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HSTR 595.01: The American Empire

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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:

Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay: An Essay on History*
(Nabu Press)

Recommended reading:

Brooks Adams, *The New Empire* (Nabu Press)

Brooks Adams, *America's Economic Supremacy* (Kessinger Publishing)

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)

C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (Oxford University Press)

Wednesday, 17 February

Required Reading:

John Atkinson Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Nabu Press)

Recommended reading:

John Atkinson Hobson, *John Ruskin, Social Reformer*

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

Wednesday, 24 February

Required Reading:

Scott Nearing, *The American Empire* (Mottelay Press)

Recommended reading:

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Economic Explanation of Capitalism* (Nabu Press)

Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Martino Fine Books)

Richard Pettigrew, *Imperial Washington: The Story of American Public Life from 1870 to 1920* (Ulan Press)

Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press)

Wednesday, 2 March

Required Reading:

Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Martino Fine Books)

Recommended reading:

Joseph Schumpeter, *The Economics and Sociology of Capitalism*
(Princeton University Press)

Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford University Press)

Wednesday, 9 March

Required Reading:

Hannah Arendt, *Imperialism: Part Two of Origins of Totalitarianism*
(Mariner Books)

Recommended reading:

Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism: Part One of Origins of Totalitarianism*
(Mariner Books)

Hannah Arendt, *Totalitarianism: Part Three of Origins of Totalitarianism*
(Mariner Books)

Wednesday, 16 March

Required Reading:

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

Recommended reading:

Randolph Bourne, *War and the Intellectuals: Collected Essays 1915-1919*
(Hackett Publishing Company)

Richard Drake, *The Education of an Anti-Imperialist: Robert La Follette and U.S. Expansion* (University of Wisconsin Press)

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

William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (Norton)

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)

John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War 1941-1947* (Columbia University Press)

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:

Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (Cornell University Press)

Recommended Reading

Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States and Central America* (Norton)

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:

Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America* (Monthly Review Press)

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:

Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (Holt)

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:

Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Harvard University Press)

Recommended reading:

Victoria De Grazia, *America's Advance through 20th-Century Europe* (Belknap Press)

Michael Parenti, *The Sword and the Dollar: Imperialism, Revolution, and the Arms Race* (St. Martin's Press)

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