constitution,” *Ensign* (November, 1987). Joseph Smith’s original prophesy was given on 19 July 1840 and was recorded by Martha Jane Knowlton Coray - the manuscript is in the Church Historian’s Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

² James Madison, *Federalist No. 51, The Federalist Papers*, Garry Wills editor (New York: Bantam Books, 1987) 262.

13. According to these statements, what seems to be the biggest threat to America's constitutional system?

In General Conference in October of 1987 President Ezra Taft Benson gave some specific advice on how members of the church could best fulfill the Prophet Joseph's prophecy. [Emphasis added.]

I desire, therefore, to speak to you about our **divine Constitution**, which the Lord said "belongs to *all* mankind" (D&C 98:5; italics added) "and should be maintained for the rights and protection of *all* flesh, according to just and holy principles" (D&C 101:77; italics added).

The Constitution of the United States has served as a model for many nations and is the oldest constitution in use today.

The dedicatory prayer for the Kirtland Temple, as dictated by the Lord and found in the Doctrine and Covenants, contains these words: "May those principles, which were so honorably and nobly defended, namely, the Constitution of our land, by our fathers, be established forever" (D&C 109:54).

Unfortunately, we as a nation have apostatized in various degrees from different Constitutional principles as proclaimed by the inspired founders. We are fast approaching that moment prophesied by Joseph Smith when he said: "Even this nation will be on the very verge of crumbling to pieces and tumbling to the ground, and when the Constitution is upon the brink of ruin, this people will be the staff upon which the nation shall lean, and they shall bear the Constitution away from the very verge of destruction" (19 July 1840, as recorded by Martha Jane Knowlton Coray; ms. in Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City).

How then can we best befriend the Constitution in this critical hour and secure the blessings of liberty and ensure the protection and guidance of our Father in Heaven?

First and foremost, we must be righteous.

John Adams said, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." (*The Works of John Adams*, ed. C. F. Adams, Boston: Little, Brown Co., 1851, 4:31). If the Constitution is to have continuance, this American nation, and especially the Latter-day Saints, must be virtuous.

Second, we must learn the principles of the Constitution in the tradition of the Founding Fathers.

Have we read ***The Federalist papers***? Are we **reading the Constitution and pondering it**? Are we aware of its principles? Are we abiding by these principles and teaching them to others? Could we defend the Constitution? Can we recognize when a law is constitutionally unsound? Do we know what the prophets have said about the Constitution and the threats to it?

Third, we must become involved in civic affairs to see that we are properly represented.

The Lord said that "he holds men accountable for their acts in relation" to governments "both in making laws and administering them" (D&C 134:1). We must follow this counsel from the Lord: "Honest men and wise men should be sought for diligently, and good men and wise men ye should observe to uphold; otherwise whatsoever is less than these cometh of evil" (D&C 98:10).

Fourth, we must make our influence felt by our vote, our letters, our teaching, and our advice.

We must become accurately informed and then let others know how we feel. The Prophet Joseph Smith said: “It is our duty to concentrate all our influence to make popular that which is sound and good, and unpopular that which is unsound. ‘Tis right, politically, for a man who has influence to use it. ... From henceforth I will maintain all the influence I can get” (*History of the Church*, 5:286).

May God give us the faith and the courage exhibited by those patriots who pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

May we be equally as valiant and as free, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

14. What four steps does President Benson suggest that we take as members of the Church to “secure the blessings of liberty and ensure the protection and guidance of our Father in Heaven?”

[NB: Some of the material herein may be the work of Gary Marshall and Eric Walz. Marshall’s content may appear in a forthcoming publication.]