

Diplomatic History of the United States – HIS 357 (01)
West Chester University – Spring 2010
MWF, 12-12:50p, Main Hall 403

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Required textbook:

Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson, eds. *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations*.
Concise edition. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Overview:

Foreign affairs analyst J. Martin Rochester writes, “If there is a single country whose foreign policy is most worth analyzing, if only for its potential impact on the rest of the planet, the United States stands out as the number one candidate.” Despite its recent economic woes, America remains a juggernaut in an increasingly small world. Moreover, little consensus exists, whether at home or abroad, about the role the United States should play in global affairs. The idea of America resonates powerfully still throughout much of the world, yet our nation’s actions often elicit mixed responses. The United States wields unprecedented power to shape events overseas, but it hardly operates without constraints. Any understanding of precisely how America interacts with the rest of the world today must begin by tracing the path our nation forged in pursuing its past foreign relations.

Current debates about United States foreign policy, the merits of isolation versus those of intervention, the advantages of unilateral and multilateral action, the value of soft power and hard power, are hardly new. Concern over these issues is apparent throughout American history, emerging in the Republic’s earliest years and continuing into our own time. Much remains the same, but so too, a great deal has changed. It has been quite sometime since other nations viewed America as an upstart former colony or even since the nation began acquiring colonies of its own. While foreign policy is still occasionally forged in back rooms, in an age of mass politics and instant communication, transparency has become vital for a nation’s success, even one as powerful as the United States.

This course encourages students to consider the history of American foreign relations in its broadest sense. Americans are more engaged with the rest of the world today than at any point in their nation’s history. Immigration, environmental issues, business practices, national security, sports and entertainment, humanitarian relief, and a host of other contemporary issues, shape and reflect America’s foreign relations and its official policies overseas. The course moves chronologically to identify the ways that Americans engaged with the rest of the world, and how others interacted with Americans, from the Revolutionary War through the present.

Objectives:

In this class, students will work with primary documents to trace the nation’s history with the rest of the world. They will become familiar with a variety of different approaches utilized by historians and weigh conflicting interpretations of events. Orally and in writing, students will develop and advance arguments based on the available evidence. They will place America’s current foreign relations within historical context to construct an informed view of United States policies.

Requirements (541 points total):

Attendance: 41 points

Briefs, 200 points: These assignments are meant to prompt reading, thinking and discussion (How bad can that be!). In total, each student will complete ten of these over the semester (out of a possible sixteen). **The first two briefs, however, are mandatory – for everybody! No more than five briefs prior to Spring Break.**

The idea: based on readings, craft a thesis statement. After which, cite documents (quotations) that support your thesis (bullet point style). Once you support your case, conclude with a passage that addresses the question, so what?

18 points are earned for each piece of writing (no more than two pages). You must address each component (thesis statement, evidence based support, so what?, proper citation). 2 final points are awarded for referencing your work in class discussion. **Late briefs are penalized by 3 points per day late.**

All citation should utilize Chicago style (Turabian), see: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html (For briefs, notes are sufficient, follow ‘N.’).

First brief due Weds., 27 January: What is the relationship between current US policy and history? To address this ever pressing question, we will consider Viet-ghanistan as a case study. In class, on Friday, we will watch Bill Moyers, former aide to United States President Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-68, examine the archival evidence (audio recorded telephone conversations). Material is available at:

<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/11202009/watch.html>

In the interim, you should consult President Barack Obama’s address at West Point, video and transcript of Obama’s 1 December 2009 speech at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2009/12/01/new-way-forward-presidents-address>

For reaction, see eminent Vietnam war historian John Prados, “Beware President’s Use of History” at:

<http://www.shafr.org/2009/12/08/beware-presidents-use-of-history/>

and “Obama’s Indecent Interval” by prof. Thomas H. Johnson and retired Foreign Service Officer M. Chris Mason at:

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/12/10/sorry_obama_afghanistans_your_vietnam

Of course, do abit of googling and you’ll find much else to utilize. Also, do not hesitate to draw from chapter 13 in your text, “The Vietnam War.” Have fun!

Second brief due Weds., 3 February: Here, identify the path which offers the greatest hope of providing us with enlightenment concerning American diplomatic history (based on your reading of pages 1-29 in *Major Problems*).

Facebook, 50 points (group): This assignment requires each student to match up with one or two others and add to the class facebook page. Think documents, multimedia, short commentary – whatever your group can devise to supplement the material we cover in class. The group can focus on an event, a personality, whatever, just get the topic approved by me. Version should be up on facebook within two weeks after covering area (example, space devoted to Thomas Jefferson should go up within two weeks after we cover the diplomacy of the early Republic – Exception here obviously, is last area Cold War-Long War, topics need be up by the time we meet for our final).

Diplomacy, 50 points (group): As the syllabus stipulates, we'll spend time in class playing the game Diplomacy where the object is to rule the world, by any means possible. While the winning team receives 10 points extra credit, the goal is to model the game so groups might create their own board games, ready for classroom use, by 2 April.

