The American Century? Contests Over the U.S. World Order

Course Description:
In 1941, media mogul Henry Luce famously declared, “The twentieth century is the American century,” thus heralding the increasing dominance of the United States in international and global affairs. Today, as the pundits debate whether the American century is over, and whether this is a good or bad thing, this course will examine the very idea of an American century and see if we can begin to trace how it has played out in the practice of international and global relations over the last seven decades. Proceeding chronologically from the emergence of the United States as a superpower at the end of the Second World War to the 21st century Global War on Terror, we will delve into some of the pivotal developments and moments in U.S. foreign and international relations in this era, including the emergence of the Cold War, nuclear escalation, international development, détente, the oil crisis of 1973, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. In place of a consensus version of this history, we will focus on international debates among politicians, diplomats, foreign affairs and international bureaucrats, historians, economists, journalists, filmmakers, and activists, thus reflecting the diversity of perspectives and terrains on which these contests have played out. Readings will include works by Frederick Jackson Turner, Herman Kahn, Richard Wright, Noam Chomsky, Allen Ginsburg, David Harvey, and Francis Fukuyama. Students will write several short response papers and complete a final research paper based on these texts.

Course Goals:
This course has multiple goals. As the course title suggests, it aims to familiarize students with some of the central themes, issues, and events related to the history of U.S. foreign relations since 1945. It is intended not only to further students’ empirical knowledge of this history, but also to develop their sense of what an interdisciplinary approach to history might entail.

This course is also an introduction to scholarly research from an interdisciplinary humanities perspective. It is thus intended to build upon the first-year writing seminar. Students will continue to hone their writing skills, practicing the art of critical analysis and argumentation. In addition, they will practice the craft of research, including the formulation of productive research questions and the art of putting their analysis in conversation with that of other scholars.

Assignments: (more specific guidelines for essays will be distributed in class)
- Essay 1: close reading (5-7 pages): 25%
- Essay 2: research essay (8-10 pages): 35%
- Research Proposal and Draft/Outline: 10%
- Participation: 30%: See below for details

**Participation Requirements:**
Participation is key for your success in this course. In addition to coming to class regularly and on time, participation includes:

1) Completion of all reading assignments

2) Completion of brief responses (one paragraph will suffice) before class discussion once a week. You can choose which reading(s) to focus on. **Just make sure to post your response to the Forum section of NYU Classes at least 1 hour before class on the day we are scheduled to discuss the reading.** Keep in mind, responses are not summaries but rather critical and creative commentaries intended to provoke possible areas of discussion.

3) End-of-Semester Presentation

4) Regular and Thoughtful Contributions to Class Discussion

5) Respectful Engagement with Others

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**Books:** Please purchase the following books. Shakespeare & Co. (716 Broadway) has several copies on hand. I have also placed copies on reserve at NYU Bobst Library. All other readings (marked with an asterisks) can be found on the Resources section of the NYU Classes Website.

- Allen Ginsberg, *The Fall of America: Poems of These States: 1965-1971*

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**Schedule of Readings and Assignments:**

(Readings and assignments are due on the date they are listed. You must print and bring a hard copy of the reading to class.)

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**Week 1: Intro and Post war Visions of World Order**

January 29: What is/was the US World Order? How to frame/study it? (the Cold War, international systems, decolonization, security, private sector, NGOs, migrations etc.; disciplinary questions)
January 31:  **SPECIAL MEETING TIME AND PLACE:** 12:30-2: 1 Washington Place, Room 527: Meeting with IDSEM UG-1631: Empire and the Americas

**Visions of an “American” Global Order:**
- Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893)*

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**Week 2: The Cold War Order**

February 5:  - Keylor, *A World of Nations*, ch. 1
- Anders Stephanson, “Liberty or Death: The Cold War as U.S. Ideology”*

February 7:  - Robert Aldrich (director), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955): film is on Reserve at Avery Fisher Center
- Geoffrey Smith, “National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States”*

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**Week 3: Forging the International Financial System**

February 12:  Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World* (intro, ch. 1, ch. 2)
[Assign Essay 1]

February 14:  Close Reading Practice: Dollar Diplomacy Documents
- William Howard Taft, “Dollar Diplomacy” (1912)*
- U.S. State Department, *The Future of Iraq Project* (excerpt)*

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**Week 4: Managing a Nuclear World**

February 19:  - Keylor, ch. 2, pages 46-52 (“Nuclear Anxieties and the Shadow of NSC 68”)
- Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Atoms for Peace,” December 8, 1953*
- Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (excerpts)*

February 21:  **Essay 1 Due**
Stanley Kubrick (director), *Dr. Strangelove* (1964)
Screening: 12:30-2: Gallatin, room 401: discussion to follow
Week 5: The Third World: Development and Modernization

February 26:  
- Joseph Chamberlain, “The True Conception of Empire” (1897)*  
- Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden” (1899)*  
- Karl Marx, “The British Rule in India” (1853)*  

February 28  
- William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (pages 1-42)  
- Andrew Rotter, “Chronicle of a War Foretold”*  

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Week 6: Development and Modernization Cont’d

March 5:  
- William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (pages 43-190)  
- Michael Latham, “The USA and the Failure of Nation-Building in South Vietnam”*  

March 7:  
- William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The Ugly American* (finish novel)

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Week 7: The Politics of Non-Alignment

March 12:  
- Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain* (foreword, Bandung: Beyond Left and Right)  

March 14:  
- Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain* (Racial Shame at Bandung, The Western World at Bandung)  

March 19 and 21: Spring Break: NO CLASS

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Week 8: 1968: International Student Revolt

March 26:  
- Noam Chomsky, “The Function of the University in a Time of Crisis”*  

March 28:  
- Assign Essay 2: Review Guidelines  
  Gerald Graffe, “They Say, I Say”

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Week 9: Working With Archives

April 2:  
- Tamiment Archives Tour: Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) Papers  

April 4:  
- Student Reports from Tamiment
Week 10: The 1970s: Counter-Culture or Consumer Culture?

April 9: Research Proposals Due
- Jeremi Suri, “The Rise and Fall of an International Counter-Culture”*
  - Keylor, ch. 5

April 11: Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (ch. 1, ch. 6)*

Week 11: Economic Crisis and Culture

April 16: - David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (intro, chs. 1-3)

April 18: - Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (chs. 9, 14)

Week 12: The End of the Cold War and the New World Order

April 23: Essay 2 Outlines/Drafts Due:
- Keylor, 310-334
- Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History”*

April 25: Individual Student Meetings to Discuss Research Progress

Week 13: Chimerica?

April 30: - Niall Ferguson, “What Chimerica Hath Wrought”*
  - Annie Murphy Paul, “Tiger Moms: Is Tough Parenting Really the Answer?”*

May 2: - Workshop Drafts

Week 14: Presentations

May 7: Final Essays Due
Organize Presentations for Mini-Conference

May 9: SPECIAL MEETING TIME: May 9, 7-9PM, Place: TBD
Mini-Conference with IDEM UG-1631 (Empire and the Americas)