

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria

Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Abbes Laghrour University of Khenchela

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Department of Letters and English Language



Handouts of the American Civilization Course

(Master One)

Lecturer: Dr. Khaled Chouana

Academic Year 2021 / 2022

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General introduction

1. Course description

This document includes a series of lectures of the American civilization course. The lectures are designed for Master One students of the Department of Letters and English Language – Abbes Laghrour University of Khenchela.

The course is a critical look at contemporary America through the analysis of several articles, literary texts and visuals which provide an overview of the culture, history and politics of the USA of today.

2. Prerequisites

Students should know the following:

- The contemporary American society and its characteristics
- Culture of America and its different aspects
- Politics in general and American politics in particular

3. Objectives

The course aims to provide Master One students with a general overview of the history and politics of the United States of America. The academic study of the USA will enable students to start a constructive discussion about the politics, culture and contemporary history of the USA.

By the end of the course students should be able to:

a- In terms of knowledge:

- define several key concepts related to American culture and politics
- identify the main characteristics of American culture of today
- summarize the main points of the discussions about American civilization

b- In terms of to “know-how”:

- discuss the inadequacies embodied in the contemporary American society
- criticize the limitations of the politics and culture of USA
- defend a view about American culture by providing arguments

c- In terms of to “know how to be”:

- compare American culture to Algerian culture
- evaluate the political system in the USA and its effectiveness
- explain the different aspects of American culture

4. Course structure

The course is divided into 12 lectures. Some lectures focus on several American domestic issues, whereas others tackle a number of topics of US foreign policy.

By diversifying the content of the course, students will have the opportunity to explore a wide range of issues related to American civilization and culture. Delimitation of the course is necessary but students will tackle the maximum number of topics when they give oral presentations. Each lecture of the course is organized as follows:

- ✓ Objectives
- ✓ Content
- ✓ Works cited
- ✓ Study questions
- ✓ Further readings and websites

Our scientific journey will start with examining the ideas, philosophy and values that shape the contemporary American society. Also, we will give particular focus to the US Constitution by providing a general overview of one of the most important documents of

US history. Lecture 3 and 4 analyze diversity in the USA by focusing on the key terms of the melting pot and the American Dream. After that, students will be introduced to US mass media as they get familiar with the concepts of poll, Fox News and social media. Additionally, it will be interesting to explore an important means of communication in the USA, namely popular music by analyzing its effect on American audiences and listeners.

Furthermore we will tackle the topic of US foreign policy and focus on international issues that involve the USA. We will analyze the 9/11 attacks and their impact on America and on the rest of the world. Students will examine the foreign policies used by the US government to combat international terrorism. Additionally, we will examine the concept of soft power and explore the way Americans use it to conduct their foreign policy in the Middle East. Lectures 10 and 11 analyze US democracy and the work of the 44th and 45th presidents, namely Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Finally, we will conduct a debate about US democracy today and the challenges facing politicians in America since the country has a very complex system in which interest groups and lobbyists interfere in the political scene. A general conclusion will close the discussion about the USA of the twenty-first century and its politics.

5. Approach and method

The approach of the course is multidisciplinary. It means that a particular focus will be placed on studying American civilization through the lenses of politics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and media studies. Also, students will use several pedagogical aids such as films, popular music and photographs that can be helpful to students as they consolidate their knowledge. The students' work can be beneficial when they read, watch

and listen to American civilization. The pedagogical aids may give students food for thought and foster their critical thinking.

By the end of the course, students should be able to engage in critical discussions and write academic compositions about several aspects of social, cultural, historical, and political life of contemporary America.

6. Assessment

Students will take a written exam and their performance will be assessed as well throughout the course (attendance, participation, oral presentation, and a short test).

7. References

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Lecture 1: Ideas, attitudes and values of the USA

To be an American, unlike being English or French or whatever, is precisely to imagine a destiny rather than to inherit one; since we have always been, insofar as we are Americans at all, inhabitants of myth rather than history.

Leslie Fiedler

Objectives

After this first lecture, students should:

- ✓ be introduced to several ideals and cultural attitudes of the USA
- ✓ be able to distinguish some key concepts and definitions related to American culture and society
- ✓ be aware of several contradictions of contemporary American civilization and culture

Introduction

This first lecture briefly explains the core principles of culture that shape American society. We will examine the ideas, philosophy and values that shape the contemporary American society. We will come in touch with a variety of concepts, frameworks and topics associated with US identities formation. Also, there will be an analysis of the distance between the political ideals of the USA and real life in this country. The aim here is to investigate some contradictions and ambiguities that are found in the US society and culture of today.

1. Politics in the USA: a culture

Political culture in the United States finds its roots in the Declaration of Independence, a document in which the Founding Fathers emphasized that all American citizens “are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” (*Declaration of Independence* 1776) The US Constitution is another important document since it is the supreme law of the USA. Its preamble focuses on the idea that the power lies within the

people, “We, the people of the United States.” (*Introductory statement of the US Constitution*) Thus, the government derives its power from the consent of the governed that is the people.

There is a political culture in the USA based on some common values such as faith in democracy, equality, liberty, support of capitalism, freedom of speech and individual rights. But we must remind ourselves that some ethnic and gender minorities in the USA such as African Americans, Native Americans, women and working class had to fight for their rights. Since then, there were some US citizens who were engaged in political and social activism to seek some unalienable rights they regard as their due. Democracy, equality, liberalism, capitalism, and exceptionalism are among the core tenets of American political culture. (Burgett & Hendler 143) In the following, we will summarize these main values and principles.

1.1. Democracy

Democracy, from Greek *dēmos* “common people” and *kratos* “rule, strength”, refers to the system of government in which the sovereign power is vested in the people as a whole. In the US context, democracy is viewed by American citizens as the idea that their elected officials (presidents and congressmen) are accountable to them. US citizens have the right to choose their officials as they vote for them. American citizens accept majority rule and they have a deep belief that ultimate power resides in the people themselves.

1.2. Equality

As for equality, this concept is embodied in the Declaration of Independence, “all men are created equal”. Americans believe in social equality. It means that the country does not include a nobility class such as the one found in France or Britain. Radway *et al*

point out that the form of equality that Americans favor is not equality of outcome, but rather of worth. (124) It means that all citizens have equal opportunities regardless of their social positions.

1.3. Liberalism

Liberalism in the United States follows the principles of John Locke, the British philosopher who stressed on some fundamental rights that any individual should be granted. These are “life, liberty, and property.” (179) Liberalism is based on protecting the freedom of the individual who is the main concern of politics. The government is necessary to protect individuals from being harmed by others; however, liberalism views also the rulers as a threat to liberty. (Ten 41) We must remind ourselves that the United States was created by colonists who opposed King George III and his tyrannical reign. In the present time, there is still a form of suspicion of government. Liberalism in the USA can be linked to individualism, a principle based on the fact that the individual’s rights are valued above those of the government.

1.4. US capitalism

The United States is often regarded as having a capitalist economic system. Capitalism is based on freedom of private ownership of the means of production and their operation for profit. It focuses on private property, capital accumulation, wage labor, and competitive markets. American capitalism is based on the mercantile principle of “laissez-faire” which advocates favor individual self-interest and competition, and opposes the taxation and regulation of commerce by the federal government. It means that the government takes a “hands off” attitude toward the economy. (Pearce 120) As a

consequence, the US working class had always been opposing the powerful corporation owners and this throughout the modern history of the USA.

1.5. American exceptionalism

Alexis de Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America* (1840) when he visited America and described a kind of American exceptionalism by asserting that America is a society uniquely different from the more traditional European societies. The idea is that the country is a classless society in which individuals are equal. The USA is the country of social mobility, racial diversity, and freedom of religion. It is the country of the melting pot that welcomes populations all over the world regardless of their origins or religion.

2. Some limitations and contradictions

When we examine the culture and politics of the USA, we must bear in mind that there has always been a gap between the ideals and values of the USA and real life in that country. It is true that America is a federal presidential constitutional republic and that its political system is based on the separation of powers (checks and balances). However, when one looks at the controversial second amendment of the constitution (bearing guns) and its devastating effects, or looks at the Electoral College which sometimes elects the president of the USA without taking into consideration the people's votes (The case of Al Gore in 2000 and Hillary Clinton in 2016), one may wonder if the American political system is really fair and effective?

Also American workers had been resisting the practices of modern capitalist corporations by forming trade unions (Knights of Labor, IWW, AFL-CIO) throughout the modern history of the USA. The right to form unions and lead union actions is embodied in the constitutions of several developed countries, whereas the American Constitution does

not guarantee this right. American employers strongly oppose trade union with the support of the federal government which does not intervene in conflicts and chooses to follow the “laissez-faire” principle. Today, the US economic system can be labeled as a corporate capitalism, characterized by the dominance of powerful corporations (Coca Cola, Wall mart, Microsoft, Google, McDonald...etc.). Wall Street also plays a major role in the economy as it controls the financial markets and it has some important implications not only for ordinary Americans but for the global economy of the world.

When it comes to exceptionalism, it can be said that the country is no exceptional when we examine the issue of poverty (37.2 million in 2020) and homelessness (580 000 in 2020). Additionally, European countries such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom are much more generous with the disfranchised people in terms of welfare and government assistance. Americans struggle just to get a health care whereas in the European countries medical assistance is embodied in the law and even illegal immigrants have the right to have a free healthcare despite being against the law of the country.

Finally, at the international level, Americans tend to view themselves as being above the law, specifically the international laws of the United Nations as they invaded Iraq in 2003. There is clearly a distance between American ideals that work as a social regulator in the US nation and American real policy which seeks national interest.

Conclusion

In this lecture, we dealt with the political culture of the USA. The United States was created to oppose the English crown that was oppressing the Protestants in Britain. The American colonists wanted to get their freedom from the British Empire as to pursue wealth and prosperity through hard work and dedication. Americans believed that under

the British system of government with King George III who was unaccountable (No taxation without representation), it was impossible to protect freedom and promote opportunity.

