



# Theories of Imperialism

**\*Limited View Document\***

Instructor: Bridget Martin  
Course level: Upper division

## Course Description

Over the course of the twentieth century, European, Japanese, and American empires covered large portions of the surface of the earth and collectively transformed the lives of billions of people. Today, China is also increasingly influential on a global scale. Focusing on the twentieth century into the present moment, this survey course explores global geographies of modern imperialism and introduces key concepts and debates on the topic. We will use the mid-twentieth century moment as a starting point and a pinhole through which to view the geographies and imperial ambitions of major modern empires and enduring imperial relations: the rise and fall of the Japanese empire; the decline of formal European colonization; the predominance of the American empire; and the persistence of neo-colonial and uneven relations between western powers and formerly colonized countries. What does imperialism look like and feel like at different moments and from different perspectives? What drives it? Are militarism and war inherent to global capitalism? Does imperialism (or empire) still exist in a world of post-colonial states? The course explores these questions through the themes of race, militarism, finance, resource extraction, intimate relations, and cultural production. Readings and lectures are global in focus, providing students with a combination of conceptual tools and historical-geographical foundations needed to think broadly about the topic of imperialism and to pursue further research and study.

Note: Texts listed as “related reading” are not required. However, lecture content will be based on both required readings and on related readings. Students are encouraged to review relevant recommended readings when writing research papers.

## Learning objectives

- 1) To critically introduce key theories on the drivers and formations of empire and imperialism;
- 2) To provide historical geographical foundations for understanding major imperial and hegemonic transitions of the twentieth century;
- 3) To introduce a variety modalities of imperialism at different scales, from the intimate to the world-historical;
- 4) To encourage critical

and independent student thought on the topic of imperialism through discussion, theorization, and research.

### **Assessment**

- **20% Class participation and attendance.** In almost all cases, more than two absences will result in a loss of points regardless of reason. In case of extenuating circumstances such as a family or medical emergency, please communicate with the instructor as far in advance as possible in order to work out alternative arrangements to keep up with the course. Students are expected to verbally participate in class or to consult the instructor in office hours on a regular basis in order to earn participation points. Alternative arrangements can be made for students with documented disabilities that would prevent active verbal participation. The participation grade includes the completion of a five-minute final presentation (5%) and a pass/fail living glossary (5%).
- **15% Conceptual paper.** In this short paper, students review key theories introduced in the first part of the course.
- **15% Historical paper.** In this short paper, students will familiarize themselves with one topic selected in consultation with the instructor. This paper doubles as a final paper prospectus. Details will be explained at the beginning of the semester.
- **25% Final paper.** This paper will be a revised combination of the two short papers.
- **25% Final exam.** This will be a short-answer exam.

### **Academic Integrity**

Any written work you submit for this course is presumed to be your own original work. It should not be the work of others nor should it be work submitted, in whole or in part, for another course. You must properly cite your written work, including both direct quotations and ideas and arguments taken from other sources. Academic misconduct will result on a failing grade on the assignment and will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs. Review university policy first and then consult with the instructor if you have any questions regarding what constitutes academic misconduct.

### **Disability Services**

Students with concerns or questions related to accessibility should consult with both the Center for Disability Services (CDS) and the instructor. The instructor will make reasonable accommodations in coordination with both the student and with the CDS office.

## Course Outline

### Thinking Imperialism in the Mid-Twentieth Century

What is imperialism? Readings focus on the theoretical debates about “empire” and “imperialism” in the wake of the collapses and re-makings of global empires before and after World War II. We will start to make broad conceptual distinctions between different formations of empire and modalities of imperialism: settler colonialism, direct colonization, and military, cultural, and financial imperialism in the post-colonial world. In particular, we draw on the work of Arrighi to make sense of these distinctions and debates. We also read key economic theorists of imperialism and ask whether we should consider capitalist accumulation as the central driver of global empire. Lectures place these theoretical texts into historical-geographical context and introduce the broad contours of the global empires of Europe, Japan, and the US as they existed in the mid-twentieth century.

Key words: Empire, Hegemony, Lenin, Capitalism

#### 1. Introduction & Reading *The New York Times* in 1945

#### 2. Hegemonic Transitions

- US Central Intelligence Agency (1948) *The Breakup of the Colonial Empires and Its Implications for US Security* (pp. 1-14) ([available online](#))

#### 3. What is Imperialism?

- Arrighi, Giovanni (1983) “Afterword”, *Geometry of Imperialism: The Limits of Hobson’s Paradigm* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), London: Verso Press. (pp. 155 – 173)
- Arrighi, Giovanni (1994) “The Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism” in *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, London: Verso Press. (Selection: pp. 28 – 37)

*Related reading:*

- Howe, Stephen (2002) *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### 4. Carving-up and Ransacking the Whole World

- Hobson, John (1967 [1902]) “Imperialism: A Study”, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. (Selections: appx. 10 pages)
- Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich (1975[1917]) “Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism” in *The Lenin Anthology*, Robert C. Tucker (ed.), New York: WW Norton. (Selections: appx. 10 pages)

- Luxemburg, Rosa (year) “Chapter 26: The Reproduction of Capital and Its Social Setting” in *The Accumulation of Capital*, London: Routledge. (Selections: appx. 2 pages)
- Gallagher, John and Robinson, Ronald (1953) “The Imperialism of Free Trade”, *Economic History Review* 6(1). (15 pages)

*Related reading:*

- Ikenberry, “A Liberal Hegemony or Empire? American Polarity in the Age of Unipolarity” in Held and Koenig-Archibugi (eds), *American Power in the Twenty-First Century* (pp. 83 – 113)
- Beverley Silver and Giovanni Arrighi (2003) Polanyi’s ‘Double Movement’: The Belles Époques of British and US Hegemony Compared. *Politics and Society* 31(2): pp. 330-337.

