

MEDIA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
STUDY GUIDE

BLOOD AND OIL

Featuring Michael T. Klare

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NOTE TO TEACHERS

This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content—and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them—the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide so that you have the option of focusing in depth on one section of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the structure of the video, moving through each of the video’s sections with a series of key summary points, questions, and assignments specific to that section.

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions are designed to improve preliminary discussion about the issues the video addresses prior to viewing.

Key Points provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each section of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

Discussion Questions provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind).

Assignments for each section encourage students to engage the video in more depth—by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

OVERVIEW

The notion that oil motivates America's military engagements in the Middle East is often disregarded as nonsense or mere conspiracy theory. *Blood and Oil*, based on the critically acclaimed work of *Nation* magazine defense correspondent Michael T. Klare, challenges this conventional wisdom to correct the historical record. The film unearths declassified documents and highlights forgotten passages in prominent presidential doctrines to show how concerns about oil have been at the core of American foreign policy for more than 60 years – rendering our contemporary energy and military policies virtually indistinguishable.

At the heart of this story is a meeting between President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Saudi King Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud on Valentine's Day, 1945, aboard the USS Quincy in Egypt's Great Bitter Lake. In that meeting, President Roosevelt made a pact with the King, which still resonates today: the United States will provide military protection for Saudi Arabia in exchange for privileged American access to Saudi Arabia's vast oil reserves. With methodical precision, Klare details how this meeting has spawned a series of events and presidential policies that have resulted in repeated American military operations and wars in the Persian Gulf.

Blood and Oil calls for a radical re-thinking of U.S. energy policy, warning that unless we change direction, we stand to be drawn into one oil war after another as the global hunt for diminishing world petroleum supplies accelerates.

The film shows how this coalescing of American energy and foreign policy has:

- Historical roots that date to the Roosevelt administration and include each successive presidential administration.
- Contributed to America's reliance on imported oil, substantially weakening American energy independence.
- Led to the forging of alliances between the United States and undemocratic oil regimes with questionable human rights records.
- Cost the lives of thousands of American soldiers to maintain American dominance of the Middle East.

Ultimately, we must challenge and break this policy coalescence before we are drawn into more oil-related conflicts, particularly as global demand is dramatically rising.

PRE-VIEWING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Explore your feelings about war. Why does the United States go to war? When should the United States go to war? What should the U.S. fight for? Are natural resources (e.g. oil, minerals, water) worth fighting for? Why or why not?
2. At the 2006 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush declared, “America is addicted to oil, which is often imported from unstable parts of the world.” Do you think President Bush is correct in calling America’s relationship to oil an addiction? Why or why not?
3. What are the benefits and/or repercussions for using petroleum as our main source of energy? What other energy options are there? How do these other options compare to petroleum?
4. In the year 2008, gasoline prices have risen over four dollars per gallon. How much are you willing to spend on gasoline? At what cost would you decide it’s too expensive? How could you maintain your current lifestyle without petroleum? What life changes would you make?
5. What are some of the reasons that energy independence and creating alternatives to oil have become such prominent issues in American media and politics in recent years?

INTRODUCTION

Klare emphasizes the extent to which the American economy is dependent on oil and how increasingly that oil must be imported from foreign countries in unstable parts of the world.

Key Points

- The U.S. economy depends heavily on oil – used not only in transportation and agriculture, but petroleum products are used to make everything from plastics and cosmetics to paints and pharmaceuticals.
- Despite being home to only 5% of the world’s population, the United States consumes 25% of the world’s daily petroleum.
- Ninety-eight percent of U.S. oil consumption is from transportation – cars, buses, trucks, planes, and ships.
- For much of the 20th century, the United States produced the majority of the oil it consumed. But in 1998, the U.S. began importing more oil than what it produced domestically.
- The United States now relies on 2/3, or about 66%, of its oil supply from foreign countries. The Department of Energy predicts this will be 70% by 2025.

Discussion Questions

1. What strengths and/or weaknesses do you see in the United States importing the majority of its oil from foreign countries? Support your answer.
2. Why does the United States need oil? What industries rely heavily on it? What could potentially happen if the world supply of oil was cut off from the U.S.?
3. Did you know that Americans make up only 5% of the world population? What are your initial thoughts about this statistic? Was it more or less than you thought? How about in terms of petroleum consumption? Should the U.S. be able to consume 25% of the world’s petroleum? Why or why not?