But when the USA, the greatest nation of the world, invades free countries like Iraq by claiming this is done to defend liberty against tyranny and terror, or that their former president, Donald Trump, prevents some citizens from Arab countries to have access to the USA (Ban Order), we may disagree with the global leadership of America. True the United States is a democratic country and its government protects the civil rights and liberties of its citizens, but the country should also respect the rights and dignity of all individuals regardless of the country they live in.

Study questions

1. Give a definition of US capitalism and give your own examples of hegemonic companies in the USA that exploit their workers.
2. To what extent is the United States a democracy? Justify.

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Lecture 2: US Constitution: relevance and limitations

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

Preamble to the US Constitution

The US Constitution doesn't guarantee happiness, only the pursuit of it. You have to catch up with it yourself.

A letter from Benjamin Franklin to Jean-Baptiste Le Roy, 1789

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ be familiar with the US Constitution
- ✓ distinguish the different articles of the US Constitution
- ✓ be aware of some ambiguities and limitations of the constitution

1. Definition of constitution

The word “constitution” is derived from Latin *constitutionem* and means an “act of settling; anything arranged or settled upon; regulation”. A constitution is the supreme law of the land. It refers to the fundamental principles and rules of government as embodied in a written document. The Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of the United States of America. (Maier 35)



Preamble to the US Constitution

2. Historical background and development of the US Constitution

The United States of America has the oldest written constitution in the world. It must be said that countries like the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, and Saudi Arabia do not have a written constitution. They rely on several legislative acts, court decisions, and customs which were never collected in one specific document and which are considered as constitutional.

The creation of the American constitution started with the Founding Fathers who met at the Philadelphia Convention in 1787 so as to discuss replacing the Articles of Confederation¹. The federalists wanted to establish a strong national government; however, anti-federalists favored a strong state government closer to the people. The result would be a compromise between the two opponents. On June 21, 1788, the American constitution was ratified and a new federal government was created.

Today, in the United States we have one national constitution and fifty states constitutions. It means that all the states, whether California, Colorado, New Mexico, or Alaska, have their own constitution. The fifty state constitutions are longer than the national one as they contain more details regarding the relationships between the state government and the people.

Both the federal and states' constitutions are considered to be fundamental blueprints which organize the political life of the United States. The last Amendment of the Bill of Rights states that “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

¹ The Articles of Confederation were the first American constitution drafted by the Second Continental Congress. The ratification by the 13 states was completed by 1781, but the central government was powerless under the Articles of Confederation as any of its decisions required unanimous approval of the 13 state legislatures.

(Tenth Amendment of the US Constitution) It means that there is a kind of balance between the federal constitution and the state constitution.

Thanks to the US Constitution, American citizens are more aware of their rights and freedom as they can quote the Bills of Rights in defense of their liberties when they face a policeman or a judge. They can for instance use the 1st Amendment to defend their freedom of speech or the 5th Amendment to protect their judicial rights. Still, today it seems difficult to view American people being delegated some powers while they are subject to two constitutions (federal and state) which are constraining them.

3. Characteristics of the US constitution

3.1. Written constitution

As it has been mentioned before, the United States has a written constitution as the majority of countries. Other countries like Britain or New Zealand have an unwritten constitution.

3.2. Separation of powers

The US constitution ensures that there is a separation of powers among the three branches of the political system (executive, legislative, and judicial). This is commonly known as “checks and balances”. Within the US constitution, power is shared and as a result this principle prevents the president or the Congress or the Supreme Court of the USA to have too much power in their hands. Each branch of the government is checked and balanced by the other two branches.

3.3. Rigid constitution

A rigid (inflexible) constitution is one which cannot be easily changed. The US constitution is said to be rigid. It means that changing the constitution or adding an

amendment requires a process in which both the House of Representatives and the Senate must vote the amendment by two-thirds majority. Then as the amendment is adopted by the legislative branch, three-quarters of the 50 states must agree as well for the amendment to be enacted.

It must be noted, however, that the US judicial branch has the power to review any bill, law or executive order and declare it unconstitutional. In fact, federal and state judges have the right to interpret the constitution as they have done in the major cases of *Plessy v. Fergusson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) which deal with the legality of segregation concerning the African American community members. Chief Justice Evans Hughes remarked back in 1909 that “the constitution is what the judges say it is.” (Qtd. in McDonald 224)

3.4. Federalism

The US constitution gave power to both the federal government (Article 1: powers of Congress) and the states (Amendment 10). However, in reality the power of the federal government had grown significantly and particularly after the Great Depression in the 1930’s when the President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced his welfare program *New Deal* that helped Americans during these hard times. The growth of the federal government in terms of economy, education, taxes, and health had come at the expense of the power of the 50 states whose political power had declined significantly.

- **Summary**

The following points summarize the main features of the US constitution:

- Codified constitution (written and ratified in 1788). It includes 27 Amendments (the first ten amendments are known as the Bill of Rights).

- Inflexible Constitution (The 27th Amendment was submitted in 1789 and was ratified after prolonged deliberation in 1992).
- Separation of powers (checks and balances/ Power is shared by the three branches). The US Supreme Court can declare any Executive Act or Act of Congress as unconstitutional.
- 2/3 of the States and Senate must agree for an amendment to be added, then 3/4 of the states must ratify it so as it be effective.
- The US constitution promotes federalism (White House and State of the Union Address).

Conclusion

We can say that the US constitution has some inadequacies and weaknesses. The American political system has little power against the big business corporations. Moreover, the USA is the only country in the world (also Mexico and Guatemala) with a right to keep and bear arms with no constitutional restrictions. The controversial 2nd Amendment of the US constitution divided the nation into those who claim their constitutional rights of keeping and bearing arms and those who call the government to ban firearms to protect the citizens.

Finally, minority ethnic groups such as African-Americans and Latino-Americans face police brutality in their neighborhoods and their constitutional rights are not being respected. The US constitution is supposed to promote freedom, protect individual rights and civil liberties, and improve the quality of life of all Americans.

But despite the weaknesses of the US Constitution, it is important to say that the twenty-first century citizens of democratic countries need a supreme and a high law that

regulates their relationships to their rulers. Constitution is a necessary evil that establishes a kind of harmony in any contemporary society. Other governments in African and Asian countries need also to promote the constitutional rights of their citizens because they deserve to live a decent and a good life as any democratic and prosperous country.

Study questions

1. Give a short definition of US Constitution and state its characteristics.
2. What is the impact of the Second Amendment right to bear arms in the American society?

Works cited

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Lecture 3: Diversity and minorities in the USA

Was it not possible, then, to think of the evolving American society not simply as a slightly modified England but rather as a totally new blend, culturally and biologically, in which the stocks and folkways of Europe were, figuratively speaking, indiscriminately mixed in the political pot of the emerging nation and melted together by the fires of American influence and interaction into a distinctly new type?

Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ distinguish the different US minorities
- ✓ have some cultural background about the melting pot and diversity in the USA
- ✓ be aware of the ambiguities embodied in several myths and ideals of American civilization and culture

Introduction

This lecture analyzes the different racial groups of the USA and explores the founding myth of the melting pot.

1. Race and ethnicity in the USA

America has a racially and ethnically diverse population and this is mainly due to the fact that the country encouraged immigration since its foundation. People all over the world move to the USA each year to settle their and make a living. The *US Census* categorizes the American population into: White Americans (Europe, Latino, Middle-East and North Africa), African Americans, American Indians, American Asians, and Native Hawaiians.

It must be noted that the term “White Americans” has been used so far by the Bureau of the US Census to identify people of European descent, Latinos Americans of North African and Middle Eastern descent. Nevertheless, European Americans are the largest

ethnic group of White Americans and this since the country's foundation. Latino Americans are classified as an ethnicity and not a race and they form the largest minority group in the USA. The concept "race" is often used interchangeably with the concept "ethnicity". However, the US Supreme Court considered that Jews, Arabs, and Zulus for instance should be labeled as ethnic groups and not as races (US Census).

2. Diversity and the melting pot

The USA is the land of culture diversity since it welcomes people from all over the world. In 1782, John Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote his famous *Letters from an American Farmer* and gave some clues regarding the very controversial issue of American identity or "americaness" by asking a relevant question: "What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. [...] Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world." (48)

Similarly, in 1831 Alexis de Tocqueville described the people of America as: "[...] a society comprising all the nations of the world: English, French, German. [...] All people having different languages, beliefs, and opinions. In short, a society without roots, without memories, without prejudices, without routines, without common ideas, without national character. [...] What ties these very diverse elements together? What makes a people of all this?" (Qtd. in Paul 257)

We notice that both St. John de Crèvecoeur and Tocqueville, two French writers, depict a mythical America which looks like a paradise and which is composed solely of white Americans of European descent. This America is excluding the African citizens who

live on its soil. In fact, African Americans are suffering from the agony of slavery and cannot even voice their concerns.

What is more, I think there is a kind of hypocrisy from the French and particularly when Tocqueville who praised America and its democracy, wrote a report on Algeria in 1847 where he advised the French army to follow a strategy that was based on a partial colonization mixed with a full dominance of the Algerian tribes. Tocqueville asserted that domination through violence was necessary to defeat El Emir Abd-el-Kader and to colonize Algeria effectively.

But beyond the Algerian question, it is worth noting that one of the founding ideals of the American identity is the melting pot. It is a metaphor for people coming from different countries to form a homogenous society which lives in harmony thanks to the cultural diversity brought by its members. The different citizens of this country melt together and form a unique culture. The melting pot was used to depict the cultural integration and assimilation of immigrants to the USA.

The concept “melting pot” came into use after playwright Israel Zangwill popularized it in 1908 when he wrote his play of the same name. In fact, *The Melting Pot* depicts the life of a Russian Jewish family who immigrates to the USA and flees oppression in the traumatic Russia. The play looks at America as an ideal society in which its different ethnic groups live in harmony without division and hatred (see below).



