

**SPRING 2006, GOVERNMENT 98R**  
**EMPIRE: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

Meeting time: Mondays, 1-3pm  
Location: CGIS, Knafel N105  
Instructor: Olivia Lau  
olau@fas.harvard.edu  
Office hours: Mondays, 3-4pm Fisher Family Commons

**Description**

This course will offer a critical examination of modern Western empires using analytic and critical concepts from social science. We will look at economic, geostrategic, and domestic causes for the rise of empires, their dissolution, and imperial legacies. Since I do not assume that students will have any experience in the topic, a small portion of each week’s reading provides some historical background.

*This is not a course on American foreign policy in the 21st century.*

**Requirements**

Grading will consist of the following components:

- 20% Class participation  
- 25% 10 page book review (due Friday, March 9th, 5pm)  
- 5% 5 minute presentation of proposed research topic (due in class March 19th)  
- 50% 25 page research paper (due May 16th, 5pm)

All written assignments should be turned in to my mailbox on the 3rd floor of CGIS North (the Knafel building). Written work will be penalized at the rate of a full letter grade for each day (1 minute to 24 hours) late. No extensions will be granted for the research paper as you will have had an entire semester to work on it.

Since this is a small course, I expect everyone to have done the weekly reading, such that your participation reflects the thought and consideration you have put into the readings. Your class participation grade reflects attendance, the thoughtfulness of your comments, and your ability to engage your peers as well as the readings. For example, an individual with perfect attendance, who speaks frequently, but does not contribute to the intellectual development of the course can expect no better than a “B” for his or her participation grade.

For the book review, you may select from the list on page 3. If you wish to review a book not on the list, you may do so, but clear it with me no later than February 12th. You should
provide a social-scientific assessment of the author’s thesis, and examine whether he provides sufficient evidence to support his arguments. Note that the book review is due outside of our normal class meeting time.

For March 19th, you should prepare a brief presentation of a proposed research topic for your final paper. Think about the following prior to your presentation:

- What is the research question?
- What evidence can I find?
- What theories from the course can I apply to the question?

I am willing to read drafts of your final research paper, provided that they are submitted no later than our final class meeting on April 30th. I am available via email at any time, but if you have detailed questions, you should come to my office hours. If you cannot make it to my office hours, email me to set up an alternative time.

**Required Course Materials**


Other required readings are available online, via links on the syllabus or online course reserves.

**Recommended Materials**

George Orwell (1934), *Burmese Days: A Novel*, Harvest.


*Indochine* (1992), Sony Pictures Classics.
Potential Books for Review


Course Outline

Items marked with an * are optional, but recommended.

Week 1: Introduction (Wednesday, January 31)

We will be meeting in CGIS N252 (the Shklar Room) from 1-2pm for an introductory session prior to the lottery deadline. Please note the special day and location.

Types of Empires and their Origins

Week 2: Types of Empire (February 5)


Week 3: Mercantilism and Monopoly (February 12)

Select book for review, and bring it to class.


Presidents’ Day (February 19): No class meeting

Week 4: Security and the Size of Nations (February 26)


Chapters 8–9, “Western Europe as a Region: Shared Features” and “Western Europe as a System of Competing States” (pp. 175–224), in David B. Abernethy (2000), *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980*, Yale University Press.


Features of Empires

Week 5: Imperial Administration (March 5)


* George Orwell (1934), *Burmese Days: A Novel*, Harvest.
Book reviews due: Friday, March 9th at 5pm

Week 6: Finance and Informal Empire (March 12)


Week 7: Student Presentations (March 19)

The Aftermath

Week 8: Decolonization and Nationalism (April 2)


Selections (pp. 26–30, 36–53, 85–97, 131–166) from Partha Chatterjee (1993), *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, University of Minnesota Press.


Week 9: Decolonization and Ethnic Conflict (April 9)

David D. Laitin, “Hegemony and Religious Conflict: British Imperial Control and Political Cleavages in Yorubaland” (pp. 285–316), in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds.) (1985), Bringing the State Back In, Cambridge University Press.


Week 10: The Economic Legacy of Empires (April 16)


Week 11: The United States in the Post-War World (April 23)


Week 12: Conclusions? (April 30)

Final papers due: May 16th at 5pm