Assignments

1. Look up the countries that are the top petroleum importers to the United States. Where does the United States get its oil? Why do you think there is so much focus on the Middle East and the Persian Gulf when the U.S. imports so much of its oil from other countries?
2. Research the 1970s energy crisis during President Jimmy Carter's administration. What were the circumstances that led to the crisis? What were some of the solutions his administration implemented? Relate the 1970s energy crisis to today. What are some of your suggestions for dealing with the current situation?
3. Find a list of petroleum products on the internet. Keep track of all the petroleum products you use on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis.

A DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE

Klare describes how Franklin Roosevelt was the first American President to make oil a central feature of foreign policy. He focuses on Roosevelt's 1945 meeting with the King of Saudi Arabia, the oil-for-protection partnership that resulted, and how this agreement continues to resonate today.

Key Points

- During World War II, the U.S. consumed nearly one-third of its oil reserves while providing 6 out of the 7 billion barrels used by the allied forces.
- President Franklin D. Roosevelt, trying to secure access to oil for future conflicts and domestic consumption, met with the King of Saudi Arabia in 1945.
- The United States has provided Saudi Arabia with billions of dollars worth of sophisticated military equipment and weapons, provided training for military personnel, and often stationed a significant number of American troops in the Kingdom.
- Every American president has maintained a close relationship with Saudi Arabia, even though the Saudi Arabian monarchy grants very few rights to its male citizens and virtually none to its female citizens.
- Speaking to Congress in 1990, then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney cited the meeting between Roosevelt and Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud in connection to the possibility of the United States responding to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with military force.

Discussion Questions

1. Klare states that oil played a key role in the Allied victory over Germany and Japan in World War II. Why is oil so vital for warfare?
2. Why did President Franklin D. Roosevelt meet with the King of Saudi Arabia in 1945? What have been some of the consequences of this meeting?
3. While testifying before Congress about possible military action against Iraq prior to the first Gulf War, why does then Defense Secretary Dick Cheney mention the 1945 meeting between President Roosevelt and the King Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud?
4. What are some of the major political, economic, and social differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia?

5. What are some of the reasons why a close relationship with the United States is good for the Saudi Arabian royal family? Why does the close relationship upset many Saudi religious leaders?

Assignments

1. Look at a map of the Middle East and list the countries that constitute the Persian Gulf. Which countries have good relations with the United States? Which do not? Which are democracies? Which have energy resources?
2. Research the history of Saudi Arabia. How did it become a country? Who have been the leaders of Saudi Arabia?
3. Do a research project on Vice President Dick Cheney. Be sure to look into his career as a political politician and ties to corporate America. Do you think this presents a conflict of interest? Why or why not?

BY ANY MEANS NECESSARY

Klare details how the Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon and Carter doctrines were motivated by the need to protect and maintain U.S. dominance in the Persian Gulf. The most striking doctrine is from Jimmy Carter who, in his 1980 State of the Union Address, declared explicitly that the United States would use military force to protect American access to Middle Eastern oil.

Key Points

- De-classified documents show that the Truman Doctrine, which is commonly defined as a response to a Soviet threat to Greece and Turkey, was intended to prevent Soviet access to the flow of oil from the Middle East.
- The Eisenhower Doctrine's primary concern was keeping the Soviet Union out of the Middle East. Eisenhower professed before Congress that Soviet efforts to dominate the Middle East would likely draw the United States into military action or war.
- Because of the growing unpopularity of the Vietnam War, the Nixon Doctrine concluded that the United States should use proxy forces to protect the oil instead of being involved directly. Nixon provided billions of dollars worth of military and economic assistance to Iran and Saudi Arabia for them to act on behalf of American interests in the region.
- In 1979 the Shah of Iran, one of the closest allies to the United States in the Persian Gulf, was overthrown and was soon replaced by the anti-American Ayatollah Khomeini. In his 1980 State of the Union speech President Jimmy Carter declared that the United States would take full military responsibility for protecting American interests in the Persian Gulf and would no longer rely on proxy forces.

