

Seven Questions on... Teaching U.S. Foreign Relations

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Editor's note: "Seven Questions On..." is a regular feature in *Passport* that will ask scholars in a particular field to respond to seven questions about their field's historiography, key publications, influences, etc. It is designed to introduce the broader SHAFR community to a variety of perspectives for a given field, as well as serving as a literature and pedagogical primer for graduate students and non-specialists. This iteration, however, focuses on teaching the history of U.S. foreign relations. **AJ**

1. What are your 25 favorite books and/or articles to assign in a survey course on the history of U.S. foreign relations (e.g. U.S. Foreign Relations since 1776; U.S. and the World since 1914)? Do you use a textbook? Why (and which one) or why not?

Lori Clune: We don't offer a traditional history of U.S. foreign relations course. The department never really embraced a broader survey of U.S. diplomacy and as the only faculty member in my department interested/trained, I have focused on specialty courses. I do use a foreign relations focus in my lower division, GE modern U.S. survey class.

Catherine Forslund: The main text I use in my 300-level diplomatic history survey (1776-1940 and post-1940) is the Oxford University Press *Very Short Introduction* book on *American Foreign Relations* by Andrew Preston. We only read about half of it in the first part of the survey, but we read the whole thing in the second semester. The ideology of US diplomatic leaders is so engrained in the foreign relations culture that those short chapters lay the foundation for those influences in the best way for students studying in the second semester. While really brief, it hits all the key issues students really need, and in these days of students reading less and less (at least at my institution), something that gets the major points across as efficiently as possible is welcome. In addition, I put a general US foreign policy history textbook on reserve in the library (by LaFeber, Patterson, etc.) for students to augment their knowledge on various events in diplomatic history depending on their existing knowledge.

My favorite readings are collections of core primary source documents that almost by themselves, with the proper context, encapsulate most/all of the ideological foundations of US foreign policy throughout its history. Can't name them all here, but starting with John Winthrop's *City Upon a Hill* and Washington's Farewell Address/Jefferson's inaugural speech, through Monroe and Truman Doctrines, Open Door Notes, the Roosevelt Corollary, and George Kennan's Long Telegram/Mr. X Article, even into the Reagan, Bush, and Obama Doctrines (these and multiple others) are the most powerful statements students can get of what US leaders based decisions on and set policy with for the nation.

One novel I like to use in class is *The Quiet American* by Graham Greene (1955) which gives a very engaging look at the transition in Vietnam from French colonial power to US power in the years leading up to the America's war there. The various elements at play in South Vietnam and the intrigue of the story makes it compelling and instructive both at the same time.

In recent years, I've used the following books with good results: *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World*, Frank Lambert (2005); *From Isolation to War 1931-1941*, Justus Doenecke and John Wilz (2015); *The Killing Zone: The US Wages Cold War in Latin America*, Stephen Rabe (2011); *Crisis & Crossfire: The US & the Middle East since 1945*, Peter Hahn (2005); and *The Vietnam War: An International History in Documents*, Mark Atwood Lawrence (2014). Lambert presents a topic usually glossed over in most histories with a few sentences or paragraphs and students do get interested in talk of pirates! Doenecke and Wilz's classic about the leadup to World War II is short, to the point, clearly written, and gives students a great, intense deepdive into the topic. Rabe and Hahn offer students another chance to study more in-depth regions of the world that often get shorter shrift but are of interest to them and often in the news. While I have students read from both books, I let them do a project expanding their knowledge in either Latin America or the Middle East and they can follow their interests. Lawrence's Vietnam text has just the right combination of documents, narrative, and analysis and isn't prohibitively expensive. None of these books are overly costly which matters a lot with my students.

Luke Griffith: In survey courses about U.S. foreign relations at New Mexico Junior College (NMJC), I assign traditional, readable monographs and a textbook. My goals are to introduce students to academic prose and the foundational arguments in the field about important subjects, such as the origins of the Cold War, the U.S. decision to nuke Japan in 1945, and the Americanization of the Vietnam War in winter 1964-1965.

I tend to assign classic monographs in my courses. For instance, I require students to read Melvyn Leffler's *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1953*, an orthodox explanation of why American policymakers feared communism in the early Cold War. To outline the debates about the U.S. atomic bomb decisions in 1945, I assign Wilson Miscamble's *The Most Controversial Decision: Truman, the Atomic Bombs, and the Defeat of Japan*. To shed light on President Lyndon Johnson's thinking about the Vietnam War, I also assign the introduction and conclusion of Fredrik Logevall's *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam*.

In addition, I assign portions of a textbook, David Shi's *America: A Narrative History*. It is a well-written, narrative history, which provides students with the background information that is required to interpret U.S. history.

Justin Hart: I teach the survey of U.S. foreign relations in two halves, breaking at 1914. My favorite book to assign in both halves is what functions as the textbook, the Merrill/Paterson volumes, *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations* (which also conveniently break at World War I). Although now somewhat dated, not having been updated for almost 15 years, these volumes are the only things out there that combine primary documents with different scholarly interpretations of those same documents. *Major Problems* therefore remains essential in teaching students what it means to “do” history, in terms of the way that an evolving secondary literature grows out of individual authors’ engagement with an often-fixed set of primary documents. (n.b. Someone could do the profession a real service by releasing a new edition of this book.)

Alongside *Major Problems*, I also assign 23 supplementary books, both novels and monographs. I have tried various novels, including (of course) *The Quiet American* and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, but my current favorite is Viet Thanh Nguyen’s *The Sympathizer*, which gives a Vietnamese-American perspective on the American war in Vietnam. The monographs that have consistently elicited the best discussions for me are Kristin Hoganson’s *Fighting for American Manhood* for the first half of the survey and Mary Dudziak’s *Wartime* for the second half of the foreign relations survey. Students tend to have a very polarized response to Hoganson; most do not expect to encounter such an explicitly gendered analysis in a foreign relations class and they are often either fascinated or repelled by it, which leads to excellent discussion in either case. *Wartime* elicits equally good discussions, but for the opposite reason, as both conservative and liberal students come together in critiquing the military-industrial complex and endless war from different ends of the political spectrum. In fact, what might be described as a neo-isolationist sensibility among the current generation of students is the most striking attitudinal shift over the twenty-ish years I’ve been teaching U.S. foreign relations—so drastically different than the gung-ho militarism of the immediate post-9/11 period when I started teaching.

