

*College of William & Mary
Government 327, Fall 2021*

Theory & History in International Relations
(or: Why everything you think you know about IR might be wrong!)

Prof. Maurits van der Veen

Class

TuTh, 9:30-10:50 am
Location: 123 Chancellor Hall
Office hours: in person or on Zoom, by appointment

Office

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Course description

What is international relations, and how do we theorize about it? Most introductions to international relations concentrate on relations between states, and motivate our theoretical frameworks by appealing to universal characteristics of people, states and the way they interact.

However, both the notion that international relations is primarily about states and the idea that states have characteristics that are universal (both over time and across space) are simply, undeniably **wrong**. This course delves into some (but hardly all) of the ways and reasons they are wrong, with the aim of developing a more nuanced and critical understanding of what international relations, past and present, were/are actually like, and of the origins and blind spots of our theories. Towards the end of the course, we apply this improved understanding to an analysis of what international relations is likely to look like in the near future.

How and why are common beliefs about international relations wrong? First, because they derive from a very limited set of historical examples: the post-Westphalian (and especially post-Napoleonic) history of Western Europe looms very large in motivating and grounding our thinking about international relations. In the first part of the course, we will examine the nature and meaning of “international relations” in other parts of the world and at other times in history.

Next, we tend to think of our standard theories about international relations as being abstract, derived from some basic (and, again, universal) principles: anarchy, self-interest, human nature, etc. But no theory is birthed in a vacuum. Much of our theoretical toolkit dates back to the first half of the twentieth century, and the world at that time did **not** look like a world constructed from those basic principles. Instead, it was a world in which race and hierarchy were central. Unsurprisingly, and problematically, this had important repercussions for our theories.

Race, racism, and hierarchy remain central in international relations today, only their presence and impact is often not just ignored, but simply not seen. This is due in no small part to the shortcomings of our theoretical toolkit. Over the past century, many scholars have worked to expand this toolkit, often only to be ignored themselves. There is no shortage of exciting recent

scholarship along these lines, and we will read some, to help guide our discussions about how IR theorizing should change, given both its empirical and theoretical shortcomings.

Finally, we will turn to the near future: How is international relations likely to change in an increasingly online world? And how can the insights we have developed in the course be used to improve our answers to this question?

In a recent article about the study of international relations, Francis Gavin argued that “We desperately need not only answers but new ways of thinking about, framing, and analyzing the most important global questions” (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/20/its-never-been-a-better-time-to-study-international-relations-trump-foreign-policy/>). This is so because the world around us appears to change ever more rapidly; it is also so because our existing theories of international relations often seem stale and needlessly abstract.

If we really want to understand international relations better, we need a better sense of where our current theories come from, as well as a critical approach to thinking about how a changing world might demand revisions. Or, perhaps, as some have argued, we simply need a recognition that what seems new to us today is largely the continuation of long-standing patterns that simply have been unrecognized or ignored for too long.

The overall goal of the course is to help you become well-informed, critical consumers of international relations theories and arguments, conscious of where those theories come from and how they might help or hinder us in thinking about international relations today. In addition, you will be able to engage in well-informed and sophisticated debate regarding the implications of the internet for what international relations look like.

COVID-19

A year and a half into the pandemic, there is still a lot of uncertainty about the safest and best ways to provide a good classroom experience. My goal is to do everything I can to contribute to everyone staying healthy and being able to participate fully in the class. In particular:

1. We currently have an indoor mask mandate. But if the College decides to lift this mandate over the course of the semester, I will not stop wearing a mask, and I request that all of you continue masking too. We cannot know everyone’s health status and that of those close to them: not everyone can be vaccinated, for instance (I have two children under 12 who as of now cannot), and the best we can do to protect everyone’s health is to continue to wear masks indoors.
2. If you experience COVID-19 symptoms during the semester, you should make an appointment with the Student Health Center or a private healthcare provider for a clinical assessment and testing if necessary. If you test positive or are identified as close contacts, you must complete the form at *Report COVID* to initiate case management that will assist with isolation requirements and help you navigate classes and study. Moreover, I will work with you to make sure that you

will miss as little as possible during your absence from class, and that you will not be penalized if you cannot do an assignment on time.

3. If I myself experience COVID-19 symptoms or am required to isolate because of close contact with someone who has COVID, or if a campus-wide outbreak forces a return to online course delivery for everyone, we will switch to Zoom, but no other aspects of the course will change.

