HSTR 595.01: The American Empire

Richard Drake

University of Montana - Missoula, richard.drake@umontana.edu

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The American Empire (HSTR 595)

Course Description

The American empire, which today consists primarily of hundreds of military bases around the world at an annual direct and indirect cost estimated to be a trillion dollars, began to take shape in the years following the Civil War, in the Caribbean and the Pacific. After the Spanish-American War of 1898, the empire grew enormously in both regions. The success of American imperialism sparked a national debate about the country’s purposes in the world. Proponents of expansion hailed it as an unmixed blessing for the country and for every land and people in the orbit of American idealism. Critics pointed to its economic and moral costs. Their debate continues to this day. We will explore the controversial question of the American empire in the light of classic and more recent readings in the historical literature on the subject. Students will write weekly reviews of three-to-five pages, due in seminar on the day of the assigned reading. They also will lead seminar discussions on a rotation basis. The course will conclude with a four-hour written examination on the course readings, to be held during final exam week. The required readings, but not the recommended readings, will be made available on the Reserve Shelf of the Mansfield Library.

Weekly Meetings and Readings

Wednesday, 27 January

Introduction

Wednesday, 3 February

Required Reading:


Recommended reading:


Wednesday, 10 February

Required Reading:

Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Dover)
Recommended reading:

C. Wright Mills, *The Causes of World War Three* (Simon & Schuster)


Wednesday, 17 February

Required Reading:


Recommended reading:

John Atkinson Hobson, *John Ruskin, Social Reformer*

John Atkinson Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (Kessinger Publishing)

Wednesday, 24 February

Required Reading:


Recommended reading:


Wednesday, 2 March

Required Reading:

Recommended reading:


Wednesday, 9 March

Required Reading:


Recommended reading:


Wednesday, 16 March

Required Reading:

Walter Millis, *The Road to War—America 1914-1917* (Howard Fertig)

Recommended reading:


Wednesday, 23 March

Required Reading:

Charles A. Beard, *The Economic Basis of Politics* (Transaction Publishers)

Recommended reading:
Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States (Dover)*

Charles A. Beard, *The Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy (The Free Press)*

Wednesday, 30 March

**Required Reading**


**Recommended reading:**

William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America’s Present Predicament along with a Few Thoughts about an Alternative* (Ig Publishing)


Geir Lundestad, *The U.S. and Western Europe since 1945: From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (Oxford University Press)

Wednesday, 6 April

**Spring Break**

Wednesday, 13 April

**Required Reading:**


**Recommended Reading**

Alfred McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (University of Wisconsin Press)

Wednesday, 20 April

Required Reading:


Recommended reading:

Greg Grandin, *Empire’s Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (Holt)

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage)

Wednesday, 27 April

Required reading:


Recommended reading:

Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan)

Chalmers Johnson, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (Metropolitan)

Wednesday, 4 May

Required reading:


Recommended reading:


**Field Examination: Monday, May 9, 2-5 ED 312**