

History 859/ Political Science 578
Class meetings: Mondays, unless otherwise noted, and will be held
from 2:30-5:15.
Spring 2017
Boston University

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United States as a World Power

Scope and Objective of the Course:

This class is a research-intensive seminar. It allows in-depth discussions of controversial subjects. It requires each seminar participant to investigate a particular topic of interest—to drill deep.

This seminar is centered on the following theme: We are especially interested in examining the intellectual foundations of US foreign relations from the presidency of Woodrow Wilson to the end of the Cold War and beyond.

Broadly speaking, three lines of thought about international policy have competed for dominance during this period: so-called isolationism, collective universalism, and unilateral universalism. In the 1930s, after discouragements associated with the World War, a majority of Americans accepted the notion that the United States should concentrate its attention on correcting social-economic problems at home (the Great Depression) and avoid over involvement with Europe's incessant quarrels and rivalries. "Isolationism" assumed its most obvious shape in America's refusal to join or cooperate closely with the League of Nations. After Pearl Harbor, the new popular wisdom about international relations held that only with the other great powers—first through the "Grand Alliance," then the United Nations—could the United States assure its security. But with the onset of the Cold War, growing disillusionment with the UN, and a general recognition that the United States was not just one of several states but the preeminent one in the West, a presumption developed that Washington must act boldly around the globe to protect its wide-ranging interests and to foster an international order conducive to the prosperity and safety of Americans. This was the gist of the Truman Doctrine and NSC 68.

Within these broad lines, more specific concepts and ideas have played a role in shaping foreign policy. We shall examine them from the standpoint of their intellectual validity and political influence. And we shall be particularly concerned to see how they

have meshed with other determinants of U.S. policy—such as economic factors, bureaucratic machinery, domestic politics, and the actions of adversaries and allies. What have been the results, intended and unanticipated?

This Spring 2017, much attention—but by no means all—will be focused on World War II matters and the long Cold War.

Books:

The following books can be purchased at the Boston University bookstore. These same books are also available at the university library.

1. Michael Bess, *Choices Under Fire*
2. David Coleman, *The Fourteenth Day*
3. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*
4. George Herring, *America's Longest War*
5. George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*
6. Thomas Knock, *To End All Wars*
7. Melvyn Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*
8. J. Thompson, *A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's Global Role*
9. Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*

Course Requirements:

Each student will have to write one research/analytical essay (approx. 25 pages) and deliver a class presentation. Essay = 2/3 of grade. Participation in class discussion = 1/3 of grade.

Essay is due in class on May 1.

Late essays will not be accepted unless the request is accompanied by a letter from a doctor or university official.

Reading assignments and discussion schedule:

During the first half of the semester, we shall discuss common readings (per the book list or recommended texts). The second half of the semester will be devoted to student presentations (and critiques) based on research essays-in-progress.

Books should be read by the dates indicated below.

January 23: Introduction to class and general discussion

January 30: World War One and its legacy—Thomas Knock, *To End All Wars* and John Thompson, *Sense of Power: The Roots of America's Global Role* and George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (assigned portions)

February 6: World War Two and its legacy—John Thompson, *A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's Global Role* and Michael Bess, *Choices Under Fire*

February 13: Cold War beginnings—Melvin Leffler *Preponderance of Power* and Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (assigned portions)

February 21 (Tuesday): New Frontier and Vietnam—Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War* (assigned portions), Coleman, *The Fourteenth Day*, Herring, *America's Longest War*, Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*

February 27: Détente, end of Cold War, and after—Sherry, *In the Shadow of War* (assigned portions), Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, and Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (assigned portions)

March 13: TBA

March 20: TBA

March 27: TBA

April 3: TBA

April 10: TBA

April 19 (Wednesday): TBA

April 26: TBA;

May 1: TBA and essays due