Discussion Questions

1. Why would both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations be worried about Soviet efforts to dominate the Persian Gulf area?
2. Compare the Vietnam War, and the subsequent Nixon Doctrine, to the war in Iraq. Has President George W. Bush followed the Nixon Doctrine? In what ways was he following the Carter Doctrine? Support your answer.
3. President Jimmy Carter was the clearest in stating America's interests in the Persian Gulf region. Why do you think Truman and Eisenhower before him were much more clandestine? How about Nixon?

Assignments

1. Research the Cold War. What role did oil play during this conflict? Look at the situation from the standpoint of both the United States and the Soviet Union.
2. Research Richard Nixon and his doctrine of Vietnamization. When should the United States rely on proxy forces to defend American interests? When should they not?

CENTCOM

Klare discusses the creation of the Central Command (CentCom) in 1983 and how Reagan clearly intended for CentCom's focus to be the protection of the flow of Middle East oil. Examples include the escorting of Kuwaiti tankers through the Strait of Hormuz by U.S. warships in 1987 and the original rationale for the first President Bush's decision to use military force to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait in the Gulf War.

Key Points

- In 1983, Ronald Reagan upgraded the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force to a full military command, the Central Command.
- The original function of the Central Command, as communicated by the Reagan administration, was to protect the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to the United States and markets around the world.
- When Iran began attacking Kuwaiti oil tankers, President Reagan ordered naval ships to protect the tankers as they traveled through the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf.
- When, on August 2, 1990, Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait, the first President Bush called on the Central Command to deploy American troops to protect Saudi Arabia from further Iraqi aggression.
- The original justifications for military action in the Gulf War, articulated by the Bush administration, focused on protecting energy supplies and Saudi Arabia.
- After protests to a proposed military response to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, the Bush administration focused publicly on Saddam Hussein's human rights violations.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the Central Command? Why was it created? What is its purpose? Why do you think it did not exist before 1983?
2. What role did oil play in the first Persian Gulf War? Do you think the United States would have intervened in the region if oil were not a factor? Why or why not?
3. Explain the shift in President George H.W. Bush's rhetoric about the first Persian Gulf War. What were his initial arguments for defending the region? What were his later arguments?

Assignments

1. Research the history of the Central Command. Since its creation in 1983, what role has it played in American foreign policy?
2. Study the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). What countries are involved? How and why was it started? What is its role today?
3. President George H.W. Bush's rhetoric concerning Saddam Hussein, at the start of the first Persian Gulf War, was not the first or last time a president demonized a foreign leader for political gain. Research other uses of this technique by former American presidents. How about the current president?

FUELING TERROR

With Saddam Hussein left in power at the end of the Gulf War, Klare explains, President Bush decided the United States would need to keep a significant number of American troops in Saudi Arabia to effectively prevent Hussein from further regional aggression. The presence of these American military personnel enraged many religiously conservative Saudis, including Osama bin Laden, who then created the terrorist network Al Qaeda. Bin Laden immediately began calling on his followers to attack U.S. interests in the Middle East as well as the United States itself.

Key Points

- Shortly after Iraqi troops invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney flew to Saudi Arabia to request permission from the King for the deployment of American troops to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- The King agrees to allow American troops in Saudi Arabia based on three conditions: 1) The U.S. will send enough troops to deter further aggression from Iraq. 2) They will stay only as long as needed. 3) They will leave if asked by the King.
- Around this time, Osama bin Laden pleads with the King to deny American forces access to Saudi Arabia and instead to allow the mujahadeen, Muslim forces, to dispel Iraqi troops from Kuwait.
- Once the Iraqi troops were removed from Kuwait, President George H.W. Bush decided to cease hostilities but, because Saddam Hussein was left in power, also implement a strategy of containment requiring that some American troops remain in Saudi Arabia.
- Osama bin Laden, angry over what he saw as a broken promise by the Americans that U.S. troops would leave Saudi Arabia at the end of the Gulf War, created the terrorist network Al Qaeda and called on his followers to attack American interests in the Middle East.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney meet with the King of Saudi Arabia in August 1990? What were the conditions Cheney and King Fahd agreed upon?
2. What is Al Qaeda hoping to achieve with their violent attacks?
3. What does Osama bin Laden write about oil in his book, *Messages to the World*? To what extent do you think oil played a part in the terrorist attacks on September 11?

