Global Meliorism

Definition:
- ‘socio-economic and politico-cultural expression of an American mission to make the world a better place” (p.173)

- “help other nations share the American dream.”

Global Meliorism is not Liberal Internationalism

LI as legal and institutional doctrine: creation of League of Nations; arms control; freer trade

GM is goes beyond formal international cooperation
- human rights
- liberal representative democracy
- market capitalism/economic development
- humanitarian assistance: medical and food relief

GM has broad but not deep domestic support
- general moral decency
- not obvious entanglements
- not perceived as too costly

GM can be pursued unilaterally by US, although the doctrine is best pursued multilaterally:
  World Bank; UNESCO (US withdrew in 1980s);
  Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD);
  UN Food and Agricultural Organization/ World Food Program
Is the Vietnam War an example of global meliorism or containment?

**McDougall: GM matters most**
- victory is to be achieved via socio-political change, not by military force
- LBJ is extending the “Great Society” abroad
- Containment called for counter Soviet “power”, not creating liberty and prosperity abroad

**Containment didn’t require Vietnam war**
- Vietnam not intrinsically valuable to US
- S. Vietnamese regime was authoritarian, not democratic
- unclear that US loss (S. Vietnamese defeat) mattered much to US allies
- Vietnam war risked expanding Cold War to direct “hot war” with Soviet Union

**Logevall’s *Choosing War* thesis**
- LBJ could have averted escalation between Aug. 1963 and Dec. 1964
  - July 1964: more advisors sent (total near 21,000)
  - Late July-August 1964: Tonkin Gulf incident
  - March 1965: first combat troops land
  - July 1965: more combat troops sent
- US rejected “neutralization” of Vietnam too quickly
- Rusk’s State Dept. regarded Vietnam as military, not diplomatic problem
- Domestic political credibility at stake
Nixon and Vietnamization
- not global meliorist, but containment supporter
- 1968 campaign: Nixon says he will “end the war and win the peace.”
- June 1969: Nixon begins US troop withdrawals
- April 1970: Cambodian “incursion”
- Feb. 1972: Nixon-Mao summit
- January 1973: Paris Peace Accords end US role in war

Reconsidering Containment
- repelling communism in Vietnam was seen as necessary to containment
- credibility of commitments to allies and US resolve against adversaries perceived as necessary
- Could Vietnam have occurred without “containment”?