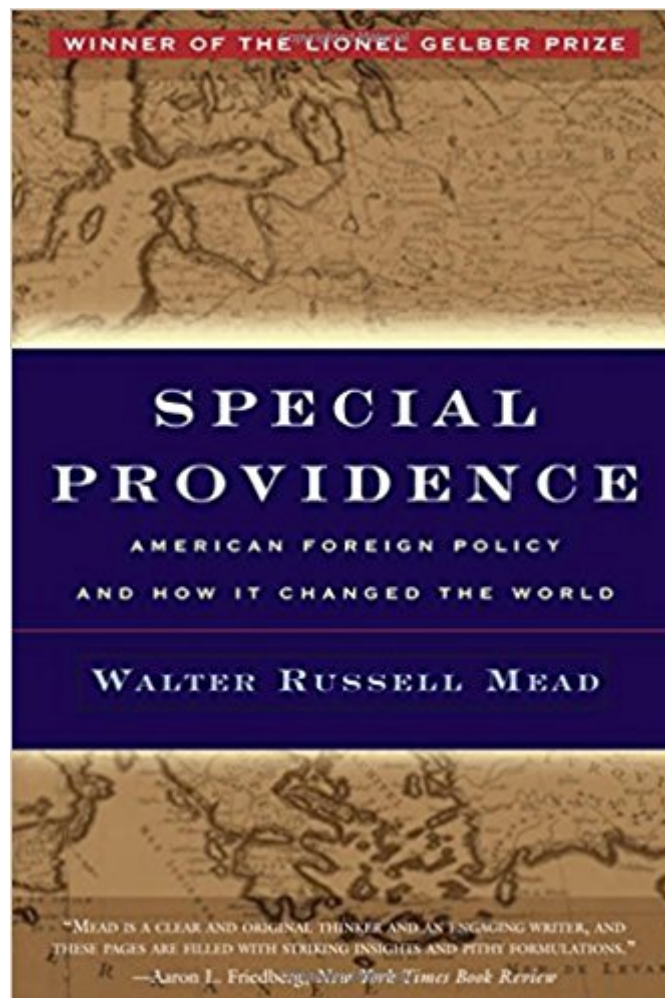




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# Special Providence: American Foreign Policy And How It Changed The World



## Synopsis

"God has a special providence for fools, drunks and the United States of America."--Otto von Bismarck  
America's response to the September 11 attacks spotlighted many of the country's longstanding goals on the world stage: to protect liberty at home, to secure America's economic interests, to spread democracy in totalitarian regimes and to vanquish the enemy utterly. One of America's leading foreign policy thinkers, Walter Russell Mead, argues that these diverse, conflicting impulses have in fact been the key to the U.S.'s success in the world. In a sweeping new synthesis, Mead uncovers four distinct historical patterns in foreign policy, each exemplified by a towering figure from our past. Wilsonians are moral missionaries, making the world safe for democracy by creating international watchdogs like the U.N. Hamiltonians likewise support international engagement, but their goal is to open foreign markets and expand the economy. Populist Jacksonians support a strong military, one that should be used rarely, but then with overwhelming force to bring the enemy to its knees. Jeffersonians, concerned primarily with liberty at home, are suspicious of both big military and large-scale international projects. A striking new vision of America's place in the world, *Special Providence* transcends stale debates about realists vs. idealists and hawks vs. doves to provide a revolutionary, nuanced, historically-grounded view of American foreign policy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

America is perceived as not having a foreign policy tradition, contends Mead (*Mortal Splendor: The*

American Empire in Transition), a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. In fact, Mead contends, there are actually four contrasting schools of foreign policy: a "Hamiltonian" concern with U.S. economic well-being at home and abroad; a "Wilsonian" impulse to promulgate U.S. values throughout the world; a "Jeffersonian" focus on protecting American democracy in a perilous world; and a bellicose, populist "Jacksonian" commitment to preserving U.S. interests and honor in the world. As Mead's detailed historical analysis of the origin and development of these schools shows, each has its strengths and faults if Wilsonians are too idealistic, Jacksonians are too suspicious of the world but each keeps the other in check, assuring no single school will dominate and that a basic consensus among them will be achieved, as was the case during the Cold War. As the Cold War ended, however, and the world became more complex, consensus ended. Hamiltonians and Wilsonians saw the opportunity to mold the economy and morality of the world in the U.S. image, but Jeffersonian doubt about foreign action in places like Bosnia, and Jacksonian popular suspicions of organizations like the WTO soon challenged such grandiose plans. Mead worries that U.S. foreign policy is too unfocused today and suggests we could learn much from the interactions in the past of the four schools, a complex history he ably unfolds. 8 pages of photos not seen by PW. (Nov. 8) Forecast: With foreign policy at the forefront after September 11, this could help shape discussions of U.S. response; expect serious interest. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A senior fellow for foreign policy at the Council on Foreign Relations, Mead (*Mortal Splendor: The American Empire in Transition*) follows in the footsteps of Walter McDougall in *Promised Land, Crusader State* (Houghton, 1997). Like McDougall, he points out that the United States contrary to the received wisdom was awash in diplomacy from its birth throughout the supposedly isolationist 19th century. But Mead sets himself a broader task. Why, he asks, does the United States still suffer from a reputation for na?vet? despite its meteoric ascent to world power? The author traces European puzzlement at Americans' stubborn independence, aversion to state power, and obsession with commerce. Like other historians, Mead discerns several schools of thought that vie for supremacy within the American diplomatic tradition: Hamilton's preoccupation with commerce, Jefferson's watchfulness over the Republic's founding principles, Jackson's obsession with military strength, and Wilson's pursuit of a just world order. The beneficial interplay of these principles, says Mead, has yielded the most successful foreign policy in history. Largely celebratory and sure to be controversial, this work belongs in all library collections. James R. Holmes, Ph.D. Candidate, Fletcher Sch. of Law & Diplomacy, Tufts Univ., Medford, MA Copyright 2001 Reed Business

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As a former student of American Diplomatic History, I found Mead's book quite interesting, especially his effective classification of the four groups. Even though these are artificial constructs, they do make it easier to understand the thinking of those who, periodically bring pressure to bear on foreign policy decision-makers. The book is a little out-dated but provides some good points of reference. I am still trying to determine how Hamiltonian, Wilsonian and Jeffersonian I am. I am a mixture of all but am not, for sure, a Jacksonian.