Michael E. Neagle: My U.S. foreign relations survey is titled “American Foreign Policy” and covers the 1890s to the present. The course is designed to illustrate how the United States evolved into a global power.

I don’t use a textbook or monographs in large part because students simply didn’t do much of the assigned reading. Over the years, I’ve taken a “less is more” approach. I typically assign shorter readings—articles, essays, op-eds, primary-source documents—but analyze them in greater depth during class discussions. To that end, for many years I used *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations* (Merrill, Paterson, eds.). The selected documents in each chapter were usually edited to a digestible length while preserving the richness of meaning and ideas. The essays often provided differing arguments about a particular issue, which demonstrated to students the importance of interpretation and evidence in historical analysis. In recent years, I’ve shifted my main reader to *America in the World* (Engel, Lawrence, Preston, eds.), which provides much of the same thing as *Major Problems* at a more affordable price. Students seem to appreciate getting different perspectives from each excerpt.

My course readings lean more toward primary sources

than secondary ones to enable students to engage more directly with historical actors and their ideas. Some of the documents that have produced the most fruitful discussions include FDR’s Pearl Harbor address, George Kennan’s Long Telegram, and George W. Bush’s post-9/11 address to Congress. There is a bounty of assumptions contained in these texts—particularly about America’s place in the world and how challengers to that presumption are framed—that I try to help students tease out.

Kimber Quinney: I teach the entire chronology of American foreign relations. The course begins prior to 1776 because we approach early Euro-American and Anglo-American diplomatic relations with indigenous nations as an essential chapter in the history of “American” foreign relations. The course continues to the present (quite literally to the present day sometimes) as a way to underscore the ways in which that history directly and indirectly affects contemporary U.S. foreign policy.

The course begins with the assumption (be it wrong or right) that American foreign policy has historically had three primary goals: to maintain security, to promote prosperity, and to spread American values. I ask students to assess the extent to which those three goals continue to guide foreign policy in the 21st century. We pay particular attention to the relationship between American foreign relations and American democracy, interrogating questions such as: Does a “democratic tradition” exist in the history of U.S. relations with other nations? To what extent does or should the United States promote democracy abroad? What is the relationship between national security and civil liberties at home?

I do not use a textbook, but in recent years I have relied consistently on the following books:

Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, *American Empire: The New Rules of World Order, 1776 to the Present* (2013).

Michael Cox, Timothy J. Lynch, and Nicolas Bouchet, eds., *US Foreign Policy and Democracy Promotion from Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama* (2013)

Lloyd C. Gardner and Marilyn B. Young, eds., *The New American Empire: A 21st Century Teach-In on U.S. Foreign Policy* (2005—we need a new edition!)

Andrew Bacevich, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism* (2008)

John Sbardellati: I am a big fan of the “Major Problems” series, and I always use *Major Problems in American Foreign Relations, Volume II: Since 1914* by Dennis Merrill and Thomas G. Paterson. The selection of documents and secondary sources in each chapter is superb, and I always have more than enough to engage students in discussion. I appreciate that each chapter has at least two secondary source selections, and that these offer students a gateway into the debates that have shaped the field. Sometimes the interpretations put forward in these selections are diametrically opposed to each other, and this creates an opportunity to stage an in-class debate, which students often enjoy since it gets their competitive juices flowing. In other chapters the source selection is more about surveying the range of methodological approaches historians have utilized to study the topic at hand, which is useful in exposing students to the ways in which historians’ methodology influences our understanding of the past. In other words, how history itself is shaped by the questions we choose to ask.



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Years ago I assigned a lot more readings than I do today. Another of my favorite series is "Debating Twentieth-Century America." This series doesn't have a long list of titles, and only a few are specifically on foreign relations, but the volumes are excellent. I especially find the book on FDR's foreign policy—*Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies, 1933-1945*—by Justus Doenecke and Mark Stoler to be superb. I have fond memories of dividing my students into two groups, Doeneckians and Stolerites, and having them engage in rousing debates. As with the "Major Problems" series, this one also includes both secondary sources and a selection of primary documents, but the difference here is that the essays were written specifically for this book rather than being excerpts. They are more comprehensive, and much longer as a result. Each volume in this series is 200+ pages, which is hard to assign to undergraduates these days, especially if this is only covering a week of material in the course.

My US foreign relations course is a single semester standalone class at the 3rd year level. So I don't teach the first half of the US foreign relations survey, but instead I begin in 1898. So I usually have a number of additional readings that I start the course off with since the Merrill & Paterson volume begins in 1914. For example I've often assigned a chapter from Hoganson's *Fighting for American Manhood* which pairs very nicely with just about any speech by Teddy Roosevelt. Next time around I may adopt Hoganson's Bedford Series book *American Empire at the Turn of the Century*, which features a wide array of documents that could lend itself to multiple in-class discussions and even an early semester writing assignment.

2. What is your favorite lecture to give and why? What lecture topic do you dread as it approaches on the syllabus?

LC: I love teaching most of the twentieth century. Students are nearly a blank slate in U.S. foreign relations, so it is all new to them. I feel less confident teaching 9/11 and after. Students often have relatives who fought in Afghanistan or Iraq and it can be difficult to grapple with the complexities of the more modern conflicts.