Course requirements

This course is about thinking critically about the world around us and how we understand it. You will not learn to think critically by simply listening to me lecture. Therefore, the most important requirements are: 1) come to class prepared by doing (and thinking about!) the assigned readings, and 2) participate in class discussions. As one measure of participation, and an added incentive to do the readings before class, there will be 5 unannounced quizzes, based on the readings for that day. Each quiz is worth 2% of your grade, for a total of 10%. Participation in class (judged in terms of quality, not quantity) is worth another 15% (for a combined total, with quizzes, of 25% of your grade).

Class discussions are crucial opportunities to get clarifications about any questions raised in the readings, to critically analyze the material covered in the readings and lectures, and to share your own ideas and insights. Your participation will not just improve your own learning; it also helps that of all your fellow students.

Additional requirements are a class presentation, two short papers, and a 10-12 page final paper in lieu of a final exam. Detailed information about each of these assignments will be provided later; here I give a brief overview.

For the class presentation, you will select one of the recommended articles on the syllabus, and give a brief presentation about your article at the start of class, so we can incorporate it in our discussion. This accounts for 10% of your grade. The two short papers will take the form of op-eds, and are due October 14th and November 18th. Each is worth 15% of your grade. In them, you will make an argument about how other histories than the standard/mythical ones (1st op-ed) and the centrality of race and hierarchy in IR as it actually exists (2nd op-ed) should make us think about a current IR issue in a new light.

The paper will be worth 35% of your overall grade, and will be due on the first Monday after classes end, December 13th. It will take the form of a policy brief arguing how insights from history, combined with a theoretical approach that takes race and hierarchy seriously, can help in thinking about an aspect of United States foreign policy making. For the paper, you may opt to expand upon one of your op-eds, or choose a different topic altogether.

Finally, you have the opportunity to boost your participation grade by one full letter grade, by any combination of 8 of the following “assignments”:

- Online discussion: At least once a week I will post one or more discussion questions, related to the required or recommended readings, on our class discussion board. Make a

- thoughtful contribution to the ensuing discussion
- Over the course of the semester, I will identify several outside speakers or events relevant to our course. Attend such an event and write a brief comment/response on the discussion board for that particular event
 - Participate in the Government department omnibus survey. More details will follow.

Any combination of these three options summing to 8 gets you credit. In fact, all of them are great ways to think about and apply our course material beyond the classroom, so I highly encourage you participate in them even if you do not feel you need extra credit.

Additional policies & comments

In order to minimize indoor interactions, I will not have regular office hours this semester. However, I am more than happy to chat after class, and to set up meetings either over Zoom or in person, outside (weather permitting). Please do get in touch if you have any questions on the reading material, the class discussions, the presentation or writing assignments, or the course in general. To make an appointment, just email me or see me before or after class.

If you need an extension on your written assignments, let me know in advance, and I will almost certainly grant it. Unapproved late submissions of the op-ed or the final paper will be penalized one half of a full grade per day. In addition, failure to complete any single component of the course (never showing up to class, missing all quizzes, not doing a presentation, or not submitting one of the written assignments) will result in failing the course — in other words, you cannot make up for it by excelling in all other components.

If you feel you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis, please contact the Student Accessibility Services staff at sas@wm.edu to determine what accommodations make sense and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. In addition, it would be most helpful to me if you could also reach out to me directly, so that together we can work out something that will work for you.

Finally, I take violations of academic honesty very seriously. All academic work must meet the standards set out in the Honor Code. In particular, if you cheat on a test or commit plagiarism on your paper and I discover it, I will report the violation to the Dean's office, with all the potential repercussions that implies. The work you submit must be your own — not that of a fellow student, nor that of someone whose work you found in the library or online.

Readings

There are no required books to purchase for the course. All readings are, or will be, available online: on Blackboard, at a given URL, or through the Electronic Journals feature of the W&M library website. If you are unable to access a particular reading, please ask someone (a fellow student, a librarian, or me)!

Calendar

Readings (marked with bullet points) are listed below the date of each class. Be sure to read them prior to our class meeting. The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

I. Introduction

Thu. Sep. 2 ***Introduction to the course***

- van der Valk, Leendert (2021). “The first African Americans were traded under the Dutch flag.” (on Blackboard)

Read this article and reflect on what international relations looked like four hundred years ago. How different is this (if at all) from what international relations look like today? And how well do our standard international relations theories serve us in trying to think about and understand early 17th century international relations?

