The U.S. Role in a Changing World

Student Text
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Introduction: Global Issues and U.S. Policy

We live in a complex and interconnected world. Much of the planet is connected by a web of trade, technology, and common political values. In this globalized world, traditional dividing lines based on borders and cultures have blurred. However, the problems that have haunted humanity throughout history have not disappeared. Violence continues to erupt over questions of land, power, and identity. Billions of people live in poverty. Tyrannical governments use fear and intimidation to maintain their authority. The United States is one of many actors that shapes and navigates this complex world.

Since the creation of the United States, the country has evolved to become the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. Throughout their history, the people of the United States have been compelled to rethink the U.S. role in the world. Changes in the United States—rapid economic growth, increasing global power, waves of immigration, and social and political changes—have caused generations of Americans to wrestle with conflicting foreign policy ideas. Americans have argued about what objectives and values should shape U.S. relations with other countries, and how the United States should act internationally.

Today, the United States is considering its domestic needs and reassessing its international relationships. A range of economic, political, and social transformations are taking place both at home and abroad. Agreement about how to address these issues is hard to achieve. Nevertheless, a healthy democracy requires debate and discussion about the values and policies that shape the United States’ place in the world.

The readings in this text discuss the forces that shape the U.S. role in the world. Part I explores how the U.S. role in the world shifted after World War II and the Cold War (1947-1991). Part II examines how globalization shapes several important issues facing the United States and the world today: the economy, public health and the environment, international relations, and human rights. In Part III, you will read about the al Qaeda terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the broader conflict known as the “global war on terror.” Part IV explores four security issues affecting the United States today: global power competition between the United States and China, nuclear weapons, domestic and international terrorist threats, and cybersecurity and cyberwarfare.

After the readings, you will consider four distinct alternatives for U.S. foreign policy. Finally, you will be asked to offer your own policy recommendations that reflect your personal beliefs and opinions.

Note about Disturbing Content

This period in history is marked by oppression and violence and has had lasting repercussions for many groups. Please be advised that this text includes descriptions of conflict, violence, terrorism, torture and other human rights abuses, racism, Islamophobia, the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and other challenging topics. It is important to be sensitive to your classmates and the ways in which this history might be a difficult topic to study.
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### Supplemental Materials and Videos

- Online
Interpreting Political Cartoons

Objectives

Students will: Interpret political cartoons about current international issues.

Identify the message and point of view of the cartoons.

Consider alternative opinions about issues portrayed in political cartoons.

Required Reading


Resources

“Political Cartoons” (TRB 30-34)

“Political Cartoon Techniques” (Optional) (TRB-35)

A slideshow of the cartoons is available at <www.choices.edu/usrole>.

In the Classroom

1. Getting Started—Divide the class into groups of three or four. Distribute “Political Cartoons” to each student. Have the students discuss each cartoon in their groups and answer the questions provided. As an alternative, you may wish to divide the cartoons among the groups and have students report back to the class on their assigned cartoons.

Optional: You may wish to challenge your students to complete a more in-depth analysis of the cartoons. Before distributing the cartoons to students, distribute “Political Cartoon Techniques” and review the techniques as a class. Distribute the cartoons. In addition to answering the questions that accompany the cartoons, ask students to identify at least two techniques that each cartoonist used and explain what ideas are conveyed through each technique.

Note: It may be helpful to analyze one cartoon together as a class before sending students off in their groups.

2. Drawing Connections—Select several cartoons from the collection. Discuss how the points of view of the cartoonists are reflected in the cartoons. Were the students surprised by any of the perspectives in the cartoons? Which cartoons did students find most interesting? Did students think that any of the cartoons were difficult to interpret? Which ones? Why? Do students agree or disagree with the perspectives of any particular cartoons?

Extra Challenges

1. Have the students draw cartoons presenting their own views on a specific issue or about the U.S. role in the world more broadly.

2. Choose two cartoons in the collection that present opposing views. How do the messages differ?

Homework

Political Cartoons

Introduction: The strong feelings raised by international issues inspire political cartoonists in the United States and around the world. Cartoons not only reflect the events of the times, but also offer interpretations and express strong opinions about these events. These cartoons come from cartoonists both in the United States and abroad.

Answer questions 1-3 in the space beside each cartoon.
1. Who or what is depicted in the cartoon?
2. Does the cartoon have a message or point of view? What is it?
3. What alternative opinions about the message presented in the cartoon might someone have?
1. **AMERICA’S BIGGEST EXPORT...**

   - DON’T GO!
   - COME BACK!

2. **OUR JOBS!!!**

3. **GULLIVER’S TRAVAILS**

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1. **PREVIEW**

   - Not for Distribution

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**NOT PREVIEW**

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Part II: Interpreting Political Cartoons

1. "Climate change is the greatest threat to our national security!"
2. "Really! You got to love this guy!"

PREVIEW
Not for Distribution
1. What is the central theme of the political cartoon in the upper part of the page?

2. How does the cartoonist use the image of a globe to convey a message about the United States and global issues?

3. What is the significance of the figure labeled "Globalization" in the context of the cartoon?

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1. What is the central theme of the political cartoon in the lower part of the page?

2. How does the cartoonist use the image of a burning building to convey a message about US involvement in global conflicts?

3. What role does the figure labeled "US" play in the cartoon's message?
Political Cartoon Techniques

Introduction: Cartoonists use a variety of methods to convey their ideas. The techniques they use include:

Labels: Cartoonists often identify or name certain things in their cartoons so that it is clear what the things represent.

Symbolism: Cartoonists use simple objects to represent larger ideas or concepts.

Analogy: Cartoonists compare a simple image or concept to a more complex situation in order to help the viewer understand the situation in a different way.

Irony: Cartoonists express an opinion on a topic by highlighting the difference between the way things are and the way things should be, or are expected to be.

Exaggeration: Cartoonists may exaggerate objects, people, or ideas to make a point.

Stereotype: Cartoonists may use a stereotype or generalization about a group of people (even though it is not true about everyone, or perhaps anyone, in that group).

Instructions: Work with your group to analyze your assigned cartoons. You will be asked to identify the techniques each cartoonist used. The following questions will help guide your thinking.

• If the cartoonist used labels, what things in the cartoon are labeled? Why do you think the cartoonist chose to label those things?
• If the cartoonist used symbolism, what things in the cartoon are symbols? What do they stand for?
• If the cartoonist used analogy, what two ideas or situations are compared? How does this comparison help the viewer see the complex situation in a different way?
• If the cartoonist used irony, what does the cartoonist show about the way things are? How does the cartoonist think things should be?
• If the cartoonist used exaggeration, what objects, people, or ideas are exaggerated? What point is made by exaggerating them?
• If the cartoonist used stereotypes, what stereotypes are presented? How do these add to the message of the cartoon?