CF: I'm not good at picking favorites of anything, but I do really enjoy the lecture covering the "freeing" of Panama, the "negotiations" of the Canal Treaty, and the Colombian general spirited across the isthmus on the railroad, all combined with the intrigue of Cromwell and Sullivan, the bluster of TR, and the slapstick of the Marx brothers. I've never done it, but I'd like to find the right film clip of Groucho and his brothers putting something over on someone in one of their film which so well portrays the images these Panamanian events evoke to show students none of whom (usually) know of the great Marx brothers. The reason I like this one in particular is the great story it is which includes so many elements of US policy in Latin America in the late-19th and early-20th centuries and illustrates them in an engaging way. Another lecture topic that's enjoyable for similar reasons is one covering the Open Door Notes.

If there's anything that I dread, it's covering treaties with Native American tribes across a wide spectrum of eras, with the Trail of Tears/Jacksonian years the worst. There are many sad stories in US history, but these are among the worst and I believe it is necessary for students to know the dark sides of history, but that doesn't mean I enjoy teaching them so much.

LG: My favorite lecture to deliver about U.S. foreign relations focuses on the recent U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It builds on my previous lecture about the

U.S. role in the creation of Israel in the 1940s and the Suez Crisis of the 1950s.

I enjoy teaching contemporary U.S. history, including the Trump and Biden administration's policies in Afghanistan and Iraq. It is also a way to connect history to popular culture, such as comedian Will Ferrell's impressions of President George H. W. Bush.

In contrast, I am less enthusiastic about my lecture on the Spanish-American War. It is an important subject—the U.S. acquisition of an overseas empire—but my students grow weary of my emphasis on overseas markets and naval bases. In the spring I will jettison some of the diplomatic context to show how the U.S. media and domestic politics helped to cause the conflict.

JH: My favorite lecture is probably the one titled "The American War in Vietnam," perhaps because it is the subject I know best outside of my own research. It can often be hard to distill one's own research specialty into a survey-sized lecture that does not lose the forest for the trees. With Vietnam, I have a breadth of knowledge unencumbered by the depth gained through a research specialty, so I am able to speak authoritatively without becoming bogged down in endless asides. Regardless of the reason, I enjoy providing the long view in Vietnam, going back to the early 20th century before culminating in the Johnson/Nixon period of peak U.S. involvement.

My least favorite lecture is on the interwar period. Perhaps wrongly, I feel an obligation to cover dollar diplomacy and the politics of isolationism (Neutrality Acts & such) and I struggle to care very much about the Washington system, the Dawes Act, or Gerald Nye and company. I have thought about jettisoning these topics entirely in favor of a straight cultural perspective on these years, but my lecture on the coming of World War II would make far less sense without a base knowledge of the high-level policy-making between the Versailles Treaty and the late 1930s.

MEN: As a course on modern U.S. foreign relations, which I consider to be in my professional wheelhouse, I really enjoy talking about all the topics we address. While some matters are certainly more somber to discuss than others, I think they are all worthwhile as I connect them into the broader story of the United States' rise as a global power. If there were any topics that I did dread, then students surely would, too.

The one lecture/lesson I look forward to most, though, is about the end of the Cold War. In that class, I tap into popular culture. As a child during the Cold War, I never appreciated the depth of complexity and meaning. But looking at it historically, it becomes more evident. I open with a couple of videos: a professional wrestling match between Hulk Hogan and Nikolai Volkoff and the opening scene from the film *Red Dawn*. In both cases, we collectively read the videos like texts and consider how the antagonists reflect popular mid-1980s fears of the Soviet Union as evil and threatening. Over the duration of the class, though, I go over some of the subtle shifts in such views highlighted by the evolving Reagan-Gorbachev relationship that aimed to reduce the threat of nuclear war. I close with the last scene from the film *Rocky IV* in which Rocky Balboa famously asserts after his defeat of Ivan Drago that "everyone can change."

KQ: My favorite lecture is titled "Civil Defense versus Civil Liberties," which I give during our discussion of the Truman administration and McCarthyism. The tension between safeguarding homeland security and protecting

civil liberties has deep roots in American history, and we review that history prior to the late 1940s. Then we delve into the elaborate system of government controls and lack of transparency constructed during the Cold War system created in and justified by secrecy: secret agencies, secret budgets, secret documents, and secret decisions affecting not only issues of war and peace abroad but also freedoms at home.

I dread the lecture on the War of 1812. Even today, scholars suggest that the conflict was “crucial” for the United States, that it left a “profound and lasting legacy” by testing the U.S. Constitution and by revealing the U.S. potential for world power in the economic contest with Great Britain. With all due respect to my colleagues who continue to analyze the War of 1812 and conclude that the war was not motivated by westward expansion, I find the debates about economic warfare with Britain to be a distraction from more interesting and consequential issues: the fate of Tecumseh, the obliteration of the American Indian confederacy, and the devastating implications for any remaining Native American resistance against American encroachment. But, until very recently, historiographical debates seem to have smothered consideration of such issues. Moreover, generally speaking U.S. sources describe the conflicts with Native Americans with a profound lack of empathy and remorse. For these reasons, I find myself embarrassed by the lecture despite my efforts to emphasize what I find to be the most significant long-term impacts of the war.

JS: I enjoy a number of the lectures in this course. I like when I can find a good detail or anecdote that grabs student attention. Like the story about Taft when he was in the Philippines and had reported about riding around for miles on horseback, which provoked Root’s great reply: “how is the horse?” Or LBJ’s quip about the Tonkin Gulf resolution being like “grandma’s nightshirt.” This generation of students can be a tad prudish so I often find myself giving them the PG-13 versions of Johnson’s quotes. Perhaps my favorite lecture in this class is the one on Reagan’s Cold War. The students take a lot of interest in the idea of a “Vietnam syndrome” that may have hemmed in policymakers in the 1980s. And they are usually very interested in learning about the Iran-Contra scandal, especially about Ollie North and his “neat idea.” Most of them confuse the arms-for-hostages part of the scandal with the Iranian hostage crisis that befuddled Carter, so I enjoy clarifying that for them. I also like challenging the pervasive myths that are part of the “Reagan Victory” interpretation, and then really throwing them for a loop when I give Reagan a ton of credit for embracing diplomacy with Gorbachev. But most of all I love my PowerPoint slide that features the 1985 “Ronbo” cartoon from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. The students immediately get the joke with the juxtaposition of Reagan and Rambo, though sadly the Marx Brothers reference completely eludes them.