The Melting Pot (Israel Zangwill, 1908)

The above picture is ambivalent since it celebrates the US melting pot and at the same time it can be viewed as a harsh criticism of the American assimilation model. The melting pot is an ambiguous symbol of American unity since it is considered as a myth providing national cohesion on the one hand, and as a tool of violent assimilation to white Anglo-Saxon culture on the other. Heike Paul argues that the melting pot of the early twenties century “has often obscured the role of racism in American society by projecting a colorblind vision of social harmony and by obscuring ongoing inequality.” (282)

In fact, the melting pot was linked to US immigration as thousands of migrants should have been Americanized. This does not necessarily mean giving up their culture; rather they brought about a cultural-added value to the national identity. It can be said that all Americans regardless their origin celebrate the tremendous impact of African-American culture and aesthetics (Blackness, sport, gangster rap).

3. A multicultural or a melting pot nation?

There is one last thing worth mentioning in this lecture. It is that in the American context, very few people label American diversity as a multicultural phenomenon. It is true that multiculturalism in Britain is prominent and the various ethnic groups of the UK

collaborate with each other without scarifying their specific identities; however, in the USA, despite the fact ethnic diversity is common in rural and urban areas (Chinatown, Little Bombay, Indian reservations...etc.), multiculturalism is not clearly established in policy. All immigrants who come to the USA must integrate the new nation with their cultural differences melting together into a harmonious society with a homogenous culture.

Study questions

1. The American melting pot will make the nation's immigrants transcend their old animosities and differences and will fuse them into one people. To what extent do you agree or disagree?
2. Is America a multicultural or a melting pot nation? Justify.

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Lecture 4: The American Dream

The American dream, as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the impact of mass immigration came to understand it, was neither the dream of the American Revolution – the foundation of freedom – nor the dream of the French Revolution – the liberation of man; it was, unhappily, the dream of a “promised land” where milk and honey flow. And the fact that the development of modern technology was so soon able to realize this dream beyond anyone’s wildest expectation quite naturally had the effect of confirming for the dreamers that they really had come to live in the best of all possible worlds.

Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ be familiar with the idea of the American Dream
- ✓ be aware of the distance between the American Dream and real life in the USA

Introduction

This lecture tackles the issue of the American Dream and tries to investigate the possibilities of realizing the dream in today’s America for a specific category of people, namely those who are at the bottom struggling in the dirt. Therefore a particular focus will be placed on the most deprived people of the USA who live in poverty and homelessness.

1. Overview of the American Dream

The American Dream is also a major national ethos of the United States. It was coined by James Truslow Adams in 1931 who defined it as: “[a] dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement.” (10) Adams’s definition of the dream came in the midst of the Great Depression in order to give Americans a sense of hope and confidence after their lives were ruined by the biggest economic crisis of the twentieth century.

It must be noted that today a significant part of the American population seems not to be concerned with the dream. The main concern of the most deprived Americans who live in poverty is not to have a big house with a garage and two cars, but to just make a living

by getting food on the table, paying their bills and taxes, and support themselves and their children. Realizing the dream for them in this context becomes difficult since it is a privilege reserved only for the middle-class.

Jim Cullen's book, *American Dream: A Short History of an Idea that Shaped a Nation* (2004), suggests six American Dreams: the Puritan dream based on religious faith and reform, the dream embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the dream linked to upward social mobility, the dream of Martin Luther King of social equality, the post-World War Two dream of suburbanization and home ownership, and finally the 'Dream of the Coast' in California which is linked to fame and Hollywood stars. (54)

The American Dream is represented in many works of literature, cinema, and popular music (Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Dennis Hopper's 1969 movie *Easy Rider*, and James Brown's song "Living in America" (1985), to mention but a few.

The American dream is a major factor that draws people from all over the world. The United States was founded on immigration and accordingly the country welcomed people from all nations regardless of their origin, religion or culture.

2. A dream or a reality?

We must pay attention to the fact that fulfilling the American Dream became almost impossible for some Americans and particularly with the context of the subprime financial crisis of 2007 that ruined US households who were unable to repay their home loans Stand-up comedian George Carlin mocked the dream and questioned its achievement as he stated: "The reason they call it the American Dream is because you have to be asleep to believe it." (109)

Apparently, there is a clear gap between the American Dream fulfilled by the middleclass and American realities of excluded groups who live in poverty. I think that investigating the contradictions of the American dream can be particularly valuable and fruitful for scholars and students of American studies.

Conclusion

Class discussion and exchange with the students about their own version of the American Dream.

Study questions

1. What pushes Algerians to participate in the green card DV lottery?
2. If you immigrate to the USA, will you make the dream come true? Justify.

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Lecture 5: Social media and opinion polls

Whoever controls the media, controls the mind.
Jim Morrison

The futility of everything that comes to us from the media is the inescapable consequence of the absolute inability of that particular stage to remain silent. Music, commercial breaks, news flashes, adverts, news broadcasts, movies, presenters—there is no alternative but to fill the screen; otherwise there would be an irremediable void. That's why the slightest technical hitch, the slightest slip on the part of the presenter becomes so exciting, for it reveals the depth of the emptiness squinting out at us through this little window.

Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ be familiar with several notions such as mass media and opinion polls
- ✓ be aware of the importance of mass media and its effect on Americans

Introduction

This lecture puts a stress on mass media and its influence on US society. We will look at the effect of social media and opinion polls on US citizens. It must be said that in the USA the different news media play a role in influencing public opinion. They tend to tell citizens who they should elect as their president. They also develop views on sensitive issues in politics and society to push people to take a stand. They even have an impact on the decisions of policymakers who use polls to assess public opinion regarding crucial issues. (Jacobs *et al* 5)

But first let's give some key definitions related to mass media in the United States. Then, we will examine an excerpt that I adapted from the 2018 book of Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* which I find relevant to our topic.

1. Key definitions

- **US media:** Newspapers, television, cinema, radio, popular music, magazines, websites, considered as a group. Many of the media are controlled by hegemonic corporations which generate large revenues. Currently, five corporations control almost 90% of the US media. These are: AT&T, Comcast, The Walt Disney Company, ViacomCBS, and Fox Corporation. As multinational media conglomerates grow larger it has become difficult for small, local media outlets to survive. This phenomenon was labeled as “media imperialism” where the world’s media is often dominated by American media and culture.
- **Fox news:** an American conservative television news channel that was created in 1996 by media mogul Rupert Murdoch to appeal to a conservative audience. This channel was described as practicing biased reporting in favor of the Republican Party (US right wing), the George W. Bush and Donald Trump administrations, while spreading harmful propaganda (lies and fake news) against the Democratic Party (US left wing) to negatively affect its members and leaders.
- **Gallup:** An American analytics and advisory company founded by George Gallup in 1935 which is known for its public opinions conducted in the USA and worldwide. The Gallup Poll is the division of Gallup that conducts public polls and which measures the public’s attitudes concerning political, social, and economic issues, including controversial issues. The opinion poll is conducted by asking a series of questions to a particular sample of people and extrapolating generalities. For instance, a Gallup survey conducted in September 2016 found that 49% of Americans favor the death penalty for people convicted of murder, while 42% oppose it. Also, in March 2003, a national

survey conducted by Pew Research Center, which also conducts public opinion polling, showed that 72% of Americans said the decision to go to war in Iraq was right, while 22% said it was wrong.

- **Social media:** Forms of electronic communication (websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content such as videos.
- **#Black Lives Matter:** A hashtag used in 2013 on social media following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of unarmed African American teen Trayvon Martin. #BLM which became an activist movement campaigned against violence and police brutality towards the African American community and particularly following the death of two African Americans: Michael Brown and Eric Gardner. With the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, #BLM reemerged and protests sparked in the USA and around the world.
- **Slackactivism:** A portmanteau of slack (slowness and lack of energy) and activism (action in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue). It is a pejorative term for “feel-good” measures in support of an issue or social cause remotely by using the computer or the Smartphone. It is the practice of supporting a political or social cause by means of social media (Facebook, Twitter) or online petitions, characterized as involving very little effort or commitment. The “like button” on Facebook is a popular slacktivist tool.

2. Excerpt from Lepore, Jill. *These Truths: A History of the United States*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018, pp. 203-205.

Political polling is the marriage of journalism and social science, a marriage made by George Gallup.[...] He graduated in 1923, entered a graduate program in a new field, Applied Psychology, where everyone was talking about Walter Lippmann’s 1922 book, *Public Opinion*, and Gallup got interested in the problem of measuring it. [...]

Gallup’s method was to survey public opinion by asking questions of a sample of the population carefully chosen to represent the whole of it. [...] In 1935, to announce the publication of a new weekly column by Gallup, the Washington Post launched a blimp over the nation’s capital trailing a streamer that read “America Speaks!” Gallup intended the measurement of public opinion to be a tool for democratic government, a tool intended to do the very opposite of the work of political consulting. Political consulting is the business of managing the opinions of the masses. Public opinion surveying is the business of finding out the opinions of the masses. Political consultants tell voters what to think; pollsters ask them what they think. But neither of these businesses gives a great deal of credit to the idea that voters ought to make independent judgments, or that they can.

Conclusion

Class discussion about US media and opinion polls.

Study questions

1. What is public opinion polling and is it important?
2. Do you think social media changed public relations and communication? Explain.

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Lecture 6: US protest music and its effect

Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world would do this, it would change the earth.
William Faulkner

The stuff you're writing is bullshit, because politics is bullshit.
Bob Dylan to Phil Ochs

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ be familiar with the notion of “protest song” in the USA
- ✓ distinguish some key concepts and definitions related to American activism and musical dissatisfaction
- ✓ be aware of the impact of protest songs on US audiences

Introduction

This lecture will deal with protest music in the USA. We will examine if protest songs can have an impact on the lives of disenfranchised Americans. For that purpose, we will analyze some US popular songs as case studies and investigate their effect on the American society.

1. Defining protest songs

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Music* states that “protest song” is a “term which gained currency (first in USA) in 1960s for songs which voiced feelings of protest about some social or political injustice, real or imagined, or about some international event which aroused strong emotions, e.g. American participation in Vietnam war. A famous example is ‘We shall overcome’. Among the principal singers of the genre were Bob Dylan and Joan Baez.” (1728) It seems that “protest song” was an umbrella term used by American music journalists of the 1960’s to cover a wide range of genres and subgenres of popular

music that address dissatisfaction and discontent. Similarly, in 1968 American sociologist Serge Denisoff defined a protest song as “a socio-political statement designed to create an awareness of social problems and which offers or infers a solution which is viewed as deviant in nature.” (26) In addition to its protesting dimension, a protest song has also a political function. Its lyrics address political issues because its author wants it to be so and because its listeners view it as a political song.