Recommended: a quick recap of standard IR theory debates

- Snyder, Jack. 2004. One World, Rival Theories. *Foreign Policy*, 145: 53-62.
- Lake, David. 2013. “Theory is dead, long live theory: The end of the Great Debates and the rise of eclecticism in International Relations.” *European Journal of International Relations*, 19(3): 567-587.

II. International Relations in History

Tue. Sep. 7 ***IR and the Pelopponesian War***

- Gady, Franz-Stefan. 2017. “Hey policy wonks: This is how you should read Thucydides.” *The Diplomat* (<https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/hey-policy-wonks-this-is-how-you-should-read-thucydides/>)
- Kirshner, Jonathan. 2018. “Handle him with care: The importance of getting Thucydides right.” *Security Studies* 28(1): 1-24.

Recommended

- Knutsen, Torbjørn L. 2021. “Ancient Greece: War, peace and diplomacy in antiquity.” Pp. 389-397 in Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*.

Thu. Sep. 9 ***The Steppe Tradition***

In lieu of reading the book directly, read these 2 book reviews & a response to reviewers (on Blackboard)

- White, Jenny. 2020. “The enduring appeal of autocrats.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(6): 925-930.
- Spruyt, Hendrik. 2020. “The longue durée and the impact of the Eurasian Steppe.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(6): 950-956.
- Neumann, Iver B., and Einar Wigen. 2020. “Response to reviewers: The Steppe Tradition in International Relations.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33(6): 957-961.

If you have time, I very much recommend the introduction & conclusion of the book (available through Swem online)

- Neumann, Iver B., and Einar Wigen. 2020. *The Steppe Tradition in International Relations*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
 - Introduction (pp. 1-25)
 - Conclusion (pp. 252-267)

Tue. Sep. 14 ***International relations in ancient China***

- Hui, Victoria Tin-Bor. 2021. “Pre-modern Asia and international relations theory.” Pp. 181-191 in Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*.

Recommended

- Hui, Victoria Tin-Bor. 2004. “Toward a dynamic theory of international politics: Insights from comparing ancient China and early modern Europe.” *International Organization* 58: 175-205.

Thu. Sep. 16 ***International relations in early modern China***

- Spruyt, Hendrik. 2020. *The World Imagined*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
 - Chapter 4: “Gathering all under heaven: East Asian collective beliefs and international society.” Pp. 83-132. (on Blackboard)

Recommended

- Kang, David C. 2006. “Hierarchy in Asian international relations, 1300-1900.” *Asian Security*, 1(1): 53-79.

Tue. Sep. 21 ***International relations in the early modern Islamic World***

- Spruyt, Hendrik. 2020. *The World Imagined*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
 - Chapter 6: “Lords of the auspicious conjunction: The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires and the Islamic ecumene.” Pp. 167-213. (on Blackboard)

Recommended

- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. 2006. “A tale of three empires: Mughals, Ottomans, and Habsburgs in a comparative context.” *Common Knowledge* 12(1): 66-92.

Thu. Sep. 23 ***International relations in Europe at the time of Westphalia***

- Osiander, Andreas. 2003. “Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian myth.” *International Organization*, 55(2): 251-287.

Recommended

- Costa Lopez, Julia. 2021. “International relations in/and the Middle Ages.” Pp. 408-418 in Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*.

Tue. Sep. 28 ***International relations in the early days of empire***

- Weststeijn, Arthur. 2015. “‘Love alone is not enough’: Treaties in seventeenth-century Dutch colonial expansion.” Pp. 19-44 in Saliha Belmessous, ed. *Empire by treaty: Negotiating European expansion, 1600-1900*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Recommended

- Caraccioli, Mauro J. 2021. “Early (modern) empires: The political ideology of conceptual domination.” Pp. 4419-431 in Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*.
- Phillips, Andrew, and J.C. Sharman. 2020. “Company-states and the creation of the global international system.” *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(4): 1249-1272.

Thu. Sep. 30 ***International relations within present-day North America***

(no class – answer discussion questions online)

- Beaulieu, Alain. 2015. “The acquisition of aboriginal land in Canada: The genealogy of an ambivalent system (1600-1867).” Pp. 101-131 in Saliha Belmessous, ed. *Empire by treaty: Negotiating European expansion, 1600-1900*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Recommended

- Richter, Daniel K. 2015. “To ‘Clear the King’s and Indians’ Title’: Seventeenth-century origins of North American land cession treaties.” Pp. 45-77 in Saliha Belmessous, ed. *Empire by treaty: Negotiating European expansion, 1600-1900*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Tue. Oct. 5 ***International relations and territoriality***

- Schulz, Carsten-Andreas. 2019. "Territorial sovereignty and the end of inter-cultural diplomacy along the "Southern frontier". *European Journal of International Relations*, 25(3): 878-903.

