

Empire? U.S. Power in Historical and Global Context

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Rosenkranz Hall, Room 6

Description

What do we mean when we call something an empire? This course explores this question in two ways. The course's first half ranges across the globe, from ancient land-based regimes, through early-modern commercial and maritime empires, to contemporary configurations of the modern world-system. We examine not only large-scale events and trends, but also the way colonizer and colonized experienced life in these various empires. The goal of this part of the course is to discover what legal, economic, military, or cultural features these empires shared—if any. In short: what do the things we call empires have in common?

The course's second half applies the definition developed in the first half to United States history. Can U.S. independence, the history of U.S. westward expansion, U.S. control over the Philippines and Puerto Rico, and the contemporary U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan meaningfully be called “imperial”? We again examine the experiences of both American forces and local populations to grasp how different perspectives shape the meaning of rule.

Requirements

In the course, aside from their usual responsibilities of reading assigned works closely, students will develop their own engagements with the two halves of the course: a ten-page midterm essay in which students will propose and defend a definition of empire, and a fifteen-page evaluation of the United States in terms of this definition for the final paper.

Grades will be composed of the following elements:

- Midterm essay (25%)
- Final paper (60%)
- General participation (10%)
- Leading or co-leading discussion of one week's class discussion (5%)

Academic Honesty

Breaches of academic honesty will not be tolerated. Please refer to the appropriate [discussion and definitions](#) for further information on what constitutes unacceptable practices.

Meeting Schedule

Orientation and First Meeting (Jan 15)

PART I—WHAT IS AN EMPIRE?

Definitions and Concepts (Jan 22)

- Cooper, Frederick. 2005. *Colonialism in Question*. Selections.
- Doyle, Michael. 1986. “Imperialism and Empire,” pp. 19-47 in *Empires*.
- Chatterjee, Partha. 2007. *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 14-34.

Imperial Structures I: Ancient Empires (Jan 29)

- Mann, Michael. 1986. *The Sources of Social Power, Vol. I.*, Chapters 5, 8, and 9.
- Pagden, Anthony. 2001. “The Empire of the Roman People” in *Peoples and Empires*.
- Burbank, Jane and Frederick Cooper. 2010. “Imperial Rule in Rome and China” in *Empires in World History*.

Imperial Structures II: Modern Empires (Feb 5)

- Fieldhouse, D. K. 1965. *The Colonial Empires*. Selections.
- Barkey, Karen. 2008. *Empire of Difference* (pp. 3-27; 264-296).

Experience of Empire from Below (Feb 12)

- Fanon, Franz. 1967. “The Negro and Language,” pp. 17-41 in *Black Skin, White Masks*.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*, Selections.
- Film: *Lagaan* (2001).

Experience of Empire from Above (Feb 19)

- Orwell, George. “Shooting an Elephant” and “A Hanging”; *Burmese Days* (Selections).

PART II—THE UNITED STATES

Origins (Feb 26)

- Wood, Gordon S. 2009. *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic 1789-1815* (pp. 5-52; 543-575).

“Progress” (March 5)

- Nugent, Walter. 2009. *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansionism* (pp. 157-186; 187-220).

Experience of US Power from Below (March 26)

- Ostler, Jeffrey. 2004 *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism*, Selections.

Towards the Present Day (April 2)

- Maier, Charles S. 2006. *Among Empires*. Chs. 4-6 (pp. 151-284).

Iraq I: The Structure of Contemporary US Power (April 9)

- Mann, Michael. 2005. *Incoherent Empire*, Chs. 1-4 (pp. 1-122).
- Steinmetz, George. 2006. “Imperialism or Colonialism? From Windhoek to Washington, by way of Basra,” pp. 135-156 in Calhoun, Cooper, and Moore (eds.) *Lessons of Empire*.
- Film: *Syriana* (2005).

Iraq II: The Experience from Above (April 16)

- Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. 2007. *Imperial Life in the Emerald City*, Chs. 2-6 (pp. 29-144).
- Martin Van Buren. 2011. *We Meant Well*. (Selections.)

Wrap-up and Discussion of Final Papers (April 23)