2. Of the efficiency of US protest songs

Are protest songs efficacious in society and in the political scene? Is not the first function of a song to entertain some audience who come one evening to attend a show in which singers play some enjoyable popular music that would preferably avoid political messages and pedagogical speeches? Would not it be advisable for American singers to avoid engaging in activism and simply entertain their audiences with songs?

This being said, perhaps the best way to engage in political activism is to join a political party or to integrate a political movement so as to reflect effectively on several political issues and try to bring about a change. It seems a protest song is not the best means to address social issues or to criticize the president of the United States.

In 1969, German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno harshly criticized the protest songs of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez against the Vietnam War by claiming:

I believe, in fact, that attempts to bring political protest together with “popular music” – that is, with entertainment music – are for the following reasons doomed from the start.[...] And I have to say that when somebody sets himself up, and for whatever reason sings maudlin music about Vietnam being unbearable, I find that really it is this song that is in fact unbearable, in that by taking the horrendous and making it somehow consumable, it ends up wringing something like consumption- qualities out of it. (Qtd. in Gil & Martins 187)

The criticism of Adorno may be justified since popular songs are made at the first place to be sold and be consumed in the entertainment market. The protest songs of the 1960s neither stopped the Vietnam War nor brought civil rights to the African-American community. However, we should soften the assertion that protest songs are ineffective in the political sphere. While politics is certainly important in the lives of American citizens, the facts seem to prove the opposite. The 2016 US presidential election recorded the lowest voter turnout since 2000, with 58%. An important part of the American population lost interest in political debates by choosing abstention in 2016. It is difficult then to view a protest song as an effective tool that has an impact on citizens in the field of politics. Finally, let's remind ourselves that the United Nations Security Council could not stop President George W. Bush from invading Iraq in 2003 and therefore, it is difficult to think that a protest song could be more effective than a UN resolution.

Conclusion

What is merely viewed as entertainment can be considered as a serious tool to address the problems of the most deprived citizens of the American society. Protest singers are also engaged in social activism as they give money to charitable organizations and food banks which try to get millions of Americans out of poverty.

Even today, there is still poverty, social inequality and homelessness in the USA. Hegemonic corporations continue to exploit wage earners by paying them a minimum wage. The African American community is still suffering from police violence and racism. Women are still victims of harassment and physical violence. Big companies still pollute the environment and use GMOs in their products. Even if protest singers cannot change the

world with their songs, they must carry on their activism and their singing and allow people to believe there is a more hopeful life.

Study questions

1. Give a short definition to the US protest song. Illustrate with some examples.
2. What do you make of Algerian rai music? Do you consider this genre as protest music?
Justify with examples.

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Lecture 7: US foreign policy

Let me remind you all that the first task of American foreign policy is to reduce threats to the United States.
Michael Mandelbaum

The greatest crime since World War II has been US foreign policy.
Ramsey Clark

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ be familiar with the notion of foreign policy
- ✓ distinguish some key concepts and definitions related to American foreign policy
- ✓ be aware of the importance of foreign policy in general and US foreign policy in particular

Introduction

This lecture will be about having an overview of US foreign policy. We will examine several key terms related to American foreign policy and will give importance to the decisions and behavior of the ministry of foreign affairs, namely the US State Department during the 21st Century.

1. Foreign policy: a definition

The concept foreign policy was defined in various ways by scholars. George Modelski defines foreign policy as “the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment.” (6) According to Joseph Frankel, “foreign policy consists of decisions and actions, which involves to some appreciable extent relations between one state and others.” (1) It can be said that foreign policy is very relevant to each state and therefore presidents and decision makers give a priority to their ministry of foreign affairs.

2. American foreign policy

The website of the US State Department states that America has four main foreign policy goals:

- Protect the United States and Americans;
- Advance democracy, human rights, and other global interests;
- Promote international understanding of American values and policies; and
- Support U.S. diplomats, government officials, and all other personnel at home and abroad who make these goals a reality.

It can be said that America wants to maintain its hegemony as a superpower and wants also to extend its influence upon other countries. Wittkopt *et al* highlight the importance of US foreign policy and consider that it “embraces the goals that the nation’s officials seek to attain abroad, the values that give rise to those objectives, and the means or instruments used to pursue them.” (14) The USA seeks to establish its views, values and interests in the international community. Despite the fact America is the most powerful country of the world; it aims at safeguarding its security and welfare as well as its influence.

Conclusion

A powerful nation has a powerful foreign policy as it interacts with other nations and seeks its interests and hegemony. America is undoubtedly the most powerful country of the world, but with the evolution of China and other emerging countries like India and Brazil, the USA needs to be more resourceful and has to find new international mechanisms to remain powerful and carry on its influence on the rest of the world.

Study questions

1. Give a short definition to US foreign policy.
2. Do you think China will surpass the USA? Justify with examples.

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Lecture 8: Post 9/11 and war on terrorism

The terrorists who declared war on America represent no nation. They defend no territory. And they wear no uniform. They do not mass armies on borders or flotillas of warships on the high seas. They operate in the shadows of society. They send small teams of operatives to infiltrate free nations. They live quietly among their victims. They conspire in secret. And then they strike without warning.

George W. Bush

The number of people killed by the sanctions in Iraq is greater than the total number of people killed by all weapons of mass destruction in all of history.

Noam Chomsky

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ be familiar with the contemporary US foreign policy after 9/11
- ✓ distinguish key notions related to US foreign policy
- ✓ give a critical analysis of the war on terror and its contradictions

Introduction

In this lecture, we will look at the US foreign policy and examine several international issues that involve America of the 21st century. The point here is to analyze the way America combated terrorism and particularly after 9/11.

No one can deny the fact that the foreign policy of the United States has a huge impact on the entire globe since each country deals with America and tries to have a harmonious relationship with this powerful nation.

We will examine the components of the War on Terror which started after 9/11 and investigate if this strategy that was adopted by the US Department State paid off by bringing peace to America and to the entire world. A particular focus will be placed on the limitations of this policy inside and outside the USA.



George W. Bush at Ground Zero after the attacks on the World Trade Center

1. Timeline

The following timeline shows key events related to US foreign policy and War on Terror.

- **September 11, 2001** - 9/11 attacks launched by Al-Qaeda on the American soil
- **September 16, 2001** - George W. Bush launches War on Terror (Global war on terrorism)
- **October 7, 2001**- War in Afghanistan begins
- **March 19, 2003** - War in Iraq is launched
- **May 1, 2003**- Bush's "Mission Accomplished" speech on the USS Abraham Lincoln
- **December 13, 2003** - Saddam Hussein is captured
- **March 11, 2004** - Madrid train bombings kill 193 people
- **July 7, 2005** - London bombings (7/7) kill 52 people
- **March 2, 2006** - Bush signs the US-India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act
- **August 30, 2010** - Barack Obama declares the end of US combat operations in Iraq

- **May 2, 2011** - Osama Bin Laden is killed by US special forces at Abbottabad, Pakistan
- **March 6, 2014** - US economic sanctions against Russia after its illegal occupation of Crimea in Ukraine
- **December 28, 2014** - The war in Afghanistan ends
- **July 20, 2015**- USA reopens its diplomatic mission in Cuba after being closed for 50 years
- **December 6, 2017** - Trump recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel/ UNO condemns US decision
- **April 14, 2018** - US, UK and France air strikes against Syria in response to the Douma chemical attack against Syrian civilians on 7 April
- **October 2018** - Trump decides to give high priority to fighting terrorism through military action
- **January 28, 2019** - USA and Taliban leaders agree to the withdrawal of the 14 000 US soldiers remaining in Afghanistan
- **June 30, 2019** - Trump becomes the first US president to step into North Korea and meets its supreme leader Kim Jong-un
- **October 27, 2019** - Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS since 2013, died during a raid in Idlib conducted by US special forces
- **January 3, 2020** - US drone strikes Baghdad International Airport and kills Iranian major general Qasem Soleimani of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

2. 9/11 and its aftermath

Following the terrorist attacks on American soil on September 11, 2001 which killed 2977 Americans and injured 6000 others, President George W. Bush launched the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan as part of the War on Terror. This latter is defined as an international war started by the US government to eradicate the most important terrorist groups being the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and subsequently the Islamic State. (Heazle & Iyanatul 111)

On January 29, 2002, during the State of the Union address, Bush declared that countries such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea represented “an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.” Bush believed it was important to stop terrorists by waging a limitless war against them and against the rogue states that helped them.

Historian and author Jill Lepore contends that “the Bush administration conceived of the war on terror as an opportunity to strike against hostile regimes all over the world, on the grounds that they harbored and funded terrorists.” (318) Lepore carries on by claiming that “between 1998 and 2011, military spending nearly doubled, reaching more than \$700 billion a year—more, in adjusted dollars, than at any time since the Allies were fighting the Axis.” (318) In fact, America was not going to spare money in order to combat terrorism. What was important was to avoid another 9/11 on the American soil.

It is worth noting that US foreign policy after 9/11 was based on unilateralism and the use of preemptive war. It means that America supported one-sided actions and also considered its army could wage wars against any country menacing its liberty even if that country had not declared war against her.

The War on Terror which started in Afghanistan was going to spread to Iraq for America suspected Saddam Hussein to illegally possess weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). In fact, the US government decided to attack Iraq without being sure the country did have WMDs and without going through the Security Council knowing that the vote of a resolution allowing this war would certainly be doomed to failure.