Recommended

- Costa Buranelli, Filippo. 2020. "Standard of civilization, nomadism and territoriality in nineteenth-century international society." Pp. 77-100 in Levin, Jamie, ed. *Nomad-State relationships in international relations: Before and after borders*. Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan.

Thu. Oct. 7 ***What does/should this all mean for IR?***

- Çapan, Zeynep Gulsah. 2020. "Beyond visible entanglements: Connected histories of the international." *International Studies Review*, 22(2): 289-306.

Recommended

- Subotic, Jelena, and Brent Steele. 2021. "History and memory: Narratives, micropolitics, and crises." Pp. 503-511 in Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*.

III. "International Relations" in history: An emerging discipline

Tue. Oct. 12 ***The birth of IR***

- Vitalis, Robert. 2005. "Birth of a discipline." Pp. 159-182 in David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Recommended

- Hoffmann, Stanley. 1977. "An American Social Science: International Relations" *Daedalus* 106(3): 41-60.

Thu. Oct. 14 ***Race and early IR***

Op-ed 1 due

- Vitalis, Robert. 2000. "The graceful and generous liberal gesture: Making racism invisible in American international relations." *Millennium*, 29(2): 331-356.

Recommended

- Yao, Joanne, and Andrew Delatolla. 2021. "Race and historical international relations." Pp. 192-200 in Benjamin de Carvalho, Julia Costa Lopez, and Halvard Leira, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Historical International Relations*.

Tue. Oct. 19 ***Fall Break (no class)***

Thu. Oct. 21 ***Imperialism and early IR***

- Long, David. 2005. "Paternalism and the Internationalization of Imperialism: J. A. Hobson on the International Government of the 'Lower Races'." Pp. 71-92 in David Long and Brian C. Schmidt, eds., *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Recommended

- Henderson, Errol A. 2017. "The revolution will not be theorized: Du Bois, Locke, and the Howard School's challenge to white supremacists IR theory." *Millennium*, 45(3): 492-510.

Tue. Oct. 26 ***Idealism and early IR***

- Schmidt, Brian C. 2002. "Anarchy, world politics and the birth of a discipline: American international relations, pluralist theory and the myth of interwar idealism." *International Relations*, 16(1): 9-31.

Recommended

- De Carvalho, Benjamin, Halvard Leira, and John M. Hobson. 2011. "The Bing Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919." *Millennium* 39(3): 735-758.

IV. The centrality of race and hierarchy in international relations today

Thu. Oct. 28 ***Race in IR***

- Shilliam, Robbie. 2021. "International Relations." in *Decolonizing Politics*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- *Listen*: Radikaal Podcast, episode 41 (by Cas Mudde): "Robbie Shilliam on decolonizing politics and the Rastafari movement" (<https://www.buzzsprout.com/1134467/8810969>)

Recommended

- Henderson, Errol A. 2013. "Hidden in plain sight: Racism in international relations theory." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26(1): 71-92.
- Zvobgo, Kelebogile, and Meredith Loken. 2020. "Why race matters in international relations." *Foreign Policy*. (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/19/why-race-matters-international-relations-ir/>)

Tue. Nov. 2 ***Race and sovereignty***

- Nisancioglu, Kerem. 2019. "Racial sovereignty." *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(S1): 39-63.

Recommended

- Thompson, Debra. 2013. “Through, against and beyond the racial state: The transnational stratum of race.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26(1): 133-151.

Thu. Nov. 4 ***Explicit and implicit hierarchies***

- Gruffydd Jones, Branwen. 2013. “‘Good governance’ and ‘state failure’: genealogies of imperial discourse.” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26(1): 49-70.

Recommended

- McConaughy, Meghan, Paul Musgrave, and Daniel H. Nexon. 2018. “Beyond anarchy: Logics of political organization, hierarchy, and international structure.” *International Theory* 10(2): 181-218.

Tue. Nov. 9 ***Hierarchies of people(s)***

- Dionne, Kim Yi, and Fulya Felicity Turkmen. 2020. “The politics of pandemic othering: Putting COVID-19 in global and historical context.” *International Organization*, 74(S1): E213-E230.

Recommended

- Zhang, Chenchen. 2019. “Right-wing populism with Chinese characteristics? Identity, otherness and global imaginaries in debating world politics online.” *European Journal of International Relations*, 26(1): 88-115.