Really made me rethink my perspective on US foreign policy. I had fallen for the myth that (in brief) the US was either isolationist or trying to take on the world. The reality is that in periods of apparent isolationism, the US actually had a remarkably successful foreign policy, based in many ways on trade. Mead comes up with four schools of US foreign policy thought, named after key characters in US history: Hamiltonian (realist/mercantile), Wilsonian (idealist), Jeffersonian (libertarian), and Jacksonian (populist). These four trends work with and against each other to create policies that have helped lift the US to the top of the international tree, despite looking like the US can't really cope with foreign policy making. Well written and engaging, it's one of the few books I've had to read for a class that I think I'd've read anyway.

Mead breaks down hundreds of years of American political evolution into four nicely defined schools of thought and goes on to explain each in great detail. Definitely a must read for those interested in American foreign policy and political history.

This is a clever book by an author who must be brilliant and who clearly is plugged into a great network of information and expertise. The book's identification of four flavors of U.S. foreign policy is handy and seems more accurate than its traditional two-way rivals: liberal vs. conservative, or idealistic vs. realistic. As a "macro" theory, Mead supports the four-way approach by reference to "micro" foundations in U.S. political demography, particularly by citing the work of David Hackett Fischer. Mead's four schools are also reminiscent of the four-way Myers-Briggs typing of personality preferences: Jacksonians as SJs, Jeffersonians as SPs, Hamiltonians as NTs, and Wilsonians as NFs? Mead's book is clever in at least two other respects. First, Mead risks little actual analysis and advice regarding real-world foreign policy. His main point about the outside world is that U.S. foreign policy is easier to formulate and implement when the world is simple. Humorist Richard Armour

made a similar point when he concluded one of his historical reviews with the observation that the American people of the 1950s were "secure in the knowledge of whom to hate." This continues to be an important point: it illustrates the current usefulness of the Arab Muslim image in building a broad U.S. political movement. Second, Mead has something for everyone -- at least, for every American. With malice toward none, with charity for all, he has praise for all four of the U.S. schools. He has obviously struggled with his presentation of the Jacksonian school (the militant fundamentalists), which is the one that seems farthest from Mead's roots as an intellectual. Mead credits Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. with helping him be positive about Andrew Jackson himself. But although Mead disclaims triumphalism, he implicitly evaluates foreign policy in nationalistic terms: gains of territory and other wealth for the U.S., with low U.S. casualties, is the measure of U.S. foreign policy achievement. While he regrets non-U.S. casualties, he warns against trying to make too much of the rest of the world. By these standards, Mead proclaims U.S. foreign policy a success and thus well conceived, even in the period before the First World War, when traditionally the U.S. was not supposed to be paying much attention to foreign affairs. This seeming paradox is partly explained by a factor that Mead does not emphasize sufficiently: the private sector's role in expanding U.S. territory. Private American colonization went ahead of the U.S. Government into a large part of what became U.S. lands: the trans-Appalachian area, West Florida, Texas, California, Utah, and Hawaii, among the successful cases. Mead does note briefly that "before the Civil War Southerners looked to Texas, Central America, and Cuba for more slave states," but he does not tell in any detail the story of private U.S. adventurers' attempted conquests in such areas, or of the U.S. Government's official actions for and against these efforts. The case of the Philippines provides a contrasting example, where the U.S. Government took the initiative in conquering the territory without private American colonization. However, the non-governmental pattern resumed in the 1900s with private Americans' participation in Israeli colonization, creating a Texas-type, lone-star republic, which, although not annexed, has a "special relationship" with the U.S. These examples illustrate a mechanism by which the U.S. expanded its territory with low U.S. Government troop casualties, and thus had a successful foreign policy by Mead's standard, without the U.S. Government paying as much attention to foreign policy as that success might imply. Obviously, territorial expansion has generated blowback, which the U.S. Government has often anticipated and tried to avoid or limit. Mead also recognizes the need to deal with this downside of expansionary foreign policy. He describes very effectively how the Hamiltonian and Wilsonian schools offer alternatives for succeeding in the larger world. We in the U.S. have family, friends, homes, businesses, and cultural interests outside our borders, which we will not want to neglect. Mead's

clarifying work is a substantial contribution to helping us think about our approach.

Had to purchase this for a grad school course and initially dreaded having to read yet another lengthy book; however, I was pleasantly surprised by how easy the book is to read, as well as how informative and interesting it is.

The four "schools" Mead presents have compelling narratives that resonate in all of us yet are somewhat in conflict with each other: are we free traders? do we agitate for a better world? should we keep ourselves to ourselves? if we fight do we utterly destroy our enemies? Mead has helped me understand the "other side", and be much more sympathetic to these points of view. Whenever I ponder US foreign policy questions, I now begin by asking myself how Mead's schools align on the question. Further, I find Mead's schools are quite relevant and interesting when applied to domestic issues.

Outstanding book by an outstanding author. Thoughtful and insightful.

A clear and easily digestible analysis of American foreign policy tendencies as they've evolved over the centuries.

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