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Book Guide

God and Gold

In this book, CFR Senior Fellow Walter Russell Mead recounts how the British and their American heirs built an unrivaled global system of politics, power, investment, and trade over the past three hundred years. Teaching notes by the author.

Summary

God and Gold argues that the history of the modern world is the story of a centuries-long war between the English-speaking peoples and their enemies. Sustained by control of the oceans that surround them, over the past three-hundred years the British and then the Americans built a global system of politics, power, investment, and trade.

Since Cromwell's day, the English-speakers have seen their enemies as an axis of evil who hate liberty and God, who care nothing for morality, who will do anything to win, and who rely on a treacherous fifth column to assure victory.

Those enemies—from Catholic Spain and Louis XIV to the Nazis and the communists and now to al-Qaeda—held similar beliefs about their British and American rivals. But no matter who was right, for more than three hundred years the Anglo-Americans have been winning. They have occasionally lost small wars but they have won the great power wars that shape the world.

Where some see an end to history and others see a clash of civilizations, *God and Gold* shows how the current conflicts in the Middle East are the latest challenge to the rise of Anglo-American power and describes the diplomacy of civilizations the current situation demands.

This book is suitable for courses on British and/or American history, the history of American foreign policy and international affairs, and world history and the philosophy of history.

Essay and Discussion Questions

Courses on British and/or American History

1. What are the features of the world system invented by the Dutch and further developed by the British?
2. Does "the system," as it is run by the United States, differ from the British system? If so, how?
3. What was the role of religion in the rise of the Anglo-American world system?
4. How did financial institutions support the rise of the Anglo-American world system?

Courses on the History of American Foreign Policy and International Affairs

1. What is "whig history?" How is it relevant to American foreign policy? How does it relate to American views of world government and international institutions?

2. How does capitalism, in Mead's view, propel American foreign policy?
3. Discuss the role of religion in international affairs.

Courses on World History and the Philosophy of History

1. What does this book say about the end of history and the clash of civilizations? Are they opposing ideas? Can the concepts coexist?
2. What does the author mean when he says that the United States "sets the pace" in the international system? What are the consequences for the rest of the world?
3. Are there universal historical forces? Historical truths?

Supplementary Materials

Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Isaacson, Walter and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

Landes, David, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

Macaulay, Lord Thomas Babington, *The History of England: From the Accession of James II* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

Mahan, A.T., *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1600–1773* (New York: Dover Publications, 1987).

Niebuhr, Reinhold, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Lexington, KY: John Knox Press, 2001).

Smith, Adam, *Wealth of Nations* (New York: Modern Library, 1937).

Taylor, A.J.P., *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Zimmerman, Warren, *First Great Triumph: How Five Americans Made Their Country a World Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

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