

*“The Causes and Consequences of Declinism in Great Powers” CGS Seminar with Robert Ralston
October 23, 2019
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On October 23rd, Robert Ralston, the 2019-20 CGS Predoctoral Fellow, gave a talk entitled “The Causes and Consequences of Declinism in Great Powers” presenting one of the chapters of his dissertation which addresses the ambiguity surrounding a great power’s decline.

Declinism has been discussed by numerous politicians both in the United States and Europe. Ralston argues, however, that decline as how we measure it and talk of decline by those in politics do not necessarily correlate with each other. While his research is still on-going, he is discovering that the political parties outside of power are most likely to cultivate a narrative of decline and that declinism is more likely to come about when there is either a generational shift among party leadership or when political outsiders become influential.

Ralston plans to cite Great Britain as a case study in his research using archival pieces, parliamentary speeches, and British newspapers. One interesting observation that appears to strengthen his argument is that while the topic of declinism in Great Britain emerged in the 1970s, its GDP (a traditional used in political science to measure a country’s power) dropped significantly during the 1940s-1960s. Such an event signifies the difficulty in correlating a country’s discussion of decline with actual indications of its decline.

The Center looks forward to continuing its support of Ralston’s research endeavors.