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 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 some underlying logics of American power both at home and abroad.

The course examines questions concerning the nature and origins of American global power. Proceeding in loose chronological fashion 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 defining phenomena and pivotal moments of U.S. foreign 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. Earlier texts and moments will provide a broader context for consideration.

In place of a consensus version of this history, we will operate on the historiographical premise that stories about the nation and its role in the world are part of the contested logic of the U.S. world order. The course will examine these contests by: comparing “mainstream” and “revisionist” versions of U.S. foreign relations; examining the relationships between foreign and domestic aspects of this history; and analyzing the role of race, class, gender, citizenship, and nation in ideas and practices of American power.

While we will use a textbook to provide some broader background material, emphasis will be placed on the analysis and interpretation of primary sources (official documents; literature; film; popular culture) and secondary sources (particularly postmodern and Marxist theory) from and about the period. Readings will include works by Frederick Jackson Turner, C. Wright Mills, Richard Wright, Herbert Marcuse, Allen Ginsburg, David Harvey, and Francis Fukuyama. Students will write several short response papers, a close reading essay, and 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

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 asterisk) can be found on the Resources section of the NYU Classes Website.

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 28:** What is/was the U.S. World Order? How to frame/study it?
(What is a world order? What is an empire? Is the U.S. an empire? What are the characteristics of U.S. global power? Is the U.S. different from other global powers?)

**January 30:** **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 4:** **Structures of Power: International and National Governance:**
- Keylor, *A World of Nations*, ch. 1
- C. Wright Mills, “The Structure of Power in American Society”*  
- Anders Stephanson, “Liberty or Death: The Cold War as U.S. Ideology”*

**February 6:** **Structures of Power: Domestic/Personal/Everyday Governance:**
- Geoffrey Smith, “National Security and Personal Isolation: Sex, Gender, and Disease in the Cold-War United States”*
- Ron Rosenbaum, “The House That Levitt Built”

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

**February 11:** Emily Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World* (intro, ch. 1, ch. 2)  
[Assign Essay 1]

**February 13:** Close Reading Practice: Dollar Diplomacy Documents
- William Howard Taft, “Dollar Diplomacy” (1912)*
- U.S. State Department, *The Future of Iraq Project* (excerpt)*
Week 4: Managing a Nuclear World

February 18:  
- 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)*  
- C. Wright Mills on “Crackpot Realists”

February 20:  
**Essay 1 Due**  
Stanley Kubrick (director), Dr. Strangelove (1964)  
-Screening before class on Feb. 20 from 9:30-11 in Gallatin Room 432:  
discussion to follow

Week 5: The Third World: Development and Modernization

February 25:  
- 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 27:  
- William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, The Ugly American (pages 1-42)  
- Andrew Rotter, “Chronicle of a War Foretold”*

Week 6: Development and Modernization Cont’d

March 4:  
- 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 6:  
- William Lederer and Eugene Burdick, The Ugly American (finish novel)

Week 7: Race and the Politics of Non-Aligned

March 11:  
- Richard Wright, The Color Curtain (foreword, Bandung: Beyond Left and Right)  
- Brief for the United States as Amicus Curiae, Brown v. Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1952) (no. 8)*

March 13:  
- Malcolm X, “The Ballot or The Bullet”*

March 18 and 20: Spring Break: NO CLASS

Week 8: Dissent in the 1960s: Who Protests What?
March 25:  
- Herbert Marcuse, “The New Forms of Control”* (excerpts from One-Dimensional Man)  
- Noam Chomsky, “The Function of the University in a Time of Crisis”*  
- Allen Ginsberg, “Witchita Vortex Sutra”*

March 27:  
Assign Essay 2: Review Guidelines  
Gerald Graffé, “They Say, I Say”*

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**Week 9: Working With Archives**

April 1:  
Tamiment Archives Tour: Archives of Dissent from the 1960s

April 3:  
Student Reports from Tamiment

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**Week 10: The 1960s/1970s: Counter-Culture or Consumer Culture?**

April 8:  
**Research Proposals Due**  
- Jeremi Suri, “The Rise and Fall of an International Counter-Culture”*  
- Keylor, ch. 3

April 10:  
Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (ch. 1, ch. 6)*

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**Week 11: Global Economic Crisis and Culture**

April 15:  
**Annotated Bibliography Due**  
- David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (intro, chs. 1-3)

April 17:  
- Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (chs. 9, 14)

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

April 22:  
**Essay 2 Outlines/Drafts Due (Option 1)**  
- Keylor, 131-151  
- Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History”*

April 24:  
**Individual Student Meetings to Discuss Research Progress**

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**Week 13: Chimerica?**

April 29:  
**Essay 2 Outlines/Drafts Due (Option 2)**  
- Guest Lecturer: Professor Chinnie Ding  
- Niall Ferguson, “What Chimerica Hath Wrought”*
- Annie Murphy Paul, “Tiger Moms: Is Tough Parenting Really the Answer?”*

May 1: - Workshop Drafts

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**Week 14: Presentations**

May 6: **Final Essays Due**
Organize Presentations for Mini-Conference

May 8: **SPECIAL MEETING TIME: May 8, 12:30-2PM, Rooms 527 and 501**
Mini-Conference with IDEM UG-1631 (Empire and the Americas)