



PSCI 1404

INTRODUCTION TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

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Objectives My course is dedicated to developing your critical reading and writing skills in the areas of international relations and contemporary history. It requires a great deal from participants. It is harder than the typical introductory class. You are expected to take charge of your learning, engaging with each other and the instructors in a process of knowledge creation through practice, inquiry, deliberation, and criticism. You will produce three pieces of analytical writing. These are complementary and cumulative assignments that, combined, will enhance your understanding of the nature, purpose, and future of U.S. hegemony or primacy. This is the issue, arguably, at the core of debate today and really since 2010 about American foreign policy.

The analytical form we will work with this semester is the book review, including the comparative review or essay, as found in the *New York Review of Books* (<http://nybooks.com/nyrev/>) and in other general publications devoted to politics and the arts such as the *Boston Review*. This kind of essay is also ubiquitous in newspapers, journals of opinion and international affairs, and in the professional publications of various fields and disciplines, such as the *American Historical Review*, the *American Political Science Review*, *World Politics*, *American Studies Quarterly*, in law journals, and the like. The point is to familiarize you with this form of intellectual production and to let you practice this art yourselves. Why practice it? Writing reviews will, arguably, make you better readers of them. The skills involved are also ones that you will use often in the future. Whether or not you go on to Ph.D. programs or professional schools or take positions in private and non-profit organizations, you will have to read and synthesize complex arguments and information for yourselves and others.

Grades Your grades will be based on the three writing assignments. Percentages indicate the weight of each component in the determination of your final grade. Reviews 1 (20%) and 2 (25%) are short, 1000-or-so-word assignments that may be incorporated in part in the final 3000-word essay-review 3 (55%).

Books Spencer Ackerman, *Reign of Terror* (Random House, 2021), Hal Brands, *Twilight Struggle* (Yale UP, 2022), Michael Mandelbaum, *The Four Ages of American Foreign Policy*

(Oxford UP, 2022), Chris Miller, *Chip War* (Scribner, 2022), Samuel Moyn, *Humane* (Farrar, Straus, 2021), and M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch* (Yale UP, 2021).

One More Thing If you do not do so already, please keep up with the *New York Times* or equivalent print source for day-to-day developments in U.S. foreign policy.

Schedule of Sessions, Topics and Assignments

Any time we read a new author, please do some research to find out who they are and what they do and are known for. We want to develop textual and contextual knowledge about those who take positions on the questions about which the class is centrally concerned. When you read, note any names or concepts that you don't understand or recognize rather than ignore them. As you continue reading, note too those ideas and names that continue to occur. What do they signify? Develop your understanding cumulatively. Finally, the best way I know to nail an argument and retain it in your mind is to write a short, 50-100 word précis or abstract of the text after you have finished it. You will be able to make use of these in discussions both early and late in the semester (when you otherwise will have forgotten the argument) and in your final review essay.

I

INTRODUCTION: THE SO-CALLED LIBERAL ORDER (AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT)

1/11 and 1/18

The Organization and Argument of the Class

The main goal of these first weeks is to develop a provisional understanding of the ongoing debate about the broad nature of U.S. Foreign Policy (and about the strategies that might enhance U.S. power and influence into the mid-21st century) as conceived in the White House 2022 National Security Strategy document and the three critical essays. Here are some questions to consider: What are these writers contesting? Are their ideological biases (left, right, conservative, liberal, radical, etc.) obvious and do they affect the analysis? Can we distinguish between empirical and normative dimensions of the debate (what *is* the case versus what *ought* to be the case)? How are we to resolve these matters? Can we? And why does it matter?

Read: National Security Strategy 2022 <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>, George Packer, "A New Theory of American Power," *Atlantic* (December 2022) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/12/american-foreign-policy-in-wartime/671899/>, Matt Duss and Steven Wertheim, "A Better Biden Doctrine," *New Republic* (January 4, 2023) <https://newrepublic.com/article/169598/better-biden-doctrine>, and "Robert Kagan on America's Future," Podcast transcript of Yascha Mounk, *The Good Fight*, September 27, 2022 <https://www.persuasion.community/p/kagan#details>.

1/23, 25, 30, and 2/1

The Wasting Hyperpower?

Read: Michael Mandelbaum, *The Four Ages of American Power*

We pick up speed (so to speak) with *Four Ages*. You need to be able to produce a condensed version of (and by the end of the semester, ideally, challenge or advance) the argument. In addition, try to position the book. Who is the audience for it?

*** * * First Book Review Due by Sunday February February 5.**

Write a 1000-word review of *The Four Ages of American Democracy*. Your review should include the following. 1. A title that captures the essence of your argument and critique. 2. An introductory

“hook” that leads to a summary of the book’s contents. 3. A concluding statement. Note: The first week’s readings should help you think about your positioning of the book.

Note: Make sure that you write the review as if for publication for someone unfamiliar with the book, not as an informal commentary addressed to Vitalis and Skipton.

2/6, 8, 13, and 15 Don’t Count the Liberal Order Over Just Yet

Read: M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch*.

II

THE ILLUSIONS AND INTERESTS THAT UNDERPIN(NED) PRIMACY

2/20, 22, 27, and 3/1 Domestic Causes and Consequences of the War on Terror

Read: Spencer Ackerman, *Reign of Terror*.

3/13, 15, 20, 22 Just War

Read: Samuel Moyn, *Humane*.

*** * * Comparative Review Due Sunday March 26.**

You should use the review to advance an argument that develops from the pairing of the two books. You still need to review both, succinctly, and let the reader know what is most important about each, but you should draw out the significance or value added when the two are read side-by-side.

III

AMERICA FIRST?

3/27, 29, 4/3, and 5 When Globalization Was King

Read: Chris Miller, *Chip War*.

4/10, 12, 17, and 19 Lights Shimmering in the Gloaming

Read: Hal Brands, *Twilight Struggle*.

4/24 and 26 Arguments Rehearsed and Reconsidered

Your final assignment is a review essay. The objective is to develop an argument of your own about the nature of U.S. foreign policy. One possibility is to consider the comparative usefulness and limitations of the books in making sense of the course of U.S. affairs and the kind of order likely to follow in the next decade(s).

You may make use of at least some of the text you have already written, although you are not required to, in a way that makes sense and that sustains the main argument of your essay. You may well end up revising one or more of your earlier accounts. **DUE DATE TBA**

January 8, 2023 version