After the end of major combat operations in Iraq, coalition forces noticed a flurry of attacks on its troops. Indeed, one of the important points that caused the unpopularity of the war was the number of US casualties. The US Department of Defense stated that as for January 14, 2013, 4 422 soldiers died while 31 926 soldiers were wounded in action in Iraq. The Iraqi population suffered tremendously because of the US invasion. The website *Iraq Body Count* stated that 288 000 people died because of violence. The new Middle East that Bush wanted to introduce would not see the light of day. The coalition force did not find the weapons of mass destruction, while it was the main argument supporting this invasion. The Bush administration was wrong about the full cost of the war. The Nobel Prize-winning economist winner Joseph Stiglitz asserted that the total cost of the war ranged from \$2.8 to \$4.5 trillion. This number represented the cost only to the United States and did not reflect the enormous cost to Iraq, or the rest of the world.

3. Anti-terrorist legislation and Guantanamo

After 9/11, it was obvious that Americans agreed on the need to ensure greater security to the country and prevent the danger of further attacks. But critics of the Bush administration claimed that its package of antiterrorist legislation (‘Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism’- more usually known as ‘the *USA PATRIOT Act*’) went far beyond what was

necessary to achieve this objective. The *USA PATRIOT ACT* was signed by Bush on October 26, 2001 to strengthen national security. This law was criticized for its authorization of indefinite detentions of immigrants; the permission given to police officers to search a home without the owner's consent or knowledge; and the expanded use of National Security Letters, which allowed the FBI to search telephone, e-mail, records, including library and financial records.

The *USA PATRIOT ACT* undermined some essential civil liberties in the USA. It also created a new spirit of intolerance. If anyone criticized President Bush for his foreign policy, he or she was going to be accused of inculcating antipatriotic sentiment. Some academics opposed to the war in Afghanistan complained they were harassed by university and other authorities. So, America became an Orwellian Big Brother who had been watching the citizens. The actions and private life of Americans were being monitored by the US government and this undermined civil liberties significantly.

Another consequence of the 9/11 attacks was the setting up of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp in 2002. This military prison is located at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and therefore it is not considered as a legally domestic US territory. The Taliban and Al Qaeda detainees who were imprisoned there were not entitled to the right of *habeas corpus* (a court order requiring a person under arrest to be brought before a judge or into court) since they were not on the American soil. President Bush argued that the Geneva Convention which protects prisoners of war (POW) would not apply to the terrorists for they were not on the American soil. However, most prisoners were freed and were transferred to other countries. The number of prisoners was reduced to 40. Barack Obama tried to close the

prison of Guantanamo in vain since the US Congress voted against its closing. In January 2018, Donald Trump signed an executive order to keep the prison open indefinitely.

4. Drone strikes

On 23 May 2013, Obama announced that War on Terror was over. However, the rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) led America to carry on with combating international terrorism. The US government began air attacks against ISIS in Syria and all the Middle East. It was clear War on Terror wasn't going to stop despite Obama's announcement. As a matter of fact, Americans adjusted their military strategy to the enemy they were combating since 9/11. Facing contemporary terrorism was not going to rely on traditional armies with ground forces and tanks; rather, America would use surgical strikes intended to damage only terrorist camps, with no or minimal collateral damage.

The point is the Obama administration was severely criticized for overusing drone strikes. These attacks by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) kill terrorists; however, they also kill civilians which do not take part in the war. True, the UAVs are very precise and effective in reaching their targets, yet they result in excessive collateral damage.² (Ofek 35)

Investigator journalist and writer Jeremy Scahill criticized the Obama administration's senseless argument that UAVs strikes are a cleaner way of combating terrorism. Scahill argued that "Obama has codified assassination as a central official component of American policy. [...] This is a global assassination program that is authorized and run under what amounts to a parallel legal system [...] where the president and his advisers serve as the judge, jury and executioner of people across the globe." *The New York Times* also reported that Obama used drone strikes in seven countries- Iraq,

² Deaths and injuries inflicted that is an unintended result of military operations.

Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen- without the authorization of Congress.

What is ironic is that the Norwegian Nobel Committee granted the 2009 Peace Prize to Obama for “his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples.” True, when we analyze the rhetoric of Obama, we notice the president is very open-minded vis-à-vis other diplomacies. His 2009 speech at Cairo University began with the Islamic greeting *assalamu alaikum* and he quoted some verses from the Holy Quran. However, this is real life and Obama’s realpolitik³ views US foreign policy as a means that is based primarily on pragmatism and self-interest rather than ethical ideologies.

Conclusion

We live today in a complex world where foreign diplomacies will play a significant role in the promotion of international peace. The USA is involved in several international issues which have a direct impact on different countries, including Algeria. Across the globe, there has been a transition from a bipolar world (Cold War involving USA and former Soviet Union) to a multipolar world. Buzan and Lawson contend that there is a transition from “an era of bipolarity to one of unipolarity, multipolarity or even non-polarity.” (71) While America remains a strong power economically and military, emerging economies such as China, Brazil, and India have been challenging US dominance and hegemony. But what is more important is that international terrorism also adapted to this complex era. In fact, ISIS uses social media to spread terror around the

³ Realpolitik is a political system that is not based on beliefs, doctrines, ethics, or morals, but rather on realistic, practical ideas. Richard Nixon’s diplomacy with China in the 1970’s was an example of realpolitik. Nixon had to deal and negotiate with China and acknowledged its emergence as a powerful economic nation.

world in addition to recruit new members. The *Financial Times* described ISIS's use of social media as "probably more sophisticated than most US companies." (Jones & Khalaf)

Perhaps, it's time for America to adjust its foreign policy to the challenges of the era of non-polarity by developing a real partnership with underdeveloped countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. One key element, I think, to face terrorism, nuclear weapons, poverty and global warming is to develop economic and cultural cooperation based on equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit.

Study questions

1. What is meant by the Bush Doctrine?
2. Give an interpretation of the depiction of War on Terror in a Hollywood movie (choose one movie).

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Lecture 9: US soft power

I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us, that the less we use our power the greater it will be.

A letter from Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Leiper

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ be familiar with the notion of US soft power
- ✓ make a distinction between hard power and soft power
- ✓ be aware of the importance of the concept of soft power and its implications

Introduction

In this lecture, we will examine US soft power. After giving a short definition to this concept that is used in the field of foreign policy, we will give some examples of US soft power. The point here is to explore the impact of US soft power on the



rest of the world in general and on the Arab world in particular. By the end, we will assess the importance of soft power for the US foreign policy of the 21st Century as the most powerful country of the world is confronted to international terrorism, global warming and the global economic crisis.

1. What is soft power?

The concept of “soft power” is used in the field of foreign policy to describe any country’s use of nonmilitary power to convince other countries to ascribe to its policies.

Soft power implies that there is hard power which is opposed to it. The *Thesaurus Dictionary* tells us that power is “the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events”. One person may oblige another person to do something by using force or by threatening him. This is called hard power. But soft power is the opposite of hard power since it happens when someone gets what he or she wants through attraction or persuasion.

Soft power in the field of foreign policy can be achieved through the use of cooperative programs such as university and cultural exchanges in addition to financial aids. The term “soft power” was coined by the Harvard professor of political science Joseph Nye in the late 1980s and relates to a nation’s ability to attract or persuade other nations, rather than coerce them by using military or economic means. Nye offers an overview of the concept of soft power by stating that:

Everyone is familiar with hard power. We know that military and economic might often get others to change their position. Hard power can rest on inducements (“carrots”) or threats (“sticks”). But sometimes you can get the outcomes you want without tangible threats or payoffs. The indirect way to get what you want has sometimes been called “the second face of power.” A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries admire its values, emulate its example; aspire to its level of prosperity and openness. This soft power—getting others to want the outcomes that you want—co-opts people rather than coerces them. [...] Soft power is not merely the same as influence. After all, influence can also rest on the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence. Simply put, in behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power. Soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction. (2004)

Nye views power as the ability to get what we want from others and this can be done in three ways: through coercion (use of force or intimidation); through payment; and through attraction and persuasion. For Nye, coercion and payment are called hard power, whereas

the ability to get what we want through attraction and persuasion is called soft power. Soft power is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.” (9)

Soft power in the USA is embodied in its cuisine, internet, technologies, sports, American Dream, soft drinks, blue jeans, tolerance and democracy. Millions of people watch American movies, read comics and US literary works, listen to rock music, eat hamburgers and donuts, like visiting New York City or the Statue of Liberty and attend American colleges which have a high reputation and are ranked the best educational institutions in the world. Nye contends that the soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.)” (25) Consequently, America attracts different countries all over the world and influences them because they consider it as an ideal nation that is worthy to be imitated. After all, countries everywhere want to be as powerful and developed as the USA and they think that they can do so by adopting the standards and policies of that country.

2. Examples of US soft power

The best example of American soft power is the Marshall Plan. It was a financial aid that was transferred to Western Europe in 1948 to help France, Britain and several other countries which were destroyed because of World War II. America gave Western Europe \$12 billion to rebuild the destroyed cities by modernizing industry and improving prosperity. Above all, the United States wanted to prevent Western Europe from falling to the influence of the Communist Soviet Union and to achieve this goal she used soft power.

Similarly, the US Department of State sponsors multiple programs for educational, cultural, and professional exchanges across the world. Educational exchange programs such as Fulbright or FLEX are an element of US soft power. Also, America assists countries which face natural disasters and help them with several varieties of disaster assistance programs, such as flood control in Pakistan and earthquake relief in Japan and Haiti. This humanitarian help can attract the devastated countries which would like to cooperate with the USA politically and economically and adopt its values.

3. Decline of US soft power?

Nye noticed that there is a decline in the United States' use of soft power and particularly after 9/11. The wars of Afghanistan and Iraq combined with the Bush Doctrine all lessened the value of soft power in the minds of people all over the world. The Arab world in particular considered the USA as an imperial nation. Although Arabs admire some aspects of American culture, they oppose American policies in Iraq and Guantanamo.

Under the presidency of Donald Trump, the United States dropped from the top ranked in the world in soft power to fourth in 2018, according to *Fortune*. Let's not forget that Trump adopted an "American First" policy that emphasized American nationalism, unilateralism and isolationism. Nye argues that "Tweets can help to set the global agenda, but they do not produce soft power if they are not attractive to others." (2019)

Conclusion: Towards the use of a smart power

In his 2011 book, *The Future of Power*, Joseph Nye suggested to use the concept of "smart power" instead of "soft power" to describe an effective US foreign policy of the twenty-first century that can reach its goals. "A smart power narrative [...] is not about maximizing power or preserving hegemony. It is about finding ways to combine resources

into successful strategies in the new context of power diffusion and the rise of the rest.”