Thu. Nov. 11 ***Are IR theories racist, and what should we do about it?***

- *Listen*: Podcast: “Race and Securitization theory.” Patrick Thaddeus Jackson & Daniel Nexon, with guests Jarrod Hayes, Nawal Mustafa, and Robbie Shilliam(https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/whiskeyindiaromeo/episodes/2020-05-21T14_58_46-07_00)

Recommended: key articles behind the fracas

- Howell, Alison, and Melanie Richter-Montpetit. 2020. “Is securitization theory racist? Civilizationism, methodological whiteness, and antiblack thought in the Copenhagen School.” *Security Dialogue*, 51(1): 3-22.
- Hansen, Lene. 2020. “Are ‘core’ feminist critiques of securitization theory racist? A reply to Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit.” *Security Dialogue*, 51(4): 378-385.
- Wæver, Ole, and Barry Buzan. 2020. “Racism and responsibility: The critical limits of deepfake methodology in security studies: A reply to Howell and Richter-Montpetit.” *Security Dialogue*, 51(4): 386-394.

V. The future of international relations in an online world: plus ça change?

Tue. Nov. 16 ***Cyber security***

- Steiger, Stefan, Sebastian Harnisch, Kerstin Zettl, and Johannes Lohmann. “Conceptualising conflicts in cyberspace.” *Journal of Cyber Policy*, 3(1): 77-95.

Recommended

- Valeriano, Brandon, and Ryan C. Maness. “International relations theory and cyber security: Threats, conflicts, an ethics in an emergent domain.” in Chris Brown and Robyn Eckersley, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of International Political Theory*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Wagner, Ben. 2019. “Constructed ‘cyber’ realities and international relations theory.” Pp. 60-70 in J.P. Singh, Madeline Carr, and Renée Marlin-Bennett, eds. *Science, Technology, and Art in International Relations*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Thu. Nov. 18 ***Cyber-politics between states***

- Calderaro, Andrea, and Anthony J.S. Craig. 2020. “Transnational governance of cybersecurity: Policy challenges and global inequalities in cyber capacity building.” *Third World Quarterly*, 41(6): 917-938.

Recommended

- Branch, Jordan. 2020. “What’s in a name? Metaphors and cybersecurity.” *International Organization*, 75(1): 39-70.

Tue. Nov. 23 ***Cyber mercenaries***

Op-ed 2 due

- DiResta, Renée, Shelby Grossman, and Alexandra Siegel. 2020. “In-house vs. outsourced trolls: Digital mercenaries shape state influence strategies.” Stanford, CA: unpublished manuscript.

Recommended

- Egloff, Florian. 2017. “Cybersecurity and the age of privateering.” Pp. 60-70 in George Perkovich and Ariel E. Levite, eds. *Understanding Cyber Conflict: Fourteen Analogies*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Thu. Nov. 25 *Thanksgiving Break: no class*

Tue. Nov. 30 ***The internet as a global commons***

- Govella, Kristi. 2021. “China’s challenge to the global commons: Compliance, contestation, and subversion in the maritime and cyber domains.” *International Relations* (online before print).

Recommended

- Riddervold, Marianne, and Akasemi Newsome. 2021. “Introduction: Cooperation, conflict, and interaction in the global commons.” *International Relations* (online before print).
- Davis Cross, Mai’a K. 2021. “Outer space and the idea of the global commons.” *International Relations* (online before print).

Thu. Dec. 2 ***Post-truth international relations?***

- Renner, Judith, and Alexander Spencer. 2018. “Trump, Brexit & ‘Post-Truth’: How post-structuralist IR theories can help us understand world order in the 21st century.” *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, 28: 315-321.

Recommended

- Crilley, Rhys. 2018. “International relations in the age of ‘post-truth’ politics.” *International Affairs*, 94(2): 417-425.

Tue. Dec. 7 ***Is international relations fundamentally changing?***

- DiResta, Renee. 2018. “The digital Maginot line.”
(<https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2018/11/28/the-digital-maginot-line/>)
- DiResta, Renee. 2019. “Mediating consent.”
(<https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2019/12/17/mediating-consent/>)

Recommended

- Duncombe, Constance. 2020. “Social media and the visibility of horrific violence.” *International Affairs*, 96(3): 609-629.

Thu. Dec. 9 ***Wrap-up***

- Readings TBA

Mon. Dec. 13 **Paper due**