I don’t have any lectures in this class that I dread giving. But there is one that I’ve never attempted, and that’s the Cuban Missile Crisis. I fear that I can’t do justice to the conflict, that I can’t truly impress on them just how high the tensions rose, and how close things came. So this is one where I turn to film. I think the best one may still be the Cuba episode from the CNN/BBC documentary series on the Cold War. At just under 50 minutes it can be screened in its entirety, and it contains fascinating interviews with figures like Castro and McNamara. Students are often stunned by Castro’s brash dismay over the peaceful resolution of the conflict, and the episode pairs perfectly with the Merrill & Paterson chapter of *Major Problems*.

3. What do you see as your biggest challenges in teaching this generation of students about the history of U.S. foreign relations (or even just in terms of teaching in general)? How have these changed since you began teaching?

LC: I think we all face the challenge of teaching students who struggle with determining the reliability of information. Over the years I have shifted to consciously teaching critical reading skills.

CF: The biggest challenges stem from a couple things: lack of a reading habit—beyond anything longer than a Tweet or Facebook post—and a seemingly powerful disinterest in current events, whether local, regional, national, or international. That’s not to say they don’t have intense interests, they are just so seemingly-inward focused—on the latest TikTok, meme, pop star, athlete, etc.—so getting them motivated beyond that is often very difficult. In some ways, teaching foreign relations in these times of heightened tensions is a bit easier because students do hear/see news, but wars and general conflict does get their attention, showing them the world has a lot going on, some of which can affect their lives directly. In partial proof of these points, when Russia attacked Ukraine, the big question in class was whether the draft would be activated.

The general overall change since I started teaching full-time in the late ‘90s is that an increasing percentage of students over the decades seem to be in college almost only because everyone tells them they need a college degree to get a job. So, they come to college, not really wanting to, with no particular interest in a major—maybe to keep playing their sport—and have no real desire to learn, and no intellectual curiosity so it’s hard to get them engaged much or sometimes even at all. This is true much more in intro-level US surveys than in the diplomatic history classes taken mostly by history majors.

These challenges aren’t unique to diplomatic history of course, nor are the problems of students on electronic devices in class, or using AI to “improve” their papers, but they are changing some of the fundamental ways in which we must teach going forward.

LG: I teach students who are often unprepared for college coursework at NMJC, where my greatest challenge is to maintain student engagement in my courses. In general students from Generation Z have a limited attention span, especially in survey classes. This has always been an issue, but student attention spans have deteriorated since the Pandemic.

Therefore, I employ traditional and creative techniques to keep students focused during class. For instance, I break up lectures with multimedia clips and open-ended discussion questions about every eight minutes. Otherwise, students get bored and cease taking notes. I also make participation in classroom discussion a significant percentage of a student’s grade in the course, which incentivizes participation in Socratic discussion.

JH: I could write a whole separate essay about the larger pedagogical challenges of teaching the current generation of students, so I will restrict my comments to teaching the current generation of history majors about U.S. foreign relations. In another question, I discussed what I would describe as a heightened sense of neo-isolationist sentiment among the current generation of student—a striking departure from the pro-interventionist sentiments of the students who entered my classes a generation ago in the wake of 9/11. I do not find this shift either positive or

negative, per se, but it does make it harder to get students to engage critically with the assumptions that dominated U.S. foreign policy-making from 1941 forward.

I came of age as a teacher trying to provoke students to critically examine the assumptions undergirding the creation of the American empire. Trained in the revisionist tradition of the Wisconsin school, I situated myself as a critic of empire. For whatever reason—perhaps the leftward shift of the college-educated at large, perhaps growing up saturated in the failures of American imperial overreach (most especially in Iraq and Afghanistan), perhaps something else I have not yet identified—I find that fewer students today push back against my interpretation of U.S. foreign relations. This makes my central goal as a teacher—stimulating critical thinking—a greater challenge than I used to find it.

MEN: In general, there seems to be less curiosity or willingness to engage ideas that run counter to preconceived notions. Many students figure they can simply Google what happened and that suffices as historical understanding. I impress upon such students the importance of differing interpretations and questions, that How and Why are sometimes more important than What or Who.

My teaching challenge is compounded by the fact that I work at a business-oriented college. There is a great deal of institutional emphasis on preprofessional training and less attention paid to the development of broader, critical-thinking skills and appreciating wider contexts. Moreover, much like at other schools, the History major here was phased out, so there are fewer students seeking upper-level, advanced courses in History like my U.S. foreign relations course.

KQ: This generation of students seem to have been raised on U.S. exceptionalism. They take the nation for granted; they expect that the United States will remain forever powerful and democratic. As a consequence, they find it difficult to imagine how history might have unfolded differently. And they cannot conceive that the United States' reputation as the "city on a hill" and a global beacon of light is not entirely deserved or might be extinguished.

Another (and I think related) challenge is the general lack of interest among students in tracking down sources (and the sources of those sources). This is partly due to the digital age and their obsession with social media. But something else is happening. Students are quick to jump to interpretations about events without evidence. Moreover, at least in my corner of the country, in this moment of "post-truth America," students are profoundly disillusioned with the very concept of "historical truth." As one of my students wrote recently:

I used to think I knew what historical truth meant. I really did. "America is the greatest country ever,"—I thought that was a truth for quite some time. . . . But now I am sitting here behind my monitor, and I am just rather cross about the whole situation. I don't feel like I can do anything, school is making me upset, articles are opinion pieces, I no longer feel like I can adequately convey a message anymore without having to seriously neuter it. So when it comes to defining historical truth, I can't. It seems that people don't want truth, they want to be on the right side of history.

