

The Ennobling Oath

A Pilgrim's Reflection on the Historiography of the Knights Templar

Seminar#4: The Struggle Within: Europe and US cultural approach to the Crusades.

1. Thought experiment: Interest in the crusades today is deeply influenced by the politics and mores of the present
 1. What would America look like if it had a King instead of a President?
 2. Is there a connection between the narrative of America's mission as a "City on the Hill" and the notion of the Crusades' mission of "Holy War"?
2. Crusade Historiography: **1095-1599**
 1. A defensive war; Muslims perceived as an existential threat
 2. History of the Crusade was understood as a branch of theology—influence of the Abbey of Cluny
 3. The Hundred Years War (1339-1453) breaks down the concept of chivalry
 4. Chivalry: enemy nobility have more in common with each other than the lower classes of their armies
3. Crusade Historiography: **1600—1799**
 1. The idea of the Crusades moved increasingly from the "present" to the "past"
 2. But also a "past" that was colored by confessional and/or rationalist historians
 3. Renaissance, Reformation, Counter-Reformation, Age of Reason, Age of Enlightenment
4. Crusade Historiography **1800—1950:**
 1. Crusades values re-emerge but the religious calling is secularized: honor, chivalry, duty, pure, noble
 2. Age of Romanticism; Victorian Age—historians and storytellers recount the "best of the Crusades"
 3. Sir Walter Scott (15 August 1771 – 21 September 1832); Thomas Rowley (1721–1796)
5. What made America different:¹
 1. History:
 - a) started from scratch from other powers, asked new questions
 - b) fled to build the "New Jerusalem"; always looking to the future, not past; until Vietnam, never "lost" a war
 2. Geography
 - a) Washington: "our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course."

"Placed in the center of an immense continent..., the Union is almost as much insulated from the world as if all its frontiers were girt by the ocean." Tocqueville

3. Ideology: America spun off from the Old Continent like a new planet from the sun. Neither feudalism nor royalty, neither papacy nor empire, weighed down this eager child of the Enlightenment. President McKinley to the Philippines: "There was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them."

SO, AMERICA is different. But how "exceptional" should it be? These are the questions around which Walter A. McDougall's *Promised Land, Crusader State* revolves. To set up his argument, he re-slices the historical pie in a novel way. First he cuts it in two halves, and then into four pieces each. The first half he labels the "Old Testament." The four slices, from 1776 to the 1890s, are: "Liberty, or Exceptionalism", "Unilateralism, or Isolationism", "The American System, or Monroe Doctrine", "Expansionism, or Manifest Destiny." It was "all about Being and Becoming", about denying "the outside world the chance to shape America's future."

¹ Walter A. McDougall, *Promised Land, Crusader State: The American Encounter With the World Since 1776* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 286 pp

