

**Faculty of Letters and Languages – M’sila**

**Department of English**

**Level:** Master One

**Course:** American Civilization

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## **Lecture One: The Four Schools of American Policy**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Lord Bryce, a British statesman who served as Britain’s ambassador to the United States from 1907 to 1913, once wrote that the role of foreign policy in American life could be described the way travelers described snakes in Ireland: ‘**There are no snakes in Ireland.**’ At the turn of the twentieth century the United States had no foreign policy worth noting was a view that, in retrospect, many Americans would come to share. How such a view arose is somewhat mysterious. Americans of 1900 thought they had an active, indeed a global, foreign policy. The Spanish-American War had only recently ended, and American forces were still in the midst of a bitter” war against guerrilla freedom fighters in the Philippines. It was a time, in fact, when many Americans were struck by a sense that the United States was coming of age.

It is tempting to say that American policy-makers ignore the lessons of American history because Americans are one of the least historical-minded peoples in the world, tending to agree with Henry Ford's claim that "History is more or less bunk." However, indifferent to history as many Americans may be, in everything having to do with political life they are, compared with most Europeans, almost fanatically tradition-minded. No European polity has anything like the American love affair with the Constitution. The French do not honor and venerate the leaders of their Revolution as Americans venerate our **Founding Fathers**. Many Americans, perhaps most, consider the **Declaration of Independence**, the **Constitution**, and the **Bill of Rights** to be something like sacred scripture: revelations of eternal principles, valid for all time. The Constitution is widely and justly accepted as a distillation of political wisdom and a still-living guide for contemporary conduct. The Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence are venerated as timeless expressions of principles summoning us to realize their noble ideals. It is only US diplomats and US foreign policy thinkers who find little to inspire them in the record of

the past. The position of the United States in world politics has changed strikingly from generation to generation and even decade to decade, and this naturally tends to obscure the underlying continuities in our diplomatic tradition and cause each generation to feel that it is meeting historical tests for the first time. Precisely because the ascent of the United States from a weak confederacy to a world empire was so rapid, it is understandable that Americans are forever discounting the relevance of their grandparents' and even their parents' experiences and ideas.

In fact the United States in the 1920S and 1930S laid under the spell of a historical myth--call it the myth of virtuous isolation. It was in fact a profoundly ant historical myth, based on the premise that the wise Founding Fathers had once and for all laid down the road on which American foreign policy should travel. Abstracted from any historical context, a "literal" reading of Washington's Farewell Address was used to argue against any American alliances with foreign powers under any circumstances whatever. The **Monroe Doctrine** was similarly read as mandating as a first principle of statecraft that the United States would prohibit any foreign power from meddling in the Western Hemisphere, while keeping its own nose out of the East. This lecture would be a brief summary of Walter Russell Mead's book, "*Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*"

### **I-The Hamiltonian School:**

The first species--that is, the first school of American foreign policy--Mead calls "Hamiltonian", after the founding Secretary of the Treasury and the most influential advisor to George Washington. Mead's Hamiltonians see the world as a marketplace and perceive the purpose of U.S. foreign policy to be the enhancement of America's position in that marketplace. They are conservatives in the sense of doubting the perfectibility, or even the substantial improvability, of human nature; yet they are optimists regarding the benefits that will accompany the growth of commerce and the institutions that support it. For the first century of America's independent existence, the Hamiltonians advocated cooperation with Britain, the world's leading trader. Upon Britain's decline in the 20th century, they pushed the United States to the van of world trade, but their fundamental belief remained as before: that business was both the *raison d'etre* of foreign policy and the facilitator of such collateral benefits as peace and stability.

## **II-The Jeffersonian School**

Mead's second school of foreign policy is the "Jeffersonian", which arose about the same time as the Hamiltonian, and in opposition to it. The touchstone of Jeffersonian thought is democracy, which occurs, the Jeffersonians judge, not as some happy side effect of commerce, but only as the result of careful cultivation. Where the Hamiltonians are pessimists regarding human nature but optimists regarding the institutions of commerce, the Jeffersonians are just the opposite. They revere the individual and fear that institutions, especially those of commerce, will corrupt personal virtue. For this reason they have been skeptical of intercourse with other nations; better to perfect democracy at home than risk it in the hurly-burly of foreign relations. Their enemies have called them isolationist; Mead prefers the term nationalist. But, however labeled, the Jeffersonians have put the domestic interest so far ahead of the international interest as to convey the frequent impression of indifference, even hostility, to the world beyond American shores.

## **III-The Jacksonian School**

The "Jacksonians" have a similarly domestic orientation, although they have been the driving force behind some of America's most energetic assertions of interest and power abroad. Where the Jeffersonians have tended toward elitism, handing down democracy from above, the Jacksonians are populists, viewing democracy as arising from the people themselves. In contrast to the diffident nationalism of the Jeffersonians, the Jacksonians brandish a belligerent nationalism, quick to take offense, punctilious as to honor, untroubled by the denial of rights to foreigners and other lesser breeds beyond the law. The most militant of the four schools, the Jacksonians have consistently supported spending for defense, and have never been reluctant to use the weapons once purchased. Yet their aim in fighting has been American victory, not the salvation of the world. Perhaps the world is redeemable, perhaps not; but the Jacksonians waste no time on such airy questions, as their sole concern is for the vigorous defense of American honor and interests abroad.

## **IV-The Wilsonian School**

Mead's fourth school is the "Wilsonian", which believes that the world can be saved, and that America is called to save it. Named, of course, for the President who promised to make the world "safe for democracy" and championed the League of Nations, the Wilsonians have often allied with the Jeffersonians, for like the Jeffersonians, the Wilsonians hold democracy to be the

highest social value. But where the Jeffersonians fear that contact with the world will debilitate democracy at home, the Wilsonians fear that debilitation will come from a lack of contact. To save itself, America must save the world.

### ➤ **Different Terms for the Schools**

MEAD'S TAXONOMY is not entirely original, and he does not claim that it is. His Hamiltonians and Wilsonians are, respectively, **conservative and liberal internationalists**, while his Jacksonians and Jeffersonians are **conservative and liberal nationalists**. Sliced differently, the Hamiltonians and Jacksonians are **internationalist and nationalist hawks**, respectively, while the Wilsonians and Jeffersonians are **internationalist and nationalist doves**.

### **Conclusion**

Mead is also persuasive in accounting for the striking contrast between the historic success of American foreign policy and the failure of foreigners--and many Americans--to recognize that success. By any measure, American foreign policy has been the most successful of any great power in history. Two centuries ago the United States hardly rated consideration in world affairs; now it bestrides the globe like no country before it. To skeptics who point out that American power has resulted from America's favored domestic position, especially its control of a large part of a very blessed continent, the obvious rebuttal is that such control came about through the effective conduct of an active and often bellicose foreign policy.

### **Exercises: In a short essay discuss one of the following topics:**

- 1- What Mead meant by "There are no snakes in Ireland" when he referred to American foreign policy
  
- 2- The difference between nationalist and internationalist Hawks vs Nationalist and internationalist Doves
  
- 3- **Explain the following terms:** Liberal-Conservative-Nationalist- Internationalist-Hawks-Doves

### **REFERENCES**

- Mead, W. R. (2001). *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed the World*. (New York: Alfred A Knopf)
- Brands, H. W. (December 1, 2001). "The four Schoolmasters." *The National Interest*.

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