



Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter with the World Since 1776

By Walter McDougall

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In "an entertaining and iconoclastic fashion" (Philadelphia Inquirer), the celebrated historian reinterprets the traditions that have shaped U.S. foreign policy from 1776 to the present. "McDougall has written a lively and provocative book" (Wall Street Journal) that is "a rich study of the American experience" (Los Angeles Times).

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- Sales Rank: #123413 in Books
- Published on: 1998-05-15
- Released on: 1998-05-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .75" w x 6.00" l, .82 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

When the Cold War ended and left the United States without one clear, monolithic enemy or ideology to battle, a hint of confusion and indecisiveness entered U.S. foreign policy, revealing weaknesses in the American diplomatic tradition. However, According to Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Walter A. McDougall, this confusion was not a result of the Cold War, but rather made more visible by the absence of a looming conflict. Reaching back to 1776 to analyze the foreign policy decisions made during the U.S. progression to superpower, McDougall reveals the numerous paradoxes present in American foreign policy.

Beginning with the original intentions of the Founding Fathers and the various interpretations of those ideals over the years, he deconstructs the role of the U.S. in global affairs, questioning both the logic and motives of how the nation deals with friend and foe. One of McDougall's major contentions centers on efforts to affect other countries' policies and governments by projecting U.S. standards or choices on them. He is particularly concerned with what he views as an overextension of resources and wisdom, and the glaring hypocrisy such efforts reveal. He points to several examples of how time and energy was wasted trying to change those who were uninterested or unwilling. As McDougall points out lucidly and convincingly in *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter With the World Since 1776*, one nation cannot cure the major ills of another, and the price of such an attempt is too great to risk.

From Library Journal

Pulitzer Prize-winning historian McDougall renders a service here to students of diplomatic history and general readers alike. In a concise analysis of U.S. diplomatic history, he defines terms such as "isolationism," which are bandied about so casually in post-Cold War debates on U.S. foreign policy. Adapted from his lectures at the University of Pennsylvania, this supremely readable book is presented in conversational style. McDougall divides American diplomatic history into novel "Old Testament" and "New Testament" phases. The Old Testament, which centered on safeguarding liberty at home, extended from the Revolution to the 1890s; the New Testament, featuring crusades abroad, extends from the Spanish-American War to the present. Within the two phases, he identifies eight schools of thought that battle for supremacy today. The challenge for the future is to decide which intellectual currents in America's view of the world should be retained in crafting a new foreign policy. An important work; strongly recommended for all libraries. James Holmes, Fletcher Sch. of Diplomacy, Tufts Univ., Medford, Mass.

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From Kirkus Reviews

If American diplomacy can seem confusing to foreigners, that is because it partakes of eight different traditions, suggests Pulitzer Prizewinning historian McDougall (Univ. of Pennsylvania; *Let the Sea Make a Noise*, 1993, etc.) in this perceptive study. The eight traditions that McDougall explores are American exceptionalism, unilateralism, the American System, expansionism, progressive imperialism, Wilsonianism, containment, and global meliorism. McDougall is at pains to correct what he sees as misreadings of the history of American foreign policy. He argues that the hallmark of that policy in the 19th century was not isolationism but unilateralism--in other words, avoiding permanent alliances that could endanger domestic liberty, and intervening only when vital American interests were at stake. McDougall also undercuts revisionist historians' claims that the American acquisition of territory after the Spanish-American War was an imperialist grab, arguing instead that it was a measure taken to prevent foreign attempts to gain bases that could endanger America. He offers particularly trenchant criticisms of Woodrow Wilson for opening the

door to messianic foreign interventions, and of Bill Clinton for extolling multiculturalism and diversity at home while having ``no tolerance of them where other countries were concerned." McDougall agrees with the opposition of Henry Cabot Lodge and Theodore Roosevelt to Wilson's Treaty of Versailles, crediting their opposition more to principled defense of American sovereignty than to implacable partisan and personal opposition to the president. Above all, he convincingly argues that sacrifice for foreign clients, whether through LBJ's global social-welfare schemes or Clinton's appetite for nation-building, has financially and morally bankrupted the US. Not pitched on the epic scale of McDougall's earlier work, this is a subtle, scholarly call to forsake ideology in foreign policy in favor of true national self-interest. --
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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