Film/Book review, oral presentation, ten minutes (that is like 10 points per minute!), 50 points (individual): Here, choose an outside film (Hollywood, indie, documentary, television) or a (gasp!) book, even a website, and make a short presentation to the class – inform us how this particular piece is valuable, and even how it is not, for offering insight into some aspect of America's diplomatic history. **These presentations should coincide with content, I'll send around sign up sheet within a week. There should be no more than two students per given topic of study.**

5 May: 100 points Final paper. Build from one of our discussions to stake out a position regarding the history of America's foreign relations. Think as broadly as you like, but make sure you get my approval to move forward. Your piece should draw on all relevant material from *Major Problems* and should also benefit from any two outside sources. An excellent place to begin your research, once you look through the suggested reading at the end of the chapter, is the journal of the profession, *Diplomatic History*, available in its totality online by utilizing your West Chester University ID, or by simply logging on to any computer on campus. Also, do access www.shafr.org – our profession's website (Society for Historians of America's Foreign Relations), for op-eds, the newsletter *Passport*, and other fun stuff. Of course, you could just go to the library!

General paper grading:

A – thesis is clear, sets issue within proper historical context, conclusion addresses question of So What? Utilizes all relevant sources in *Major Problems* and appropriate ones garnered from elsewhere to make case persuasively, this includes explaining away contradictory evidence. Cited correctly (see Turabian's *Chicago Manual of Style*, see link above) and contains minimal grammar problems. Bibliography and endnotes/footnotes.

B – thesis is clear but paper lacks in providing evidence, citations, context. Partially addresses question of So What?

C – thesis is clear, but not original. Paper merely summarizes historiography with limited analysis from author concerning primary or secondary sources. Lacks evidence, citations, context. Ignores So What?

D – thesis is clear but wholly unsupported by evidence. Uninformed opinion. Paper is not persuasive, thoughtful, well written, well conceived. Lacks citations.

F – Paper is a cut and paste hack job devoid of citations, bibliography, context, thought.
Syllabus Statement:

We at West Chester University wish to make accommodations for persons with disabilities. Please make your needs known to me, the history department and/or the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities at x3217. Provide sufficient notice to all staff in order to make possible whatever accommodations are necessary. The University and its faculty members desire to comply with the ADA of 1990.

Semester Schedule:

20 January: Overview of course, syllabus.

22 January: Bill Moyars, *Journal*.

25 January: **Discussion:** Read David L. Anderson, "One Vietnam War Should be Enough and Other Reflections on Diplomatic History and the Making of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 30:1 (January 2006): 1-21. (On Blackboard).

27 January: **First brief due – Viet-ghanistan.**

29 January: *Diplomacy* - Overview.

1 February: **Discussion:** Approaches to the History of U.S. Foreign Relations – read pp. 3 – 29 in *Major Problems*

3 February: **Second Brief due – Approaching the History of U.S. Foreign Relations.**

5 February: *Diplomacy* – Let the games begin.

8 February: Revolutionary Era – Context, documents.

10 February: **Briefs – “Revolutionary Era.”**

12 February: *Diplomacy*

15 February: The Louisiana Purchase – Context, documents.

17 February: **Briefs – “The Louisiana Purchase.”**

19 February: *Diplomacy*

22 February: The War of 1812. Context, documents.

24 February: **Briefs – “The War of 1812.”**

26 February: *Diplomacy*

1 March: The Monroe Doctrine. Context, documents.

3 March: **Briefs – “The Monroe Doctrine.”**

5 March: *Diplomacy*.

8-12 March: Spring Break!

15 March: Manifest Destiny. Context, documents.

17 March: **Briefs – “Manifest Destiny.”**

19 March: *Diplomacy*

22 March: The Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War. Context, documents.

24 March: **Briefs – “The Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War.”**

26 March: *Diplomacy*

29 March: Woodrow Wilson, World War I and the League of Nations. Context, documents.

31 March: **Briefs. “Woodrow Wilson, World War I and the League of Nations.”**

2 April: *Diplomacy*. Game presentations.

5 April: U.S. Entry into World War II. Context, documents.

7 April: **Briefs. “U.S. Entry into World War II.”**

9 April: The Origins of the Cold War. Context, documents.

12 April: **Briefs. “The Origins of the Cold War.”**

14 April: Cold War Culture and the “Third World.” Context, documents.

16 April: **Briefs. “Cold War Culture and the ‘Third World.’**

19 April: Cuba and the Missile Crisis. Context, documents.

21 April: **Briefs. “Cuba and the Missile Crisis.”**

23 April: The Vietnam War. Context, documents

26 April: **Briefs. “The Vietnam War.”**

28 April: From Cold War to Long War, Context and documents, chapters 14, 15.

30 April: **Briefs. If completing a brief here, focus on connection, if any, between the Cold War’s conclusion and the Long War’s onset.**

Final Meeting (attendance is worth 11% of final paper’s grade):

Wednesday, 5 May, 1p.