

American history teaching has become a battleground between political operatives who want no mention of America's original sin (slavery) or our gradual attempts at empathetic correction (emancipation of slaves and women and protection of the gender spectrum), and those who emphasize our past injustices.

America's history is more than these two approaches. Students will benefit from exposure to the best scholarship available: both liberal and intelligently conservative, which can result in real love of country. We are indeed flawed, but also amazingly generous at correcting our past. We have accordingly become a beacon to the world.

Last week, I discussed *The Case for Goliath*, which asked us to imagine the world without us (like the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*). Mandelbaum offers much wisdom that helps us understand our global role in becoming a sort of world government.

Another very useful book in understanding how American foreign policy is made is: *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk*, Walter Russell Mead, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2004.

Mead is a Kissinger Fellow, and was, in 2004, the brightest of the Neo-Conservatives. He is an expert in how American Foreign Policy has been made, including a useful overview of its history.

Four men, three of them presidents, have shaped our global history: Hamilton, Jefferson, Jackson, and Wilson, have influenced all that followed. Their styles are:

Hamiltonian, trade with the whole world is the best guarantee of America's prosperity and general wellbeing. Latter day advocates: President Clinton.
Jeffersonian, we should beware of foreign entanglements and that minding our own business is the best policy, except where our interests are concerned. (See Monroe Doctrine, the pursuit of the Algerian pirates, and the purchase of the Louisiana Territories from the financially strapped Napoleon.) Advocate: the early Bush II administration.

Jacksonian, we should use muscle whenever our interests require. Don't Tread on Me! Advocates: Roosevelts (both of them), and Harry Truman. Also, Reagan and Bush I and II.

Wilsonian, we should be making the world safe for democracy, which includes being part of (and leading) as many international institutions as possible. (Roosevelt and Truman in founding of UN. Reagan and Bush I. Now Bush II.

These four essential pillars of American policy have been with us throughout our history. We have had presidents who have used one or another, and sometimes several, of these principles. This makes for sometimes inconsistent policy, but that's what we do.

Another political issue arose after the 9/11 attack on the US and multiple Islamist mass murders in Europe. Our desire for religious toleration was confronted by a Jacksonian policy of open warfare. Once more, our teaching needs some nuance: the difference between fundamentalist militant Islam and Islam as a normal non-political religion. Works I have used in teaching are V. S. Naipaul's *Among the Believers* and *Beyond Belief*.

The first, published in 1981, explores Naipaul's travels to all the non-Arab countries conquered by Arab Islam. Some suffer from their loss of their original languages and histories, even today, much like the suffering of our own Native Americans who were forced to abandon their cultures under forced assimilation. Iran (once Persia) resisted this forced Arabization and retained both language and history. Their form of Islam, the Shiite sect, has reflected this rebellion and violence. Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indonesia all have their own problems with the enforced Arab culture on them.

Naipaul's second book covers the same journey in 1998 (just before 9/11/01), and he asked ordinary people to explain the resurgence of Islam. An astonishing number reported Islam's putting women in their place that accounts for their piety.

One reason for including these works in religion courses is that the majority of

history of religion books are almost propaganda pieces, presenting each religion in its most favorable way.

If teaching history is to be of benefit to educating our young, we need to promote the idea that all human institutions reflect the best and worst of human behavior. Over many centuries, we have recognized and corrected many of our worst practices. Wisdom is our best weapon.

682 words

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