## Europe, Japan, and the United States

We will begin to sketch the historical-geographical contours of major empires, orbiting our investigation around two world wars. How did European, Japanese, and American imperial projects map onto each other before and after the two world wars? Did European imperialism help to drive two world wars? Drawing on Hobsbawm and Martin, we map the geographical contours of two European empires—British and French—as they extended across the globe in the pre-WWII period. The violence of World War II culminated in the US atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the subsequent withdrawal of Japan from its colonies in Asia. What was the nature and extent of Japanese and American ambition during this time? Did an American empire “replace” the Japanese empire in Asia? Readings also introduce different ways of thinking about the complex relationships between capitalist growth, militarism, and global conflict.

Key words: War, Military Empire, Settler Colonialism, Urban Space, Cultural Imperialism, Territory

### 5. Europe and Two World Wars: The British

- Eric Hobsbawm (1987). “Chapter 3: The Age of Empire” in *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*, New York: Pantheon Books. (pp. 56 – 83)

### 6. Europe and Two World Wars: The French

- Thomas, Martin (2005) “Approaching War: The Empire and International Crisis in the 1930s” in *The French Empire Between the Wars*, Manchester: Manchester University Press (p. 312 – 346)

*Related reading:*

- Chukwudi, Eze, E. (1997) “Introduction” in *Race and the Enlightenment*, Oxford: Blackwell. (pp. 1 – 9)
- Rodney, Walter (1973) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London: Bogle-L’Ouveture Publications.

## 7. Pan-Asianism and Japan's Total Empire I

- Young, Louise (1998) "Manchukou and Japan" in *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism*, Berkeley: University of California Press. (pp. 3 – 20)
- Hotta, Eri (2007) "Introduction: Pan-Asian Ideology and the Fifteen Years' War" in *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931 – 1945*, London: Palgrave. (pp. 1 – 17)

## 8. Pan-Asianism and Japan's Total Empire II

- Henry, Todd (2014) "Constructing Keijō: The Uneven Spaces of a Colonial Capital" in *Assimilating Seoul: Japanese Rule and the Politics of Public Space in Colonial Korea, 1910 – 1945*, Berkeley: University of California Press. (pp. 22 – 62)

## 9. American Ascendancy I

- Cumings, Bruce (2009) "Archipelago of Empire: An American Grid for the Global Garden" in *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*. (pp. 388 – 423)

## 10. American Ascendancy II (Korea)

- Henderson, Gregory (1968) "The Gates of Chaos" in *Korea: The Politics of the Vortex*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press. (Selections: appx. 10 pages)
- Chang, Kornel (2020) "Independence without Liberation: Democratization as Decolonization Management in US-Occupied Korea, 1945 – 1948", *The Journal of American History* 107(1), pp. 77 – 106.

## 11. American Ascendancy III

- *Democracy Now!* "How to Hide an Empire: Daniel Immerwahr on the History of the Greater United States", March 5, 2019. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvIUGYvLg0s>) (30 minutes)
- Greene, Julie (2009) *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal*, New York: Penguin Books. (selections)

### *Related reading:*

- Kramer, Paul A. (2011) "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World", *American Historical Review* (pp. 1341 – 1391)
- Lee, Steven H. (2009) "The United States, the United Nations, and the Second Occupation of Korea, 1950 – 1951" *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (9 pages)

## Nationalism and Development in the Post-Colonial World

In what ways can "imperialism" be conceptualized in a post-colonial world? We return to the mid-twentieth century, when anti-colonial struggles across Asia and Africa were giving rise to independent territories, economies, and identities rendered at the national scale. Readings focus

on the persistent inequalities of the decolonized world, focusing on both the national and global scales. Lectures place these inequalities in the context of the Cold War and in relation to the emergence of the shifting idea of “development” in the second half of the twentieth century. We will also be returning to Arrighi’s *Geometry of Imperialism*.

Key words: Cold War, Non-Aligned Movement, Nationalism, Development, Post-colonial, Neocolonialism

## 12. The Post-Colonial

### ➤ **\*ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE: CONCEPTUAL PAPER\***

- Shohat, Ella (1992) “Notes on the Post-Colonial”, *Social Text* 31/32, pp. 99 – 113. (Note: Include a discussion of Shohat in your essay due today.)

## 13. Post-Colonial in a Cold War World

- Prashad, Vijay (2007) “Bandung: The 1955 Afro-Asian Conference” in *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World*, London: The New Press. (pp. 31 – 50)
- Fanon, Franz (2004 [1963]) “Conclusion”, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press. (9 pages)

### *Related Reading:*

- Kwon, Heonik (2010) *The Other Cold War*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Goswami, Manu (2004) “Geographies of State Transformation: The Production of Colonial State Space” in *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (pp. 31 – 72)

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