Assignments

1. Research the history of al Qaeda. How and why was it started? What was its leader, Osama bin Laden, doing before its creation? What was his relationship with the United States?
2. What other terrorist attacks did al Qaeda claim responsibility for that are not mentioned in the film? Research the details of these other attacks. Why were these chosen as targets for attack by Al Qaeda?
3. Read Osama bin Laden's book, *Messages to the World*. Write either a book report or a book review, and present it to the class.

MAXIMUM EXTRACTION

Klare emphasizes that President George W. Bush's first stated priority upon taking office was to develop a new, comprehensive national energy policy. President Bush appointed Dick Cheney to head the National Energy Policy Development Group (NEPDG) and concluded that the United States might have to intervene aggressively to ensure that oil-producing states increase their output to keep up with global demand.

Key Points

- After taking office in January 2001, one of the first priorities of the Bush Administration was to develop a new national energy policy.
- Vice President Cheney was appointed to head the National Energy Policy Development Group and they released the National Energy Policy (NEP) on May 17, 2001.
- Much of the public debate about the NEP was focused on drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska.
- The NEP called on the oil-producing states in the Middle East to double output over 25 years.
- The NEP called for increased diplomacy and communication about American needs with the friendly oil-producing states – particularly in the Middle East.
- With regimes unfriendly to the United States in Iraq and Iran both countries represented obstacles to the NEP's projections.
- Around the same time the NEP was being developed, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld was conducting a review of American military policy, which focused on the same areas of the world as the NEP – particularly the Middle East.
- In a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 2002, VP Cheney stated that Saddam Hussein could “take control of a great portion of the world’s energy supplies,” and “directly threaten America’s friends throughout the region.” This is virtually identical to testimony he gave before the Senate Armed Services committee prior to the Gulf War on September 11, 1990.

Discussion Questions

1. What was George W. Bush's initial focus as president in the early months of his administration? Why did he eventually shift his focus?
2. Why was the National Energy Policy Development Group's May 2001 report so controversial? What was controversial about the report itself? What was controversial about the way it was organized and written?
3. Should the United States drill in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska? Why or why not? Where should the United States drill? Where should the US not drill?
4. What is the strategy of maximum extraction? What role has Iraq played in Klare's theory of maximum extraction? How has the Bush Administration reacted to accusations that the Iraq War is about oil?

Assignments

1. Read the National Energy Policy (NEP) released on May 17, 2001. Explore your reactions to this policy. What do you like about it? What do you dislike? Is there anything you would change? Why or why not?
2. Other than the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, research areas in the United States where drilling is considered an option. Is there anywhere we should be drilling that we are not? Why or why not?
3. Look into further claims by the Bush Administration that the Iraq War has nothing to do with oil. Who else has said it? Conversely, what have critics of the administration said about their denial of oil as a significant justification? Compile a list of articles, blogs, books, journals, etc. and share your findings with the class.

A HIGHER PURPOSE

Klare argues that Americans are unwilling to sacrifice the lives of their fellow citizens in wars over resources. But he warns that unless we delink our energy and military policies, we face a future of increasingly dangerous competition over the control of oil and natural gas between the United States and rising powers like Russia and China.

Key Points

- American military protection of oil flow is spreading from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea and Africa.
- In February 2007, the Bush administration announced plans to create a new military command in Africa.
- China's consumption of oil is rising rapidly and they too are militarizing their foreign energy policy.
- Russia seeks to dominate the flow of oil and natural gas from the Caspian Sea basin and Central Asia – particularly from the Ukraine, Georgia, and former Soviet countries.
- China's rising consumption and Russia's reemergence as an energy superpower could lead to increased hostilities between Russia, China, and the U.S. over access to and control of oil-producing regions.

Discussion Questions

1. According to Klare, what is the purpose of the African Command? How do you think its conception is similar to that of the Central Command? How is it different?
2. Nearly two-thirds of the oil consumed daily in the U.S. is from foreign countries. China recently surpassed the United States in manufacturing and technological standing. In what ways is the United States still a superpower? In what ways is the United States no longer a superpower?
3. What could China's rising consumption mean for the United States? How could this lead to increased hostilities between Russia, China, and the United States?

