

U.S. EMPIRE

History 492-0-20

Mondays 2–4:50pm

Graduate seminar

Fall 2021, Harris L40

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3–4:50pm
(Immerwahr, Harris 225)

Wednesdays 1–3pm (Kiel, CNAIR
House, 515 Clark St.)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course considers the imperial dimensions of U.S. history, both on the North American continent and beyond it. In so doing, it seeks to connect literatures that have too often been kept separate: Native American and Indigenous histories, settler colonialism, and overseas empire. Our focus will be on what imperialism has meant for land and lives, primarily examining the mechanics of U.S. empire, and at times considering its broader and more diffuse aspects. In treating overseas empire, we will devote more attention to colonies and administered land than to the United States' economic dominance and global cultural power.

WORKLOAD AND ASSIGNMENTS

Our main activity in this class will be reading and discussing books, usually just one per week, sometimes with ancillary reading. All your tasks—participating in seminar, writing journal entries, giving a presentation, and writing a historiography paper—will be about the listed readings. You can do outside reading, obviously, but you're not required to.

Your grade for this class will be cumulative in the following sense. All of the assignments are ways of assessing the same thing: whether you've done the readings carefully and developed interesting thoughts about them. You'll have a chance to show us that in your seminar participation, journal entries, presentation, and paper. Underwhelming performance in one area can thus be counterbalanced and excused by a great performance in another. Mainly, we want to see that you're keeping up with the class and that the wheels are turning.

Seminar participation

The goal is to have an intelligent conversation from which we all learn. It may seem that the best/only way to do your part is to make a sharp, original observation. But asking a question, confessing confusion, affirming someone, connecting something already on the table to another thing, offering your own spin on someone else's idea, and offering evidence from the text are also all valuable.

They are valuable because, ultimately, a seminar is not a series of unrelated, prepared-in-advance comments made by solitary geniuses. It's a conversation, or at least it should be. Thus, you'll win admiration from us for contributions that draw on what others have said or that advance our collective inquiry. That means listening, aiming for clarity, disagreeing amicably, and encouraging classmates along.

Journal entries

Every week, before all meetings other than the first, email us your thoughts on the readings. These needn't be finished or formal—bullet points are fine. Appropriate things to include: questions, stray observations, reactions, comparisons to other works on the list. Please send these by 1pm on Monday if possible, so we can read them before class. 1–2 pages would be appropriate. We won't grade these; they're just a chance for you to collect your thoughts in advance of our discussion and your final paper.

Presentation

We'll start every meeting with a twelve-minute presentation on a reading. Your job, when you're the presenter, is to pretend that you wrote the book or article we've all just read. You're now at a conference and have twelve minutes to get your point across. You aren't obliged to cover every part of the argument—in fact, we'd recommend against that. Rather, your goal is to sell your audience on your writing.

It may be tempting to focus on outlining the argument (“My book has three theses. First, . . .”). But remember, your task is not to summarize the book or article, it's to pitch it. So give your audience a sense of *why* your perspective is helpful. Tell us what problem your work solves. Often, a good way to do that is to start out with a riddle (“When people think about India, they often think about caste. Why?”) or with a counter-theory (“You might think—most people do—that caste is an ancient institution, a holdover from classical India. But I'm going to try to convince you that . . .”) or both. If introducing material that's not in the book (a contemporary example, images) would help you get your point across, do it.

Usually, classroom presentations are met with a sort of smiling indifference. The presenter drones on far past the time limit, everyone endures it bravely, we applaud, and then all is forgotten. Not this time! We'll treat these presentations as serious-minded attempts to master the art of public speaking, the most underrated item in the scholar's toolkit. So, after every presentation, we'll critique it for style as well as substance (which we'll be able to do, as we'll have done the reading, too). The goal, of course, is to support each other in acquiring this important academic skill. The seminar should be a sheltered space in which to get the hang of it.

If you want to use slides, the room is outfitted for that. But you'll need to arrive slightly early to get set up; let us know and we'll make sure you have access to the room.

Historiography paper

Your final duty will be to write a historiography paper, meaning a paper that analyzes the scholarly literature. Choose at least four readings on our syllabus to write about, and discuss them in relation to some question or problem of interest to you. Your paper should be at least 2,500 words, not counting notes.

Your task is to do something more than summarize the readings. Assume that your reader has read the books and pretty much remembers how they go. What can you tell that reader that would be of interest? Is there some methodological question that you think the books can illuminate? Some question about the nature of imperial power? Is there some assumption that all the books tacitly make, that perhaps they shouldn't? We're open to many different ways of approaching this assignment, and we'd be very happy to talk over your ideas before you start typing.

LEARNING THE DISCIPLINE

A final unusual component of this class is that we'll spend a lot of time on professionalization. At the beginning of the course, we'll settle on some topics that we'd collectively like to discuss. Then, at each meeting, when we're done talking about the book in question, we'll move to a discussion of one or more of those matters. Doug and Daniel will make some remarks (or if it's a topic about which we know little, we'll bring in a colleague) and then the floor will be open. You can ask any question you'd like and we'll all talk about it, striving for maximal candor.

You won't be graded on this, and we'll keep doing it only as long as it seems helpful.

BOOKS

We've put the following books on order at the campus bookstore in the Norris Center. We've also placed them on reserve at the library (unless they are available online through NU, as some are). All other readings are available via Canvas or the internet.

1. James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
2. Megan Black, *The Global Interior: Mineral Frontiers and American Power* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018)
3. Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)
4. Paul Conrad, *The Apache Diaspora: Four Centuries of Displacement and Survival* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021)
5. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018)

6. Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America's Empire: The United States, the Philippines and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009)
7. Andrew Needham, *Power Lines: Phoenix and the Making of the Modern Southwest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014)
8. Claudio Saunt, *Unworthy Republic: The Dispossession of Native Americans and the Road to Indian Territory* (New York: Norton, 2020)
9. David Vine, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020)

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Sept. 27

- Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), [online](http://www.historians.org) at AHA website (www.historians.org)
- Simon Pokagon, *The Red Man's Rebuke/Greeting* (1893), [online](http://library.si.edu) at Smithsonian website (library.si.edu), an alternative pdf copy is under Modules on Canvas.
- Jeremi Suri, "The Limits of American Empire: Democracy and Militarism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), on Canvas
- Daniel Immerwahr, "The United States is an Empire," forthcoming in *The Myths that Blind Us*, ed. Julian Zelizer and Kevin Kruse (New York: Basic Books, 2022), on Canvas

Oct. 4

- Conrad, *Apache Diaspora*

Oct. 11 (Indigenous Peoples' Day)

- Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, introduction, chaps. 1-7, 9, 12-15, conclusion
- Justin Leroy, "Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism," *Theory & Event* 19.4 (2016)

Oct. 18

- Saunt, *Unworthy Republic*
- Benjamin Madley, "Reexamining the American Genocide Debate: Meaning, Historiography, and New Methods," *American Historical Review* 120 (2015): 98-139

Oct. 25

Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*

Nov. 1

- Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*

Nov. 8

- McCoy, *Policing America's Empire*, prologue, chaps. 1-11 and 17

Nov. 15

- Black, *Global Interior*

Nov. 22

- Needham, *Power Lines*
- Doug Kiel, "Nation v. Municipality: Indigenous Land Recovery, Settler Resentment, and Taxation on the Oneida Reservation," *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 6 (2019): 51-73.

Nov. 29

- Vine, *United States of War*

Tues., Dec 7: Historiography paper due by email by 5pm