(207) Nye noticed that “the concept of ‘smart power’—the intelligent integration and networking of diplomacy, defense, development, and other tools of so-called ‘hard and soft’ power—is at the very heart of President Obama and Secretary Clinton’s policy vision.” (207)

Smart power is a pragmatic strategy applied in foreign policy to enable the USA to reach its goals and this can be achieved by the combination of hard and soft power. For success in the twenty-first century, the United States will need to adjust tactics, assess its resources and be aware of the strength and limits of its power.

Thanks to globalization and information technology, countries like China, India, and Brazil will use their soft power to influence other countries and reach their international objectives. Those countries can undermine the US dominance in economics and culture; however, America is a resourceful country that can easily adapt to globalization and the challenges of the twenty-first century. In short, the United States will use a smart power to foster its preponderance in a fragile world threatened by international terrorism, global warming, pandemics and economic crises.

Study questions

1. Do you think Hollywood movies represent an effective tool of US soft power? Do they influence you? Explain.
2. Does America use soft power with Algeria to get what she wants? Give arguments.
3. Professor Eliot A. Cohen criticizes the concept of soft power while maintaining that hard power remains essential for American foreign policy. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

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Lecture 10: Presidency of Barack Obama

Electoral politics was always an objective of the Black Panther party, so Barack Obama is a part of what we dreamed and struggled and died for. I am so happy to see this. Whether you're black, white, green or polka-dot, this is some real human progress we're seeing.

Bobby Seale

He has no particular principles that I can identify. In fact, the advertising industry enthusiastically gave the best marketing campaign of the year to Obama, the year he was first elected.

Noam Chomsky

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ describe the presidency of Barack Obama
- ✓ identify several concepts used in US politics
- ✓ assess the Obama presidency by tracing its ambiguities

Introduction

This lecture is an overview of the presidency of Barack Obama. We will trace the accomplishments and limitations of the 44th president of the USA who served two terms in the White House (2008-2012 and 2012-2016). We will investigate if the election of the first African American president of the USA solved the American agony of racial bondage and segregation and if it benefited minority groups who face exclusion and social inequality. Globally speaking, we will assess the presidency of President Obama by focusing on several domestic and foreign issues such as: social justice, health care, US diplomacy and relationship to the Arab world. The following timeline indicates the most important events of the presidency of Obama.

1. Timeline of the presidency of Barack Obama

- **4 November 2008:** Barack Hussein Obama II is elected president.
- **20 January 2009:** Inauguration of Obama as the 44th president of the United States.

- **18 February 2009:** Administration commits to doubling U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.
- **26 June 2009:** The House passes “cap and trade” bill to combat climate change.
- **11 July 2009:** First presidential visit to Africa.
- **9 October 2009:** Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to Obama.
- **23 March 2010:** Obama signs the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (also called Obamacare).
- **8 April 2010:** Obama signs the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia to decrease nuclear stockpiles.
- **2 November 2010:** In the midterm elections, the Republicans win control of the House of Representatives as the Democrats lose 63 seats.
- **27 April 2011:** Obama releases his long form birth certificate to prove that he is a native- born U.S. citizen.
- **2 May 2011:** Osama bin Laden is killed by U.S. Special Forces.
- **17 September 2011:** Occupy Wall Street protests begin in Manhattan’s Zuccotti Park.
- **26 February 2012:** Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African-American teenager from Miami Gardens, Florida, is murdered by George Zimmerman.
- **11 September 2012:** U.S. consulate and annex in Benghazi, Libya, is attacked.
- **6 November 2012:** Obama is reelected president.
- **2 January 2013:** Obama signs American Taxpayer Relief Act raising taxes on the top bracket back to where they were before President George W. Bush took office.
- **15 April 2013:** The Boston Marathon bombing kills 3 and injures 283 runners and spectators.

- **5 June 2013:** Edward Snowden leaks highly classified documents from the National Security Agency.
- **13 July 2013:** Black Lives Matter (#BLM) emerges as a political movement, protesting against racial profiling and police brutality.
- **1 October 2013:** The federal government shuts down because Congress refuses to pass legislation lifting the debt ceiling.
- **6 March 2014:** Obama demands sanctions against Russia for invasion of Ukraine and Crimea.
- **9 August 2014:** Michael Brown, an African-American man, is killed by the police of Ferguson, Missouri.
- **5 November 2014:** Republicans take control of Senate in midterm elections.
- **2 June 2015:** Obama signs a renewal of the Patriot Act.
- **29 June 2015:** Obama expands eligibility for overtime pay for millions of workers.
- **1 July 2015:** Cuba and the United States restore diplomatic relations.
- **17 January 2016:** The Obama administration lifts sanctions on Iran.
- **20 September 2016:** Keith Lamont Scott, an African-American man, is fatally shot by police in Charlotte, North Carolina, stirring civil unrest.
- **8 November 2016:** Donald J. Trump defeats Hillary Clinton, winning the presidency.
- **20 January 2017:** Obama delivers his farewell address on January 10 and leaves the White House on January 20.

2. Historical and political context

When Obama was elected president of the United States on November 4th, 2008, the country was in the midst of the global financial crisis that is considered to be the most

serious financial crisis since the Great Depression of 1929. In fact, many American households were caught in the economic turmoil and were unable to pay their home loans. They also suffered from social inequality and the lack of health insurance.

Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in the 2010 midterm election, while they won control of the Senate after the 2014 elections, and this made it difficult for the White House to pass bills and reforms regarding health care, immigration, social justice, and several other issues. (Edwards 186)

No one can deny the fact that the election of Obama, the first African American president, brought a new hope for racial minorities and reduced perceptions of racism in the USA; however, the African American community felt disappointed because race-related policies were infringed. What is more, during the presidency of Obama, African Americans faced racial profiling, police brutality and racial inequality in the US criminal justice system.

At the international level, the world was struggling with combating global terrorism and trying to decrease the negative effects of climate change. America had its army deployed in both Iraq and Afghanistan and there was an urgent need from the public opinion to bring the US troops back home. The White House had also to deal with Iran and its attempt to develop nuclear weapons. The US-Russia relations declined tremendously because Russia invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea.

3. Domestic affairs

Obama started his presidency during the Great Recession where the financial system was close to collapse. On February 17, 2009, the US president signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It is an economic stimulus package of \$831 billion whose

aim is to help the US economy recover from the financial crisis by increasing federal spending for health insurance, education, and financial assistance to individuals who face joblessness. (Ceaser *et al.* 27)

To address the excesses in the banking sector that provoked the financial crisis, Obama signed the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act in 2010, which controlled bank risk-taking. As a Democrat, Obama favored tax increases on higher incomes Americans and was able to reform the health care system by passing the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act (2010), also called Obamacare. Millions of Americans were lacking a basic health care and consequently Obamacare guaranteed low-income Americans to purchase health insurance.

When it comes to racial issues, it seems that the Obama Administration failed to find ways to make significant changes for the different minorities groups, including the African Americans. The truth of the matter is that many Americans celebrated the idea that the election of Obama in 2008 was the climax of the civil rights struggle; however, the reality was that millions of African Americans were still facing racial disparities, police brutality, poverty, and unemployment. The shooting of the African Americans people Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, and Keith Lamont Scott, to name but a few, by the police made things worse.

In 2013, Black Lives Matter (#BLM) emerged in the African American community to protest against violence and racism towards black people. Obama was caught between two fires when addressing the issue of police brutality. On one hand, some African American activists criticized him when he expressed his empathy for the police. On the other hand, some members of the police criticized the president's condemnation of racial

bias after the death of African American people caused by the law enforcement action. Though Obama was very skeptical about addressing the issues of segregation and racial inequality, he started in 2014 discussing the drawbacks faced by many members of minority groups.

4. Foreign policy

When Obama joined the White House, he inherited a chaotic foreign policy from his predecessor George W. Bush who started two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet, like Bush, Obama supported War on Terror and accordingly he adopted similar policies of the Bush administration by combating global terrorism endlessly.

Obama's foreign policy was marked by diminishing American commitments overseas. His foreign policy focused on ending the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and at the same time the president implemented an aggressive policy in the Middle East against ISIS by using drones. To be precise, Obama authorized 542 drone strikes in Pakistan, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, and Yemen according to Micah Zenko. The strikes killed an estimated 3797 people, including 324 civilians.

Obama conveyed a new way of doing foreign policy. It was less militarized and more engaged-focused. He believed Americans should take themselves out of the field as often as possible, while they should sit down at the give and take table and negotiate with their allies about central issues.

Some observers labeled the president's foreign policy as the Obama Doctrine. The president told *New York Times* journalist and columnist Thomas L. Friedman that his doctrine is "we will engage, but we preserve all our capabilities." However, several scholars did not agree whether there was an actual "Obama Doctrine". Rather, there was a

style and a way of conducting US foreign policy that was effective and very cautious. Obama's foreign policy put a stress on negotiation and collaboration instead of acting unilaterally and confronting other nations.

Obama is a realist politician. Contrary to what some commentators believe, Obama is not an idealist leader who thinks about the well-being of the rest of the world. He carried out an "America First" approach to foreign policy which centered on eradicating global terrorism and maintaining America as the strongest nations of the world. The truth is Obama's realpolitik did not try to make the world a better place but accepted it as it is. After all, foreign policy is about getting stronger and imposing a country's primacy over the other countries.

Obama was able to normalize US relations with Cuba and reached an agreement with Iran in 2015 to reduce its nuclear facilities. Similarly, he promoted international discussions that led to the 2016 Paris agreement on global climate change.

Conclusion

The election of Obama embodied the idea that the American Dream is possible for everyone; an inclusive dream for all Americans regardless of their ethnic background or their country of origin. Unlike Bush, Obama improved the image of America in Europe and even in several Arab countries leading to the enhancement of American soft power. However, the president could not pass laws to decrease racial inequality and increase immigration in the country. Similarly, he could not close the prison camp of Guantanamo as he promised because of the antagonism of the US Congress.

