Class details

HIST-UA 9629001/POL-UA 9XXX American Foreign Policy in the 20th Century
Spring 2015
Wednesdays, 6:15pm–9:15pm
Location: Room B205

Instructor Details

John Prados
Office hours Wednesday, 5-6 PM, Room 214

Prerequisites

None

Class Description

This course will survey American Foreign Policy in the classic rising years (from the late 19th Century and the Spanish-American war to the end of the Cold War). The course will focus on America’s role in the world and also on methods of historical and dynamic analysis. For each of a series of watershed events in American foreign policy there is a particular conventional wisdom. The course will present the received history and then explore what additional insights result from the application of a range of dimensions of historical and/or political science analysis.

Types of analysis will include the “great man” in history, bureaucratic or institutional analysis, “great ideas” (ideological/philosophical analysis), inexorable movements (e.g. economic history, technological change), cultural history, and the impacts of military and/or intelligence events.

Topics of the course will include the Spanish-American War, World War I, Peacemaking in the Wilsonian style, Internationalism as embodied in the league of Nations and the United Nations, Disarmament as reflected in naval arms limitation between the world wars, general and complete disarmament after World War II, and nuclear arms control during the Cold War; foreign policy consequences of economic events (e.g. the policy impact of the Open Door, the Great Depression, the Marshall Plan), World War II, the Cold War, the Berlin Crises, Intervention in Korea and Vietnam, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the end of the Cold War after the Reagan
administration.

The class will begin with joint study of the end of the Cold War, as the last case study is the subject of a text which presents the various styles of historical analysis. After that the group will examine each topic in succession, with my presentation of the received history, then a common discussion of the historical analysis. Participants will alternate taking commentator roles for particular methods of analysis as applied to given class subjects.

The class will emphasize student participation. Three short papers will be required.

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<tr>
<th>Desired Outcomes</th>
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<td>Students will emerge from this class with a better sense of the evolution of the history of American foreign policy over the past century or so, as well as a much more nuanced understanding of the impact of a range of factors upon the making and implementation of policy, plus the ability to utilize a spectrum of analytical techniques when studying historical subjects.</td>
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<th>Assessment Components</th>
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<td>The class will require three short papers (two of 5–10 pages, the third of 10–20) and two oral presentations plus class participation. Students will be required to volunteer for presenter/commentator roles. Each class session will move through a chronological period of the subject matter. The presenter/commentator will take one of the methods of analysis we are learning and apply it to the given case. Not all methods of analysis will be represented at every class session, but some sessions may feature multiple presenters. The number will be worked out between students and instructor based on class registration. There will not be a set time of oral presentations, rather the class discussion will be freewheeling and open.</td>
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Grades will be based 20 percent on each of the short papers, 35 percent on the long paper—all discussed below, 10 percent on each of the presenter/commentator performances and 5 percent on class participation.

The first paper (5–10 pages) will select an historical episode in the record of American foreign policy over the 20th Century, describe the basic record of the history, and detail some of the outside factors influencing the situation. The second paper (5–10 pages) will take the foreign policy episode previously detailed and apply to it a different type of historical analysis. The third paper (10–20 pages) will take a different historical episode and, without attempting to present a baseline history, simply describe what insights are furnished by the application of two varieties of historical analysis. The historical episodes students use in their papers will be selected in
conjunction with the instructor.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure in the class.

### Assessment Expectations

**Grade A:** The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

**Grade B:** The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

**Grade C:** The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

### Grade conversion

NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<tr>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-87</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>83-80</td>
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<td>79-77</td>
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<td>76-74</td>
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<td>73-70</td>
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<td>69-67</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>65-66</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
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Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Academic Program Coordinator in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

### Late Submission of Work

1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. (If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Academic Program Coordinator can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9–5, M–F.)

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g.,; A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for
every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

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### Students with Disabilities

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at +1-212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

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### Plagiarism Policy

As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others." **Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.**

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the
subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity


### Required Text(s)

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<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
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### Supplemental Text(s) (not required for purchase)

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Internet Research Guidelines

Excellent sources for primary source documents on recent American foreign policy—and on foreign lands’ responses to United States initiatives, include the National Security Archive (nsarchiv@gwu.edu), and the Cold War International History Project.

Additional Required Equipment

None

Session 1 – 2/4/15

Varieties of Analysis applied to historical events: I : The End of the Cold War

In addition to beginning of semester housekeeping matters, this session will begin our orientation to types of analysis as applied to key events. A barebones, simplified “received history” of the end of the Cold War will be presented. After that techniques that modify this understanding will be inserted, including the “Great Man” theory of events, institutional analysis, and popular movements. The point in the first two sessions is to introduce the techniques of historical analysis that will be used throughout the semester.

READING: Prados, How the Cold War Ended, pp. 1-104.

Session 2 – 2/11/15

End of the Cold War: II

This session will complete the discussion of the case study, exploring what cultural history, economic history, and military/intelligence history add to our understanding, before reassembling our view of the end of the Cold War, now with a more nuanced understanding. The group will then explore questions of how contours of the story we see morph depending upon the lens of the particular sort of historical analysis we use.


ROLE ASSIGNMENT: A sign-up list will be passed around covering future class sessions on which students will volunteer as “commentators” representing particular types of history analysis as
applied to the subject of the week. The commentators will help lead discussions when their subjects come up. The instructor will assign students to cover important categories for which there are no volunteers.

