

Spring 2016
Thursday 1:30-4:30
College Hall 217

Professor Amy C. Offner
College Hall 313
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Freshman Seminar: History 106.301

How to Rule an Empire: An Introduction to European and American Imperialism

Over the last five centuries, European and American powers developed changing strategies of empire designed to order societies at home and overseas. The practice of empire spurred worldwide debates that continue today: how did imperialism operate, what purposes did it serve, could it come to an end, and what might replace it? Over the course of two hundred years, these questions inspired some of the world's great historical writing, and this seminar introduces students to a sample of it. Together we'll explore varied forms of political, economic, military, and cultural power involved in imperial expansion; the experience and consequences of empire for both colonized and colonizer; and the emergence of anti-imperialist movements. We will read an average of 150 pages per week. No background is required.

The books we'll read reward slow, careful reading. What you learn in this class, and the quality of our experience together, depends on your reading closely, coming to class with informed questions, and being prepared to help your classmates answer theirs. Active, informed class participation will account for forty percent of your grade.

Required Readings: All readings on the syllabus are required. The following books are on reserve in Van Pelt Library (Rosengarten Reserve) and available for purchase at the Penn Book Center, 130 S. 34th St. All other readings are on Canvas.

Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me* (2004)
Cathleen Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers* (2013)
Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World* (2004)
Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals* (1990)
Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders* (2009)
Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998) [also an ebook]
Nancy Kwak, *A World of Homeowners* (2015)
Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Dumb Luck* (2002)
Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country* (2001)
John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* (1998)
David Vine, *Island of Shame* (2011)

Course Requirements

1. Active, informed, responsive class participation (40%). Our seminar is an opportunity to get to know your classmates intellectually, ask one another questions, help others answer theirs, and finally decide what you think. Everyone must

complete the readings before class and participate in discussion throughout the semester in an informed, responsive way. By “informed,” I mean informed by a close reading of our texts, and by “responsive,” I mean responsive to each other, taking one other seriously enough to respond to each others’ observations, analyses, and questions.

We’ll start each class with a go-round. Each student should come prepared to speak for about two minutes, raising one question, criticism, comparison to another book, or other response to the reading. You can read your response, speak from notes, or speak extemporaneously, whatever makes you most comfortable. Don’t be afraid to ask a question during this time: if there is something you don’t understand, it’s worth discussing. If there are specific passages from the book that relate to your comment, refer to them and we can look at the text together.

The go-round will provide a springboard for our conversation, so listen to others’ ideas. Where do you agree or disagree? What questions occur to you?

2. Paper 1: Primary source analysis (15%). A three-page paper giving your analysis of a primary source chosen from a small selection that I will distribute in class. A successful paper will explain the significance of the source, using course readings to contextualize it and, most importantly, closely analyzing the text. What was the social position and perspective of the author? For whom was the author writing, and what did he or she hope to accomplish by writing the document? What historical events, debates, and ideas informed the author? Why was the author’s perspective notable?
3. Paper 2: Book review (15%). A three-page paper giving your analysis of Grandin, Hochschild, Tilley, or Jasanoff. Do not spend any time rehearsing the details of the book, but succinctly state the author’s argument and then evaluate it:
 - a. What evidence does the author provide for his or her argument?
 - b. Does he or she interpret the evidence in a convincing way?
 - c. Given the other readings we have done this semester, what aspects of the book do you consider surprising, questionable, or insightful?
 - d. What questions does the author leave unanswered that you would like to understand?
4. Paper 3: Final paper (30%). An eight-page paper that gives your comparative analysis of one historical problem discussed in two or three books on the syllabus. How have different historians studied this topic, what changes and continuities that they have found over time, what differences and similarities do they find between imperial contexts, and what are one or two questions that the books leave you wanting to understand?

Communication: The great pleasure of teaching is getting to know students. Come by my office hours or make an appointment to discuss any of the course material. For brief, procedural questions about the class, email is fine.

Disability policy: If you have a disability that requires special arrangements, please let me know at the beginning of the semester.

Academic integrity: Plagiarism and other violations of academic honesty can result in suspension and expulsion from Penn. Please review the university's guide on academic integrity (www.upenn.edu/academicintegrity), and do not hesitate to talk with me if you have any questions about the definition of plagiarism and academic honesty.

Class Schedule

Jan 14 Introduction

Part I: European Empires in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800

Jan 21 Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country*, pp. 1-150

Jan. 28 John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, Introduction and chapters 1-6, 10

Feb. 4 Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World*, 1-151

Feb. 11 Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World*, 151-308
First paper due in class

Part II: European Empires after the Age of Revolution

Feb. 18 Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, chapters 7-8
Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, chapter 3

Feb. 25 Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, all [[also an ebook](#)]

Mar. 3 Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*

Mar. 10 Spring Break

Mar. 17 Robert Bickers, *Empire Made Me*, all
Second paper due in class

Mar. 24 Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Dumb Luck*

Part III: The United States in the Long Twentieth Century

Mar. 31 Cathleen Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers*

Apr. 7 Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders*, pp. 1-225

Apr. 14 Nancy Kwak, *A World of Homeowners*

Apr. 21 David Vine, *Island of Shame*
Final paper due in class