JS: Everywhere I've taught I have found that students appreciate the importance of this history. For the past 15

years I worked in Canada, and the students there certainly have an appreciation for the consequential role that US foreign policy plays on the world stage. Now that I am returning to teaching in the US, I am curious to see if American students today still grasp the significance of our field. I am very curious to see how well these classes fill, and how much of this history will be familiar to students already.

I think that the challenges I face in teaching this current generation of students are more general in nature, as opposed to being specific to the field. I find students today to be bright and engaged. Last semester I taught my foreign policy course for the first time in several years, and I found the students to be very perceptive in their analysis of primary documents. But many of them struggled to comprehend the secondary sources. Those who actually did the reading could give decent answers to factual questions, and in their answers they could pull from information they read in the essays. But they tended to struggle with more interpretive questions, especially ones that asked them to identify and evaluate the arguments of the various authors they read that week. If I made any headway in improving their comprehension of secondary sources it was only by placing them in small groups, each tasked with spotting the author's argument and tracing some of the evidentiary claims. Ten or twelve years ago I could assign hefty reading lists, and though certainly not all of the students would have read everything that was assigned, enough of them were able to glean the main points.

4. Do you use film in your teaching of U.S. foreign relations? If so, what are your favorites and why? If not, what precludes you from doing so?

LC: I recently taught a U.S. Nuclear History in Film class. Sixteen films in sixteen weeks. Students knew very little about nuclear weapons/power. They wrote particularly effectively about *Fail Safe*, *Dr. Strangelove*, *Meltdown: Three Mile Island*, *War Games*, *Chernobyl: The Lost Tapes*, and, most powerfully, *The Day After*.

In a non-film course, I often use movies, especially documentaries. For example, in my U.S. and Vietnam class, I like to show *The Fog of War*, *Two Days in October*, and *The Movement and the "Madman"*.

CF: I have used film to teach history, but not diplomatic history specifically. My grad advisor's favorite films for diplomatic history were *Fort Apache* and *Casablanca*. Of course, *Casablanca* illustrates the complex national (and personal) relationships of the World War era and gives a strong nod to the future Cold War as well. *Fort Apache* was a metaphor, my advisor said, for the Cold War world. I think a course using all the James Bond 007 movies in sequence would be a great film class for examining global foreign relations (not just US, although the US is often a partner to MI6 and Bond, of course).

One drawback is the length of classes vs. that of films. I have offered a once-a-week class of films and history generally that's long enough to watch most films and engage afterwards to highlight points and messages. Assigning films to be watched outside of class is tough because everyone doesn't have equal access to them, and frankly, it seems much harder to get discussions going about almost anything in classes these days, including films. Lack of student participation in conversation about the films really takes the enjoyment out of using them. Otherwise, I would likely use them more.

LG: I like to show clips of films in the classroom. It presents

auditory and visual learners with a different way to be successful in my course, and it teaches students the skill of critical analysis. I encourage students to consider film an important type of primary source, meaning that they should consider its bias, audience, context, and purpose.

I enjoy showing clips of films about the Vietnam War for a few reasons. First, I highlight the evolution of U.S. films about the conflict. From *The Green Berets* to *The Deer Hunter*, filmmakers tended to reflect America's waning support for the war. In addition, I show portions of movies that deal with important subjects in the Vietnam War, such as *Full Metal Jacket's* depiction of the Johnson administration's Progress Campaign and *Apocalypse Now's* suggestion that the conflict was about Western imperialism.

JH: Although I use films extensively in my specialty courses, which I will discuss below, I rarely use films in teaching U.S. foreign relations surveys. This has to do, perhaps ironically, with my graduate training in teaching history through film. To put it bluntly, I do not believe in using film simply to illustrate a point that I could otherwise explain in lecture. I only want to introduce films if they can be critically interrogated as both primary as well as secondary sources. And this takes time—time that limits how much attention I can devote to other subjects. It can also require comparing multiple films against each other, as well as assigning readings about the films. I find that it simply takes too much time in the foreign relations survey course to teach film the way I want to, which is why I created a course at Texas Tech entitled U.S. Foreign Relations through Film—so that I could engage with films about foreign relations in the way I want to pedagogically.

MEN: In addition to the film clips that I use for my End of the Cold War lesson, I bring in other videos on occasion. I find it beneficial for students to hear different voices and get visuals of the people and places under consideration. For that reason, I generally favor documentaries, although I have used works of fiction on occasion, like the original *Manchurian Candidate* to illustrate fears of communism in the 1960s.

My favorite documentaries to use in my classes include *Why We Fight* (Jarecki) about the military-industrial complex in the early days of the War on Terror, as well as *Restrepo* (Hetherington/Junger) about a U.S. Army outpost in Afghanistan. Both films register deeply with students and tend to produce excellent discussions. I also like to use episodes from PBS's *Frontline* series, particularly in a related course I teach about the War on Terror. Some of the most useful installments for what I do include programs on "The Torture Question" (2005), "The Secret History of ISIS" (2016), and "Once Upon a Time in Iraq" (2020).

KQ: I used to assign fictionalized films such as *The Patriot*, *Hunt for Red October*, and *Flags of Our Fathers*. But I found that students didn't watch these films critically; they weren't concerned with assessing their historical accuracy and authenticity, despite my encouragement to do so!

More recently, I have turned to documentaries such as *Why We Fight*, *Fog of War*, and *No End in Sight*. Students seem better able to recognize that documentaries have biases, and they are more responsive to my invitations to challenge a film's arguments and evidence.

JS: Oh yes, I certainly do use film! In fact I teach a whole class on Hollywood's Cold War films. That course is essentially a class on American Cold War culture, and it uses feature films, most of them completely fictional, as windows into the cultural landscape of Cold War America. So the whole

class is aimed at introducing students to the ways that filmmakers and audiences understood and negotiated the shifting terrains of the Cold War struggle, and how film played a significant role in reflecting, interpreting, and even shaping American national identity in this era. I include many of the films you would expect to be in this class, like *Dr. Strangelove* and *The Manchurian Candidate*. I especially enjoy screening *Strangelove* because the vast majority of the students today have no familiarity with this film at all. Years ago many students were familiar with the iconic shots, especially Major Kong riding the missile, but these days the students have no idea that this is coming, and are truly shocked by the ending of the film. They also really find amusing the scene of President Muffley on the phone with Premier Kissev, and how it devolves into an argument over who is sorrier.

Probably because I teach a separate class on film and the Cold War, I do not use fictional films in my other foreign relations course. I do make use of documentaries in these classes, however. In my foreign relations survey, in addition to the "Cuba" episode from the Cold War series mentioned above, I have often shown the 1982 film *The Atomic Café*, which is still an engaging film that is hilariously funny in spots, but also effective in presenting the dark and dangerous aspects of the early Cold War. For my Vietnam Wars class, despite the recent Ken Burns series, I still find *Vietnam: A Television History* (the PBS documentary series from the early 1980s) to be the most compelling. There are several other documentaries that I screen parts of, but one that I show in its entirety in this class is another PBS American Experience film called *Two Days in October*. This film presents a stunning juxtaposition of battlefield and home front in October 1967, and the students are captivated by the oral histories with the former soldiers, students, and police.

5. On what topic do you find that your students agree with you the most on the history of U.S. foreign relations? On which topic do you disagree the strongest with your students?

LC: My students are particularly alarmed at the number of U.S. interventions, overt and covert, as I am. One way we often disagree is that they think the United States should step away from international obligations, treaties, and organizations like the United Nations.

CF: I have disappointingly little sense of whether my students agree or disagree with me on US foreign relations history to be honest. So few of them speak up that it's almost impossible to tell what they think. There has been some discussion and disagreement among students over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, but that's between whether Israel is committing genocide, etc., not about agreeing with me or not. However, I would say generally, they do seem to agree, and begin to see the world a little differently during and after the course.

LG: It is difficult to determine if students agree with my narrative in a course, but students at NMJC tend to accept my overarching arguments about U.S. imperialism in Latin America. I discuss American economic and political imperialism in the Americas during my lectures about the Spanish-American War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. NMJC is a Hispanic-Serving Institution, and many of my students were raised abroad, where they witnessed American imperialism firsthand.

On the other hand, students tend to push back on my explanation about Western policy at the Munich Conference in 1938, when Westerners appeased Chancellor

Adolf Hitler. The conventional argument about Munich, of course, is that the West missed an opportunity to confront Hitler. In contrast, British, French, and American officials were not in a position to stand firm in 1938 with the Great Depression at home. They were also elected public officials in democracies, where voters were quite weary of war. It is not a popular argument, but I want students to grapple with a different interpretation of the Munich Conference and the onset of World War II.

JH: As mentioned previously, I have found that students agree with my perspective on U.S. foreign relations more today than they did when I began teaching, but one topic where I do provide a perspective most of them have not heard before is when I teach the Texas Revolution in the first half of the foreign relations survey. Almost all of them have been indoctrinated (if that is the right word) in Texas nationalism, not only through living in the state, but also by the public school curriculum that devotes an entire year of study (7th grade) to a patriotic history of Texas. Having not gone through this experience myself, I find myself in the odd position of sometimes knowing less than my students about the details of the history itself, while also providing an imperialist interpretation of the Texas Revolution that sounds deeply alien to most of them. Students tend to respond in very polarized ways to that lecture. Some eat it up, like encountering a wonderful new food for the first time; others have no time for my perspective whatsoever, which is fine.

I think the lecture where students agree most with my interpretation is with the American War in Vietnam. Most of them have been taught to think of Vietnam as the greatest disaster in the history of U.S. foreign policy, but few of them have a sense of the deep roots of that conflict. They seem to be grateful for gaining a greater understanding of how things went so wrong and why Vietnam was such a disaster.

MEN: For the most part, students agree that the United States has had an overbearing influence around the world over the last century or so. The most common point of contention, though, is whether that's been a good thing. Students tend to consider American influence to be benign or even beneficial to other places around the world. Personally, I am much more circumspect.

Yet I try not to get students to agree or disagree with my interpretations. Rather, I prefer to give them space to figure it out for themselves. I emphasize that while their arguments can certainly vary, they should nonetheless be grounded in specific evidence to support that position. If they ask me directly for my opinion, I'll give it to them so long as it's not an assignment question. I don't want to come across as too coy, and I want the explanations of my own positions to reflect the same evidence-supported framework that I ask of them. But I'd much rather students come to their own conclusions. My work is more geared toward helping them to get there.

KQ: My students and I are in close agreement with regard to expansion of presidential power and its negative impact on U.S. foreign policy. No matter where they might find themselves on the political spectrum, they all seem concerned that the power of the presidency interferes with the system of checks and balances in many ways especially with regard to decision-making and the implementation of U.S. foreign policies.

My students are far less likely to agree with me about the relationship between national security and civil liberties. For instance, when I make the argument in my favorite

lecture (!) that prioritizing national security has the potential to threaten civil liberties, such as those identified in our Bill of Rights, they aren't nearly as concerned as I am about that threat. I guess I'll have to keep giving the lecture!

JS: Interesting question. I think without being uncritical of FDR and his handling of foreign policy, I tend to give him pretty high marks, even in those moments when he is doing the most juggling and dissembling. I guess I am outing myself as a "Stolerite!" I think the students generally concur.

As for areas where we most disagree, well, good Fred Logevall student that I am, I tend to stress Johnson's unique culpability for the Vietnam War, but the students, perhaps by virtue of the structure of the course, still gravitate toward the idea that each link in the decision-making chain from Truman's choice to fund the French war through Johnson's choice to Americanize the war was of equal importance.