**Session 3 – 2/18/15**

Dawn of the Epoch: The Spanish-American War

American foreign policy entered the age of globalism—essentially the modern age—in the years of President William McKinley. This session will examine how transformative the Spanish-American War proved in terms of converting Americans from an internal vision of continental frontiers to an international one of world affairs.


**Session 4 – 2/25/15**

America Enters World War I

The United States kept its neutrality for several years as Europe descended into what became a global conflict. The group will examine how the varieties of historical analysis shed different lights on how American neutrality gradually transformed into a stance favoring the Allied side in the war.

**READING:** Walter LaFeber, *The American Age*, pp. 269-312.


**FIRST PAPER DUE**

**Session 5 – 3/4/15**

Versailles and the League of Nations

President Woodrow Wilson is a character who casts a large shadow across the history of American foreign policy. He also provides a suitable vehicle for a focus on the “Great Man” theory of history. During this session the group will consider whether there are historical cases where one method of analysis should be given precedence over others.

Here the group will examine foreign policy consequences of the Great Depression, in which economic disaster led nations to seek to shield their economies by means of tariffs and protectionism; and how this trend combined with the America-first political forces that had defeated the League of Nations treaty to raise isolationism to the status of a movement. We will examine the outbreak of World War II in Europe and how isolationists sought to keep the U.S. out of it. Finally we shall look at the myriad forces and concerns unleashed by the Second World War, including the influence of a “Great Man,” Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The group will discuss different kinds of historical analysis and how these permit varied insights to be drawn.

**READING:** Walter LaFeber, *The American Age*, pp. 335-368.

George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, pp. 484-537.

**Session 7 – 3/18/15**

Collective Security and the United Nations

Much like the aftermath of World War I, and second war ended with a multilateral effort to create new international institutions that might prevent future conflicts. This session will compare and contrast the United States push to create a United Nations following the second war with its failure on the League of Nations initiative after the first. The group will consider multilateral institutions in general and what insights different analytical tools provide us about them.

**READING:** Walter LaFeber, *The American Age*, pp. 413-456.

Next week is spring break.

**Session 8 – 4/1/15**

The Cold War Begins

The classic historical questions regarding the Cold War revolve around whether it was a necessary conflict. Starting from the knowledge the group has developed about World War II and the new
international structure of the United Nations, the first hour will detail a number of the residual tensions and crisis arenas left behind from the conflict. The group will then apply its analytical techniques to search for insights in the origins of the war.


George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, pp. 595-650.

**SECOND PAPER DUE**

**Session 9 – 4/8/15**

Korea, Indochina and the Eisenhower Era

With the United States increasingly embroiled in the quasi-military but certainly ideological conflict of the Cold War, in 1950 North Korea suddenly invades South Korea. This starts off a decade of regional conflicts in Asia during which the Truman era gives way to the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower. This session will survey both commonalities and differences in the approaches of the two presidents.


George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, pp. 651-701.

**Session 10 – 4/15/15**

Kennedy and Johnson, Cuba and Vietnam

President John F. Kennedy tried to distinguish his foreign policies from those of Eisenhower. Many spoke of a new dynamism in American policy. But looking at specific regional ventures—Cuba and Vietnam—the differences prove not to be so clear. Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, was even more caught up in Vietnam. The group will employ its techniques of analysis to probe the dynamics behind these events.


George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, pp. 702-759.
Session 11 – 4/22/15

Nixon and the Parallax Shift

Richard Nixon, though still embroiled in the Vietnam war, determined to become known for new foreign policy initiatives. Nixon’s opening to the People’s Republic of China, and the era of détente he fostered with the Soviet Union, temporarily eased the Cold War. We will consider whether the changes were structural ones or of lesser consequence.


George C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower*, pp. 760-809.

Session 12 – 4/29/15

Growing Involvement in the Middle East

Starting from President Johnson’s time, events in the Middle East began to assume a greater proportion of the attention of American policymakers. With the October War in the Nixon era, and the Camp David accords in Jimmy Carter’s time, the Israeli-Palestinian issue assumed the shape it continues to have today. The class will use its pallet of analytical tools to glean insights on this area of American foreign policy.


Session 13 – 5/6/15

Disarmament and Arms Limitation

The group will flash back to the naval arms treaties of the 1920s and 1930s, and to the Geneva talks on general and complete disarmament that began in the 1950s, to pick up the thread of arms negotiations in U.S. foreign policy. This is an area where all the varieties of analysis can be fruitfully applied.


Session 14 – 5/13/15

Human Rights

President Jimmy Carter transformed American foreign policy with his specific attention to human rights issues. Since Carter’s time every U.S. president has had to deal with the basic issue as well as with an international arena increasingly attuned to human rights as a global foreign policy concern. The class will employ its tools to probe the forces and interest groups that help drive human rights policy.


Session 15 – 5/20/15 (FINAL EXAM WEEK)

THIRD PAPER DUE by 5:00pm

Classroom Etiquette

**Required Co-curricular Activities**

none

**Suggested Co-curricular Activities**

none

Your Instructor

John Prados is a senior fellow of the National Security Archive in Washington DC, where he directs its projects on intelligence and on the Vietnam war, as well as assisting on the Iraq
project. Prados holds a PhD in Political Science (International Relations) from Columbia University. He is the author of more than twenty books on assorted topics in international relations, national security, intelligence and military history, including Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the CIA and Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush.