

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
North Adams, MA

AMERICA ON THE WORLD'S STAGE: DEVIL OR ANGEL?

-Draft of a Syllabus for a Tier 3 Capstone Course at MCLA-
Submitted by Roselle K. Chartock

"A Constitution is made for people of fundamentally differing
views."

-Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes-

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, students will have the opportunity to explore answers to several current and controversial questions, including: What is - and what should be — America's role in the world today? And, what circumstances led America to be perceived alternately as imperialist (devil) and emancipator (angel) at different times in its history?

Students will start by studying the history and apparatus of American foreign policy in order to establish a foundation upon which to reach their own conclusions on these and other questions. With knowledge and evidence gained from a variety of sources, including texts, journals, fiction and other media, students will then be expected to offer recommendations concerning the path American foreign policy should take now and in the future. They will make their recommendations within the context of a term paper, a case study, the culmination of their individual research and work within a study group, each one focusing on America's relationship to a different part of the world.

It is hoped that this course will inspire students to continue to exercise their first amendment right of expressing their **informed** opinions regarding America's role in the world and, if possible, act on those opinions.

RESOURCES:

1. The following books will be consulted, with 2 or 3 to become required reading.
Buruma, Ian and Avishai Margalit. (2004). *Occidentalism. The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies*. New York: Penguin.

Chomsky, Noam. (2003). *Hegemony or Survival. America's Quest for Global Dominance*. New York: Henry Holt and Co.

Ferguson, Niall. (2004). *Colossus. The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*. New York: Penguin.

Friedman, Thomas. (2005). *The World is Flat. A Brief History of the 21st Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

-(2003). *Longitudes and Attitudes. The World in the Age of Terrorism*. New York: Anchor.

Garrison, Jim. (2004). *America as Empire: Global Leader or Rogue Power?* Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Hastedt, Glenn P. (2003). *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, Future.* Columbus, Ohio: Prentice Hall.

Move On. (2004). *Move On's 50 Ways to Love Your Country. How to Find Your Political Voice and Become a Catalyst for Change.* Maui, HI: Inner Ocean Publishing, Inc.

Moyers, Bill. (2005). *A Journalist and His Times.* New York: Anchor.

Nichols, John. (2004). *Against the Beast: A Documentary History of American Opposition to Empire.* New York: Nation Books.

Papp, Daniel. (2005). *American Foreign Policy in a New Era.* New York: Longman.

Novels and memoirs related America's foreign policy and its effects. (i.e., Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, New York: Broadway Books, 1990.)

2. Multiple sources, including other relevant texts, primary sources, film (i.e., "Why We Fight"), the Internet (i.e., the website for the Foreign Policy Association), and other media, including a daily newspaper, i.e. *The New York Times*, and journals such as *Foreign Affairs* and *Current History*. Students will be able to utilize these resources in their written and oral arguments along with appropriate documentation.

3. An ongoing personal journal related to the course material and their term paper/project.

4. Relevant songs as primary sources.

5. Guest speakers: political science and international relations professors as well as foreign correspondents and retired diplomats in the area.

OBJECTIVES/OUTCOMES (followed by methods of evaluation): By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. analyze the decision-making apparatus related to current foreign policy issues.

2. investigate the origins and historical foundations of America's values, including the Constitution and America's political parties as they relate to the development of American foreign policy.

Methods of Evaluation for #'s 1 and 2:

- a. Maintain a journal containing ongoing research and insights.
- b. In class discussion

- c. Timeline of major foreign policy shifts
- d. 5-7 page paper

3. explore and evaluate divergent views of writers from many fields, including history, political and economic theory, philosophy, and literature in order to answer the question,

What circumstances led America to be perceived as imperialist (devil) or emancipator (angel) at different times in its history?

Methods of Evaluation:

- a. Notes in journal
- b. Paper: a review of the literature

4. engage in debate and other forms of communication using evidence to support their conclusions regarding the question, What is- and what should be -America's role in a particular area of the world that constitutes the focus of their term paper.

(Research groups will work on a case study involving one of the following areas of the world: Afghanistan, Iraq, the Middle East, Sudan, China, Cuba, the Balkans, or other area.)

5. be conversant on and apply their critical thinking skills to the following controversial issues:

- defending the homeland
- economics and foreign policy
- military intervention overseas
- human rights and democratization
- multilateralism v. unilateralism. Reach conclusions on each issue and provide support for conclusions.

Methods of Evaluation for #'s 4 and 5:

- a. Written (and illustrated) terms paper and oral presentation with study group peers.
- b. Formal and informal debates and discussion.

6. apply academic learning and critical thinking skills as they work with peers and the local community to address problems related to American foreign policy. Make recommendations and then propose a vehicle through which they and others in the college community can convey their views to foreign policy decision-makers.

Method of Evaluation:

- a. Hold a college-wide forum in which the class shares their findings and then leads a discussion on the question of what path American foreign policy should take now and in the future.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: (See also those evaluation methods that follow each objective above.)

1. Attendance is the most basic criterion for evaluating student participation in class. Therefore, there are severe penalties for absences, i.e. more than one absence could result in failure of the course or major grade reduction.

2. A journal containing student's research and commentary on American foreign policy.
3. Completion of all reading and other assignments, including several papers in which student addresses the central questions of the course.
4. Vocal participation in class and in debates.
5. Final project: a term paper addressing the nature of America's relationship with one part of the world as well as what the policy should be.

TOPICS OF WEEKLY SESSIONS:

(Reading assignments will be given in class. They should be completed when due so that you will be able to participate in small and large group discussions.)

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Introduction to American Foreign Policy -Overview of Missions, Interests, Principles from various perspectives The Elusive Truth and the Historic Method (Scientific Method)
2, 3	Foreign Policy and the Constitution -Legislative, Executive and Judicial Functions -Foreign Policy Apparatus (Open Instruments, Secret Instruments) -Organize study groups for case study research
4	Library Orientation: using primary sources, journals, the Internet and other sources Meet with study groups to determine questions and process
5, 6, 7	Historical Periods and U.S. Foreign Policy (Confront the question, America as "devil" or "angel," for each period) -The Colonies in a Global Context: 1756-1783 -The Early Years: 1783-1865 -An Infant Nation: 1789-1815 -Expansion and Hemispheric Interests: 1815-1848 -Trade, Hopes of Empire and Civil War: 1848-1865 -Imperial America: 1865-1914 -America Becomes a Global Power: 1914-1945 -The U.S. in the Cold War: 1945-1989 -Shaping the Post-Cold War World: 1989-Today
8, 9	Review of the Literature: divergent views of writers from a variety of disciplines regarding the question: What is - and what should be - America's role in the world today? Guest speakers

- 10, 11 Five controversial issues (Investigate and Analyze)
(See Objective #5 for the list).
- 12 In-class debate related to question of America's foreign policy and the
five controversial issues.
- 13 Case study presentations in class (using power point and other
methods.)
- 14 Case study presentations.
College-wide forum and discussion of the path American foreign policy
should take.
- 15 Follow-up activities related to recommendations made during college-
wide forum.

"At the core of the current dialectic between America and the world is the issue of where the center of gravity for international affairs should be.... Should the world be ruled by an empire or by a community of nations?"

-Jim Garrison(2004), *America as Empire: Global Leader or Rogue Power?*