

History 287/ IR 376/Political Science 381
Fall 2017
Boston University

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United States Foreign Relations since 1898

Scope and Objective of the Course:

In this survey course we are interested in examining the intellectual foundations of U.S. foreign policy as it has evolved since 1898. Americans wrestled in the early part of the twentieth century with the meaning of empire and those problems associated with acquiring overseas territory after the brief war against Spain. During World War One and in its wake, Americans examined anew their foreign relationships, particularly as they touched upon the great European powers and Japan. Beginning with FDR's presidency in 1933, three lines of thought on international policy competed for dominance: "isolationism" from Europe, collective universalism, and unilateral universalism.

The majority of Americans in the 1930s believed that Washington should concentrate on correcting social-economic problems at home and avoid direct involvement with quarrels and rivalries in East Asia and Europe. This "isolationist" attitude was evidenced in America's continuing refusal to join or cooperate closely with the League of Nations. The popular wisdom after Pearl Harbor, however, held that only in concert with the other great powers—first via the so-called Grand Alliance, then the United Nations—could the United States assure its security and promote a semblance of international 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 strong states but the preeminent one in the West, a new presumption developed: the U.S. must act energetically around the globe. This notion informed the Truman Doctrine and NSC 68—to protect the wide-ranging interests of the U.S. and to safeguard the Western zone in Europe, East Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Since the end of the Cold War and implosion of Soviet power, American policymakers have experimented (alternated) with versions of collective universalism and unhampered unilateralism.

Within these broad lines—“isolationism,” collective universalism, unilateral universalism—more specific concepts and ideas have played a part in shaping U.S. policy. We shall examine them from the standpoint of their analytical validity and political influence. We will be especially concerned to see how they have meshed with other determinants of foreign policy: economic factors, bureaucratic and domestic politics, the behavior of U.S. adversaries and allies. Finally, attention will also be given to examining the ideas and actions of prominent policymakers (and their critics) such as Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, FDR, Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump. Into this weave we will also give attention to questions touching upon human rights dilemmas and current Middle Eastern international relations.

Books:

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

1. Walter LaFeber: *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913* (required)
2. Akira Iriye: *The Globalizing of America, 1913-1945* (required)
3. Warren Cohen: *Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present* (required)
4. David Mayers: *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power* (required)
5. George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (recommended)
6. Jeffrey Engel, Mark Lawrence, Andrew Preston: *America in the World* (required)

Course Requirements:

Each student will have to take three “in class” exams. The first exam = 30% of grade. The second exam = 30% of grade. The final exam = 40% of grade. No makeup exam will be given unless the request is accompanied by a letter from a doctor or university official.

First exam will be administered on October 13.

Second exam will be administered on November 17.

Final exam will be on the date and time set by CAS.

Participation in class discussion is required. *You must not miss lectures, discussion, and debates.*

All lectures, discussion, student debates, and exams will take place in EPC # 209.

Reading assignments:

By the exam on October 13 you should have read these required books in the following order:

Mayers, *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power* (pp. 1-253) and

LaFeber, *The American Search for Power, 1865-1913* (entire) and

America in the World (pp. 1-106).

Only Recommended: Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (pp. 1-435).

By the exam on November 17 you should have read these books in the following order:

Iriye, *The Globalizing of America, 1913-1945* (entire) and

Mayers, *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power* (pp. 254-314) and

America in the World (pp. 107-304).

Only Recommended: Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (436-809).

By the final exam you should have read these books in the following order:

Warren Cohen, *Challenges to American Primacy, 1945 to the Present* (entire) and

Mayers, *Dissenting Voices in America's Rise to Power* (pp. 315-333) and

America in the World (pp. 305-378).

Only Recommended: Herring, *From Colony to Superpower* (pp. 810-964).