On January 20th, 2017, Obama left office. Americans opened a new page with President Donald J Trump. It is up to historians and scholars of political science to assess President Barack Obama, his policies and his achievements.

Study questions

1. Give a short definition to the Obama Doctrine.
2. Obama's legacy in the Middle East is one of near-total failure. To what extent do you agree or disagree?

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Lecture 11: Donald Trump and polarization of America

Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on.
Donald Trump

Donald Trump is a phenomenon that foreign countries haven't seen. So it is a shocking experience to them that he came in to office.
Henry Kissinger

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ have some knowledge about the presidency of Donald Trump
- ✓ distinguish some key concepts of US politics such as impeachment, populism, non-interventionism, and protectionism
- ✓ be aware of several limitations and ambiguities of President Trump's policies

Introduction

This lecture tackles the domestic and foreign policies of the 45th and current president of the United States, Donald J Trump. After presenting a brief biographical overview of the president and his main policies, we will examine the reasons why the Congress tried to impeach him. Finally, we will delve into the presidency of Trump and examine if contemporary America became polarized because of his decisions and policies.

1. Who is Donald Trump?

Donald John Trump was born on June 14, 1946 in Queens, a borough of New York City. He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from the Wharton School and took charge of his family's real-estate business in 1971. The Trump Organization, a group of 500 business entities belonging to Trump, builds skyscrapers, hotels and casinos throughout America. Trump produced and hosted *The Apprentice*, a reality television series

from 2003 to 2015 which assesses the business skills of a group of contestants. His net worth is said to be \$2.1 billion.

Trump entered the 2016 US presidential election as a Republican and was opposed to the Democratic nominee, former secretary of state Hillary Clinton. He based his political campaign on right-wing populism⁴, protectionism, and nationalism. His campaign focused on opposing illegal immigration and free-trade agreements. Trump used a very populist slogan, “Make America Great Again” that attracted the US media and was appealing to millions who voted for him. He won the 2016 presidential election thanks to the Electoral College and became the 45th president of the United States, while still losing the popular vote (65.8 million Americans voted for Clinton, whereas 62.9 million Americans voted for Trump). On the 3rd of November 2020, Trump lost the presidential election to the Democratic Party candidate former vice president Joe Biden, but he refused to concede defeat. Biden won the election receiving 81.3 million votes to Trump’s 74.2 million and winning the Electoral College by 306 to 232.

2. Timeline of the Trump’s presidency

- **20 January 2017:** Inauguration of Trump as the 45th president of the United States.
- **27 January 2017:** Trump signs an executive order (also called the travel ban) stopping all refugee arrivals for 120 days and banning travel to the USA from 7 Muslim countries for 90 days.
- **6 December 2017:** Trump recognizes Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and announces plans to relocate the US Embassy there.

⁴ A political ideology that integrates a language (rhetoric) based on anti-elitist sentiments. Right-wing politicians often use populism to speak the common people and support strong controls on immigration.

- **22 December 2017:** Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which hindered the functioning of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare); however, the president failed in his efforts to repeal the act.
- **8 May 2018:** Trump withdraws from the Iran nuclear deal.
- **15 February 2019:** Trump decides to build a wall on the border with Mexico.
- **30 June 2019:** Trump becomes the first sitting US president to enter North Korea.
- **25 July 2019:** Trump speaks on the phone with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and asks him to investigate Joe Biden, the Democratic nominee for president in the 2020 election.
- **12 August 2019:** A whistleblower files a complaint pertaining to Trump's conduct on the Zelensky call.
- **24 September 2019:** House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announces the beginning of an impeachment inquiry related to the whistleblower complaint.
- **19 December 2019:** Trump became the third president in American history to be impeached (The two past presidents who faced impeachment were Andrew Johnson in 1868 and Bill Clinton in 1998).
- **3 January 2020:** Trump announces that a US airstrike in Iraq has killed Qasem Soleimani, the leader of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force.
- **5 February 2020:** President Trump is acquitted in impeachment trial by the US Senate.
- **27 March 2020:** The House passes the \$2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).
- **15 April 2020:** President Trump announces America will stop funding the World Health Organization.

- **2 October 2020:** President Trump tweets that both he and First Lady Melania Trump had tested positive for coronavirus and would immediately quarantine.
- **7 November 2020:** Biden becomes president-elect; however, Trump refuses to concede defeat and continues to challenge the results.
- **6 January 2021:** The U.S. Capitol building is evacuated during the Electoral College results certification process after seditionists and insurrectionists broke the security barrier and stormed the building. Both Houses of Congress recess the Electoral College debate after the mob forced a lockdown of the building.
- **8 January 2021:** President Trump announces he would not be attending Joe Biden's inauguration making him the first outgoing President not to attend his elected successor's inauguration since the 1869 inauguration of Ulysses S. Grant.
- **11 January 2021:** Democrats in the House of Representatives formally charge President Trump with one count of "incitement of insurrection" after Republicans in the House block invocation of the 25th Amendment making Trump the first President to face two Impeachment trials.
- **19 January 2021:** President Trump delivers his farewell address from the White House. Trump talks about the accomplishments of his term as president and wishes good luck to the upcoming administration.

3. Highlights of the presidency of Trump

From the very beginning of his presidency, Trump challenged the leadership of his predecessor by trying to get rid of every law, reform and act passed by the Obama administration. Globally speaking, when assessing the Trump presidency, I may label it as

a “presidency of withdrawal.” Since he was in office, Trump withdrew and still tries to withdraw from several agreements and laws passed by President Obama and his team.

Trump withdrew the Paris Agreement on climate change mitigation. America, one of the world’s largest polluters which failed to ratify the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, decided to leave the Paris Agreement that was supposed to regulate greenhouse-gas-emissions. The Donald Trump administration withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade agreement between trans-pacific countries which was negotiated by President Obama and did not come into effect because of Trump’s opposition in January 2017.

Under Trump, America abruptly withdrew its US troops from northern Syria on December 19, 2018. Trump took this decision although his military and civilian advisors recommended it would be a mistake. (Obaid 219) As a consequence, Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis resigned from the Trump administration. Trump withdrew the USA from the Iran nuclear deal of 2015 and reinforced tensions with Iran after ordering the assassination of General Qasem Soleimani. Similarly, the Trump administration withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia on August 2nd, 2019.

When it comes to the Middle East, one can argue that the Trump administration was only able to create frictions and antagonism with the Arab world. The US president recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and decided to move the US embassy there. Moreover, the Trump administration decided to end all funding for the United Nations refugee agency that helps Palestinian refugees.

What is more, the US president signed Executive Order 13769, often referred to as the Muslim ban, which temporarily suspended the admission of immigrants coming from 7 Muslim countries, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Thousands of

people gathered at various airports in the United States and around the world to protest the unethical ban. The Muslim ban blocked nationwide before it took effect by a federal judge in Hawaii and another federal judge in Maryland. (LeMay 39)

Additionally, Trump announced the USA would stop funding the World Health Organization (WHO) because, according to him, this UN agency was too lenient on China. This decision drew widespread criticism from international leaders and American politicians. Likewise, several pundits criticized Trump for the slow response of his administration to the Covid-19 pandemic. *The New York Times* reporter Donald McNeil Jr. asserted that the US “completely blew it for the first two months of our response.” He added “Yes, it is the president’s fault. [...] It is not China’s fault.” Aaron Blake and JM Rieger, from the *Washington Post*, argued that Trump had underestimated the seriousness of coronavirus as he pointed out “he [Trump] would repeatedly say the situation was “under control,” downplay the threat and compare it to the flu. For about two months before that, though, people around him were offering cautions about the pandemic that the coronavirus would become.” Even former President Obama strongly criticized the work of the Trump administration by describing Trump’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic as “chaotic.”

Finally, Trump was accused of pressuring the president of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky to investigate his political rivals Joe Biden in exchange for nearly \$400 million in military and security aid to Ukraine. In December 2019, after an inquiry, the House of Representatives voted to impeach the president. On February 5, 2019, after a three-week trial, senators acquitted Trump of two impeachment charges, abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. On January 13, 2021, Trump faced a second impeachment again

because he incited the US Capitol attack of January 6, 2021. But the president was acquitted of the charge on February 13, 2021.

All in all, the presidency of Trump can be described as promoting trade protectionism⁵, immigration restriction, non-interventionism⁶ and an “American First” foreign policy. We all remember the inaugural speech of 20 January 2017 when Trump pledged to put America first during his presidency, saying: “From this day forward, it is going to be only ‘America first, America first’. Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs, will be made to benefit American workers and American families.” Therefore, the US government withdrew from every international agency and treaty to save millions of dollars and focus on domestic issues.

Peter Dombrowski and Simon Reich argue that Trump’s approach to foreign policy and security policies is “nonexistent, chaotic and thus incoherent.” (57) In fact, I think the president of America shouldn’t reject globalism while promoting isolation and patriotism. The world of today is not a better place to live in and the USA, the most powerful nation of the world, has to play a major role in fighting terrorism, decreasing global warming, and eradicating world poverty.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to ask the following question: was America polarized because of Donald Trump and his ambivalent presidency? Never before had Americans dealt with a US president so contradictory. We cannot neglect the fact he is an unconventional figure

⁵ Trade protectionism is a policy that protects domestic industries from unfair competition from foreign ones. It temporarily creates jobs for domestic workers; however, in the long term, it weakens the industry because the domestic product will decline in quality and be more expensive than what foreign competitors produce.

⁶ A foreign policy that states that governments should avoid interfering in the affairs of foreign nations relations but still retain diplomacy and trade, while avoiding wars unless they are necessary for self-defense.

who opposes political correctness. He overused populism in his addresses and found it difficult to deal with the US media that he constantly accused of trying to undermine his policies and achievements. That is why he opted for dealing with Americans via twitter instead of confronting journalists and answering their questions.

Similarly, critics noticed Trump's persistent self-referential attitude that is associated with excessive self-importance. In 2000, he told the magazine *Fortune*: "I'm intelligent. Some people would say I'm very, very, very intelligent." Trump fired a number of government officials and advisors that disagreed with him and who affected his public image. As a consequence, there was a lack of stability in the White House and this weakened the leadership of Trump.