However, the biggest disagreement I've had with my students occurred just this past semester during the class discussion on the Nixon years. I started with an icebreaker activity where I asked the students to construct a "Nixinger" scorecard, listing the successes and failures of the Nixon and Kissinger foreign policy record. They listed all the expected items, placing the opening to China and détente on the success side, and the extending of the Vietnam war, the secret bombing of Cambodia, the intervention in Chile on the failure side, but then when I pressed them to give "Nixinger" a grade, I was shocked that most of them landed in the B+/A range. And I felt really old when they had no idea that "Nixinger" was a play on the practice of joining the names of celebrity couples. They'd never heard of Bennifer or Brangelina as being a thing!

6. What specialty courses in the history of U.S. foreign relations (e.g. Vietnam War, Global Cold War) do you most enjoy teaching and why?

LC: I teach U.S.: 1914-1945, U.S. during the Cold War, U.S. Nuclear History in Film, U.S. and Cuba, and U.S. and Vietnam. I would teach an even wider range of courses if I had the time. I enjoy teaching them all, but the newest one, Nuclear History in Film, which I taught Fall 2023, was incredibly rewarding.

CF: In the last decade+ there has been little opportunity to teach much diplomatic history beyond an upper-level two semester diplomatic history sequence in our little 2-person department. In the past however, I did enjoy teaching a Vietnam War class because students who took it seemed generally interested in it, because they knew so little about it, and often have a family member who served. The most enjoyable classes are the ones that include the most engaged students. But the Vietnam War, in particular, brings so many different elements of Cold War US diplomacy into play that it is an especially good topic for teaching that complexity.

LG: I am a junior faculty member at a junior college, so I have not been able to teach specialty courses about U.S. foreign relations...yet. However, I am developing two new classes—U.S. History Since 1945 and U.S. History in the 1960s—that emphasize America's role in the world. In U.S. History Since 1945, I will focus on the global Cold War and American great power competition with Russia and the People's Republic of China. In U.S. History in the 1960s, I will examine America's war in Vietnam and its empire-building in the Third World.

JH: I teach two specialty courses on the history of U.S. foreign relations: The Cold War and U.S. Foreign Relations through Film. I have taught the Cold War course in several ways over my 20 years in the profession. For many years, I used a Westad-style approach to the history of the Global Cold War. But more recently, I have gone in the other direction entirely, teaching it as a history of the domestic culture of the Cold War, in which almost all the readings are fiction. In this current iteration of the course, I have assigned a variety of books, from creative nonfiction like John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and Kenzaburo Oe's *Hiroshima Notes*, to plays like Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour*, to classic works like *Catch-22*, *The Quiet American*, and *The Ugly American*, to less conventional choices such as E. L. Doctorow's *Book of Daniel*, Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*, and Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Sympathizer*. Each time I have taught the course in this format, I have closed with the graphic novel *Watchmen*, which I would argue is the greatest work of fiction written about the American Cold War.

My other specialty course is U.S. Foreign Relations through Film, which is a course I created because I could not find a way to do justice to the teaching of film in the foreign relations survey courses. After an introductory methodological unit on how to view films as both primary and secondary sources (an approach I wrote about in the April 2016 issue of *Passport*), I proceed with units on World War I, World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam, and the War on Terror. I combine lectures on U.S. foreign relations with readings on the films we watch to provide the genesis for class discussions. I also assign Tim O'Brien's novel *The Things They Carried* to allow students to compare the fictional storytelling modes of books with films. Students have expressed particular appreciation for the methodological approach of the course, more so than the content, although they do enjoy the films as well. This is by far my most popular course. It nearly always fills to the cap.

MEN: For the last ten years, I've taught a popular course here about the War on Terror. Multiple sections of the class routinely fill each semester. Students seem to have the most interest in the topic because it encompasses their lived memories. Many of them have a vague sense of the conflict but appreciate going into more depth and complexity about it. Students' interest and enthusiasm for the topic is energizing.

Nevertheless, it is a challenging course to teach because of so many new developments. For instance, when I first started teaching the class, ISIS was hardly known. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 prompted significant revisions to my coverage of the U.S.-Afghan War. And as of 2024, by the FBI's own admission, the threat of terrorism has morphed—less about Muslim extremists abroad and more about right-wing white nationalists at home. My class has had to account for all these changes over the years so that it looks very different from when I first taught it.

The first iterations of the course, though, inspired my book project, *Chasing Bandits: America's Long War on Terror*, that is nearing completion. The study considers other twentieth-century episodes in which the United States pursued private foreign individuals we would now call "terrorists" to demonstrate that the War on Terror is not really new in U.S. history. Moreover, I argue that these challengers were useful in justifying broader American imperial designs. I wrote the book with undergraduates in mind and will look to use it in future designs of my course.

KQ: I teach a course on the domestic impact of the Cold War. The course starkly conveys how the objectives of

U.S. Cold War foreign policy undermined the protection and promotion of civil liberties at home. I enjoy teaching the course because so many different institutions (from the federal government to colleges and high schools) and attitudes (such as perceptions of immigrants, labor union activists, and civil rights activists as "agitators") were shaped by this tension between promoting democracy abroad and denying it to Americans at home.

JS: I teach two specialty courses connected to US foreign relations, "Hollywood's Cold War" and "The Vietnam Wars." I enjoy both, though for very different reasons. The film class allows me to expose students to several truly great movies that they otherwise would probably never see. Films like *On the Waterfront*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Three Days of the Condor*, and the aforementioned *Dr. Strangelove*. On the other hand, I feel compelled to include some titles due to their historical significance, and their usefulness to the course material, even if they are films that I truly dread watching. I am thinking especially of *My Son John* and *Red Dawn*. I have taught other "history & film" classes but I especially like the thematic cohesiveness of this class. What struck me most when putting it together for the first time was the way that gender became the overriding theme in the course. This was not intentional when selecting the films at all. Certainly some were chosen to highlight gender as a conceptual category in analyzing American Cold War culture, such as "momism" in *My Son John* and *The Manchurian Candidate*. But other films that I selected to highlight other aspects of Cold War culture, whether *Strangelove* and fears of nuclear Armageddon, *Ninotchka* and the appeal of capitalist consumerism, or *Red Dawn* and 1980s return of Cold War fears, all communicated their themes with a palpable emphasis on gender, specifically masculinity. I think that's really interesting.