Assignments

1. Read Michael T. Klare's book, *Rising Powers, Shrinking Planet: The New Geopolitics of Energy*. What are Michael Klare's concerns for the future? What does he believe is our only route to survival? Explore your thoughts on Klare's arguments.
2. Research how much the United States has spent on oil-related defense measures in the current year. Compare the amount to the 137 billion dollars spent in 2006. How much more is it than the money spent developing alternative sources of energy during the same period?
3. Go online and measure your "ecological footprint." Using this assessment, it is possible to estimate how many planet Earths it would take to support humanity based on your lifestyle standards. Explore your reactions to the ecological footprint quiz and be prepared to share your results and thoughts with the class.

OTHER MEF FILMS ON RELATED ISSUES

Constructing Public Opinion Political theorist Justin Lewis examines how polling data presented in the media do not simply reflect what Americans think, but actually construct public opinion itself. Exploding the myth that most Americans are moderate or conservative, *Constructing Public Opinion* demonstrates how political elites help to promote militarism, and how mainstream media sustain an electoral system with a built-in bias against the interests of ordinary people.

The Diamond Empire This astonishing documentary systematically takes apart the myth that “diamonds are forever,” investigating how a baseless advertising slogan invented by Madison Avenue executives in 1948 has come to define our most intimate and romantic rituals and ideals. It exposes how one South African family used a process of monopoly and fantasy to exert control over the global flow of diamonds, converting something valueless into one of the most coveted commodities in history, and changing the very way we think about courtship, marriage, and love. A riveting look at how marketing and consumer culture shape not only global trade and economics, but also our very identities.

Hijacking Catastrophe This powerful documentary places the Bush Administration’s original justifications for war in Iraq within the larger context of a two-decade struggle by neoconservatives to dramatically increase military spending while projecting American power and influence globally by means of force. The DVD features the theatrical version of the film, along with ten new post-election interviews with prominent political observers on topics ranging from the 2004 presidential campaign to the Democratic Party’s struggle to define itself in a time of war. Interviews include Norman Mailer, Thomas Frank, George Lakoff, Naomi Klein, and Howard Zinn among many others.

No Logo Naomi Klein, acclaimed journalist and author of the bestselling book *No Logo*, examines the rise of international branding and the grassroots anti-corporate campaigns it has inspired. She asks viewers to consider the costs of globalization, including the disappearance of public space, consumer choice, and stable, meaningful work.

Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land This critically acclaimed documentary exposes how the foreign policy interests of American political elites work in combination with Israel public relations strategists to exercise a powerful influence over news coverage of the Middle East conflict. Combining American and British TV news clips with the insights of analysts, journalists, and political activists, *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land* provides an historical overview, a devastating comparison of U.S. and international media coverage, and an examination of the factors that have distorted U.S. media reporting and American public opinion. Featuring interviews with Noam Chomsky, Hanan Ashrawi, Robert Fisk, and Rabbi Michael Lerner among many others.

Reel Bad Arabs This groundbreaking documentary takes aim at the slanderous aspect of cinematic history that has run virtually unchallenged from the earliest days of silent film to today's biggest Hollywood blockbusters. Featuring acclaimed author Dr. Jack Shaheen, *Reel Bad Arabs* explores a long line of images degrading Arabs, from Bedouin bandits and submissive maidens to sinister sheikhs and gun-toting terrorists. Along the way, it offers devastating insights into the origins of these stereotypical images and their development at key points in U.S. history. By inspiring critical thinking about the social and political effects of these Hollywood caricatures, the film challenges viewers to recognize the urgent need for counter-narratives that do justice to the diversity and humanity of Arab people, and the reality and richness of Arab history and culture.

War Made Easy This critically acclaimed documentary examines how presidential administrations of both parties have relied on a combination of media spin and media complicity to sell successive wars to the American people. The film exhumes five decades of remarkable archival footage to reveal in stunning historical detail how the American news media have uncritically disseminated and glamorized the pro-war claims of one administration after another. Narrated by Sean Penn, and based on the book by Norman Solomon, *War Made Easy* is an indispensable classroom resource and an ideal introduction to the power of propaganda and public relations in a democratic society.