

## **Matthew Danielson**

**Title:** “New Directions: The Break of United States Hegemony in the Colombian Conflict”

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Richard Weiner

**Paper written for:** History F342: Latin America, Evolution & Revolution (Fall 2016)

**Matthew F. Danielson** will be graduating this spring with degrees in Political Science and English with a concentration in writing. His senior project in Political Science explored the diversity of Indiana’s political culture, and his senior English project, which is also his senior Honors project, uses the literary theory of New Historicism to examine the Merrie Melody cartoons of 1952. He is a current recipient of the Withers Scholarship and is in the process of applying to law schools.

### **Abstract**

The Colombian conflict over drugs and politics (1948-2016) evolved over time, moving from a war between elites, to a war of peasants and elites, to a besieged government assaulted by right and left ideologies, and finally to a victorious government that successfully negotiated a peace agreement with the support of a nation suffering from war fatigue. This paper examines the role that international actors played in the evolution and ultimate resolution of this conflict. The paper argues that the post-Cold War era, a period when violence in Colombia subsided, marked a turning point. At that time the impact of the United States waned and the weight of Europe and Latin America grew, a changing international climate that helped pave the way for a successful peace settlement in Colombia.

To develop this thesis the paper examines the nuances of international relations, showing that the loss of leadership by the United States in Colombia is more incremental than total, and demonstrates both a success and failure of US policy with the exhibition of a new willingness by Latin American states to enter the world stage to break with the US. The conflict in Colombia is notable by the dominance of policy by the United States of America, a nation present since the very beginning of the conflict. And yet while hostilities were ongoing, there was a lack of intervention by the USSR (as seen in Cuba), the UN (as seen in Korea, the Congo, etc.), or other international organizations. While some of these organizations were new and untested in the early days of the conflict in Colombia, the lack of intervention should be blamed more on the presence of violence than on the inexperience of the organizations. As noted by major scholars and by the documents of the organizations, the influence of actors like the European Union (EU) and the Organization of American States (OAS) only began to rise in the early days of the twenty-first century following reductions in violence. As groups like the FARC and drug cartels underwent brutal total war by the Colombian and United States governments, and militias, the levels of violence were reduced to levels that allowed alternative methods for peace to occur. The reduction in violence also allowed the Colombian government to begin forging independent diplomatic relationships with other countries, including support for fundamental changes of international organizations. The OAS task force on drugs, created in 1976, did not spawn its “Hemispheric Plan of Action on Drugs” until 2011, which recommended policies that did not necessitate the militarized resolution of drug fueled conflicts in Latin America. With such evidence, the hegemony of the United States is demonstrated to have waned even as the

cooperation of international organizations and states grew. Once out from the burden of violence, Colombia worked to forge its own style of international relations.

### **Bibliographical Note**

The sources used to examine the Colombian conflict include scholarly articles and books that described both the historical context of the conflict, and the history of the drug war in Latin America. Secondary and primary sources included official policy positions by the European Union, the United States of America, the Organization of American States, and non-profit organizations with published statistical information.