As for my Vietnam course, it may be my favorite one to lecture in. This is because unlike any other course I teach, this one truly picks up the "story" from precisely where it left off in the previous lecture. I feel like this draws the students in more, and they ask more perceptive questions during the lectures which suggests perhaps a higher level of engagement in the subject matter. And I think that students still recognize the importance of the US war in Vietnam. They know it's a seminal moment in modern American history. It is also the class that I have revised the most. When I first taught it I gave rather cursory coverage to the French war, and I have to admit I didn't give adequate coverage to the Vietnamese side of the struggle in either war. It really was simply a class on the American experience in the Vietnam War, but though that remains a core part of the class, I am glad that I've internationalized it much more, and I believe the students are as well. It is also one of the most difficult classes I teach, especially because I use a fair bit of documentary film, much of which is very graphic. Rather than being desensitized after watching the same images of real people suffering and dying, I think it becomes harder and harder every time I teach the class. But I refuse to present the students with a sanitized history of the war.

7. How can SHAFR do more to support the teaching of U.S. foreign relations—whether at the annual conference, in its publications, or otherwise?

LC: This is a tough one, and something I have thought a great deal about. What might work at a research university may not fit for a state school or community college. I think access to syllabi from folks at all levels might be helpful. Also, perhaps sharing some recorded class sessions. Not just lectures, but engaging classes that include interesting ways to grapple with primary sources, or perhaps Reacting

to the Past examples.

CF: As far as what SHAFR can do, it should keep doing what it's been doing: have the teaching committee and panels on teaching at the annual conference, have articles in *Passport* about teaching, maintain the syllabus library, etc. The important thing is to keep offering these resources so they remain available to the new folks entering the field all the time.

If there was something to be done to make the general citizenry more aware of the importance of studying and learning from the history of foreign relations, I would suggest that, but it's hard to break through all the media noise these days—more than ever it seems—to make that point. Maybe if more people recognized the value of its lessons, more people would want to learn its history to find that wisdom (or folly). This might take the concerted action of all the history societies in the nation together to get citizens' attention, but should be worth the effort.

LG: I would like to see SHAFR devote additional focus at its annual conference to pedagogy. I would benefit from the opportunity to listen to established scholars talk about effective approaches in survey and upper-level history courses. I would also seek their counsel about balancing research, teaching, and family life, especially during the early phases of my academic career.

JH: As the cochair of the SHAFR teaching committee, I'll refrain from answering this question myself and simply look forward to reading the responses of others who participate in this forum.

MEN: Forums like this are certainly helpful. SHAFR conferences and publications are (understandably) mostly geared toward scholarship. But not all SHAFR members are at R1 or R2 institutions. For those of us at smaller, teaching-oriented schools who are not actively working on a scholarly book or article, it can feel like we don't have anything to contribute. I would encourage more panels and roundtables about the challenges of teaching and student engagement to help develop more and better ideas about effective learning.

KQ: So, here goes: I think we need to more explicit about our aim to seek out, identify, and describe historical truths not only in our scholarship but also in the way we teach history.

I know that sounds simplistic or even naive. But in this moment of political division and self-censorship, of "false news" and disinformation, of artificial intelligence and artificial facts, it is vital for scholars and educators, and for the institutions and associations where they ply their trade, to stand up for the idea that historical truth, while it may be elusive, is something worth pursuing.

One of George Orwell's most often quoted kernels of wisdom goes as follows: "During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act." As it happens, Orwell didn't really say this. Although often attributed to Orwell, the observation is actually a corruption of a sentence written by Antonio Gramsci in the Italian weekly newspaper *L'Ordine Nuovo* (*The New Order*) in 1919: "To tell the truth, to arrive together at the truth, is a communist and revolutionary act." But when a mistake is repeated often enough, it becomes accepted as the truth.

Of course, Orwell did write a lot about history and truth. Reflecting on the Spanish Civil War in 1943, Orwell recounted the ways in which propaganda and falsehoods in

Spanish newspapers began to push aside truthful accounts: "This kind of thing is frightening to me," he admitted,

because it often gives me the feeling that the very concept of objective truth is fading out of the world. After all, the chances are that those lies, or at any rate similar lies, will pass into history. . . . Yet, after all, some kind of history will be written, and after those who actually remember the war are dead, it will be universally accepted. So for all practical purposes the lie will have become the truth.

I would like for SHAFR to do more to support the teaching of hard truths, to do whatever it can to continue to keep the lie from becoming the truth.

JS: Well I really appreciated that last year's SHAFR conference had a panel on teaching. I found the whole panel to be informative and stimulating, and I was especially influenced by Brian Etheridge's talk on role-playing pedagogy. I have long been intrigued by the idea of incorporating gaming into my teaching, and several times have considered trying one of the "Reacting to the Past" role-playing games in one of my courses. Invariably I would give it very serious consideration, and then chicken out. The published games are daunting in that it seems that to do them right you have to dedicate several weeks or more to the activity, and that has always been a deterrent. But at this SHAFR panel Etheridge discussed a shorter, single-session game on the Morgenthau Plan that he was developing, and later he very generously shared his materials with me to try out in my class last semester.

The game was a huge success! It was really the highlight of the class in terms of student engagement. The role-playing element encouraged some of the shyer students to step out of their shells a bit. Students were furnished with role sheets for each of the "players" in the game, such as Roosevelt, Morgenthau, Hull, Stimson, Welles, etc. Some of them really hammed it up! More importantly it gave them a window into the messiness of the policy and decision-making process, and into how political factors and personal rivalries can shape decision-making as much or even more than the nuts and bolts of the problem at hand. Etheridge also designed the game to be a lesson on the importance of having inclusive environments for decision-making.

I would love to see SHAFR encourage the further development of innovative pedagogy such as this, whether more historical role-playing games, or other types of engaging lesson plans that captivate student interest in our field.