It is true that the members of the US Congress failed to impeach the president twice, but the trials that were followed by millions of Americans had a negative impact on the image of the president. The ultimate outcome of all these inadequacies was the removal of the president from the White House. Americans had definitely turned the page of the Trump years by electing Joe Biden as the 46th president of the United States.

Study questions

1. Populism was the centerpiece of Trump's political agenda. Explain.
2. Identify Donald Trump's Middle East policies.

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twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor.

Lecture 12: US democracy and lobbying

Objectives

After this lecture, students should:

- ✓ describe the concept of lobbying
- ✓ be able to summarize the passage of Jeffrey Sachs about corporatocracy
- ✓ identify the contradictions of US democracy when pressure groups interfere in politics

Summary: In the following passage, the US economist Jeffrey Sachs views America as a country controlled by corporations (corporatocracy), and claims that the lobbies of Wall Street, oil, military-industrial complex, and health care have a great influence over American politics.

Lobbying in the USA

Here's the conundrum: A healthy economy is a mixed economy, in which government and the marketplace both play their role. Yet the federal government has neglected its role for three decades. Just when the government was needed to chart a course through the twists and turns of globalization, it went AWOL (Absent Without Official Leave). Or, more accurately, it turned the levers of power over to the corporate lobbies. America's economic failures are therefore at least as much political as economic. This chapter examines the politics of America's corporatocracy, a political system in which powerful corporate interest groups dominate the policy agenda.

We can see how the corporatocracy arose as the confluence of four big trends. First, the American political system has weak national parties and strong political representation of individual districts. This allows special interests to have a great say in politics through local representatives. Second, the large U.S. military establishment after World War II

created the first of the megalobbies, the military-industrial complex. Third, big corporate money finances America's election campaigns. And fourth, globalization and the race to the bottom have tilted the balance of power toward corporations and away from workers. Add up these trends, and we have the perfect political storm, in which Washington has been overrun, and overtaken, by the lobbies. The wealth/power spiral has continued to amplify the political disaster.

The voters have a significant unmet responsibility, to be sure, in pulling Washington back to a true democracy. Yet most voters are poorly informed, and many are easily swayed by the intense corporate propaganda thrown their way in the few months leading to the elections. We have therefore been stuck in a low-level political trap: cynicism breeds public disengagement from politics; the public disengagement from politics opens the floodgates of corporate abuse; and corporate abuse deepens the cynicism.

America's Weak Party System

Political scientists distinguish between majoritarian and consensus electoral systems. Majoritarian systems tend to have just two or three major parties, and elections generally produce a clear winning party at the polls. The winning party (or perhaps a two-party coalition) governs while the losing party is out of government. Consensus systems have electoral rules that produce a large number of parties, and several parties generally govern as part of a broad coalition.

The main reason for America's majoritarian character is the electoral system for Congress. Members of Congress are elected in single-member districts according to the "first-past-the-post" (FPTP) principle, meaning that the candidate with the plurality of votes is the winner of the congressional seat. The losing party or parties win no representation at all.

The first-past-the-post election tends to produce a small number of major parties, perhaps just two, a principle known in political science as Duverger's Law. Smaller parties are trampled in first-past-the-post elections.

There are two major implications of America's FPTP system. First, in a two-party system, the swing votes are near the center of the income distribution and political ideology. Both parties attempt to woo the middle class and independent (nonparty) voters. The poor are typically not wooed and are often not even mentioned in the campaigns, since they are rarely the swing votes. During the three presidential debates in 2008, the words "poor" and "poverty" were not uttered a single time (neither by the candidates nor by the questioners). The opinions and needs of the poor are represented only in districts that have a high rate of poverty.

In European proportional systems, on the other hand, winning more national votes among the poor means winning more parliamentary seats overall. The poor may be represented by their own party or may have a strong hold on a center-left labor party. Even if the poor are disbursed throughout the country, they still form a powerful voting group.

These basic differences show up in systematic differences in social spending according to the voting system. Proportional systems are likely to support higher social spending and more redistribution toward the poor.

The second implication of America's FPTP system is the lack of strong party discipline within the two national parties. In proportional systems, the national parties almost always stick together in parliamentary votes. In parliamentary FPTP systems such as those in the United Kingdom and Canada, the governing party or parties also stick together on major

votes, since a failure on a major policy vote usually triggers a new national election or at least the fall of the government.

In America's FPTP system, by contrast, in which Congress and government are separate branches and the government does not fall when it loses a legislative vote, national party discipline is limited and fragile. Members of Congress prioritize local interests over national interests, since Congress is elected locally. A strong national party leader may occasionally achieve party discipline in Congress, but party ranks are easily broken when interests conflict across districts.

A stable national majority coalition in Congress is therefore hard to achieve and sustain. Moreover, congressional procedures give tremendous leeway to individual members to delay legislation and block appointments to executive departments and regulatory agencies. In the Senate, a minority of forty-one senators is usually enough to stop legislation favored by the majority, via the filibuster. Congressional power is fragmented, veto power is rife, and special interests are very well represented and able to penetrate the legislative process. To pass economic legislation, the president must inevitably run a minefield of local interests. Though the president wields considerable power over the executive departments and agencies and limited influence over regulatory processes, the White House cannot be assured of passing a program or budget through Congress. Each major budget vote is an adventure on its own, with the president winning some and losing many.

With weak national parties and with elections to Congress in single-member districts, the main local industries and wealthy constituents in each district are likely to have great sway over each representative. In a coal-mining district, the representative is likely to vote in support of coal interests (and against anti-climate change legislation) irrespective of party

or overall ideology. Military bases, mines, major factories, financial markets, and other major industries in the district are all likely to define the voting behavior of members of Congress. Congress is therefore a maze of special interests. Passing national legislation means forming coalitions of local interest groups and trading off favors across these groups. This kind of politics naturally gives enormous weight to narrow interest groups. The power of special interests is exacerbated by yet another unusual feature of American politics: nonstop campaigning. Due to an outdated choice made in the 1789 Constitution, the United States has a national election every two years, which is by far the shortest election cycle of any high-income democracy. Between 1960 and 2009, Sweden had fifteen national elections; the United Kingdom had twelve; the United States had twenty-five. The two-year cycle between congressional elections means that the United States is always in campaign mode and members of Congress are consumed by the need to fund-raise for the next election. Special interests are always at the ready to trade campaign financing for votes on crucial issues.

The Four Big Lobbies

The corporatocracy is a quintessential example of a feedback loop. Corporate wealth translates into political power through campaign financing, corporate lobbying, and the revolving door of jobs between government and industry; and political power translates into further wealth through tax cuts, deregulation, and sweetheart contracts between government and industry. Wealth begets power, and power begets wealth.

Four key sectors of the American economy exemplify this feedback loop. **The military-industrial complex** is perhaps the most notorious example. As Eisenhower famously warned in his farewell address in January 1961, the linkage of the military and private

industry created a political power so pervasive that America has been condemned to militarization, useless wars, and fiscal waste on a scale of many tens of trillions of dollars since then. The second powerful lobby is the **Wall Street–Washington complex**, which has steered the financial system toward control by a few politically powerful Wall Street firms, notably Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup, Morgan Stanley, and a handful of other financial firms. The close ties of finance and Washington paved the way for the 2008 financial crisis and the megabailouts that followed, through reckless deregulation followed by an almost complete lack of oversight by government. The third sector is the **Big Oil–transport–military complex** that has put the United States on the trajectory of heavy oil import dependence and a deepening military trap in the Middle East. Since the days of John D. Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Trust a century ago, Big Oil has loomed large in American politics and foreign policy. Big Oil teamed up with the automobile industry to steer America away from mass transit and toward gas-guzzling vehicles driving on a nationally financed highway system. Big Oil has consistently and successfully fought the intrusion of competition from non-oil energy sources, including nuclear, wind, and solar power. Big Oil has been at the side of the Pentagon in making sure that America defends the sea-lanes to the Persian Gulf, in effect ensuring a \$100 billion–plus annual subsidy for a fuel that is otherwise dangerous for national security. And Big Oil has played a notorious role in the fight to keep climate change off the U.S. agenda. ExxonMobil, Koch Industries, and others in the sector have underwritten a generation of antiscientific propaganda to confuse the American people. The fourth of the great industry-government tie-ups has been **the health care industry**, America’s single largest industry today, absorbing no less than 17 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The key to

understanding this sector is to note that the government partners with industry to reimburse costs with little systematic oversight and control. Pharmaceutical firms set sky-high prices protected by patent rights; Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurers reimburse doctors and hospitals on a cost-plus basis; and the American Medical Association restricts the supply of new doctors through the control of placements at American medical schools. The result of this pseudo-market system is sky-high costs, large profits for the private health care sector, and no political will to reform.

The Corporate Sector Continues to Win Big

The main thing to remember about the corporatocracy is that it looks after its own. There is absolutely no economic crisis in corporate America.

The creation of America's rich class (those in the top 1 percent, with incomes above \$400,000 per year) and super-rich class (those in the top 0.01 percent, with incomes above \$8 million per year) has been the thirty-year achievement of the corporatocracy. We can now see the tools of the trade. It began with globalization, which pushed up capital income while pushing down wages. These changes were magnified by the tax cuts at the top, which left more take-home pay and the ability to accumulate greater wealth through higher net-of-tax returns to saving. CEOs then helped themselves to their own slice of the corporate sector ownership through outlandish awards of stock options by friendly and often handpicked compensation committees, while the Securities and Exchange Commission looked the other way. It's not all that hard to do when both political parties are standing in line to do your bidding.

Source: Jeffrey D. Sachs. *The Price of Civilization*. New York: Random House, 2011, pp.76-93.

General Conclusion

By the end of the course, a general conclusion will review the salient points of the lectures and a class discussion will be held about the importance of studying about the USA. Students should understand the complexities and the challenges of the real-world of today and particularly when the USA is involved in international issues that have a direct impact on our country and on the rest of the world.