

IMAGINED U.S. EMPIRES IN THE GLOBAL NINETEENTH CENTURY

Proposed Undergraduate American Studies or Literature Course (*Would adapt well to an American Studies introductory or methods course, or a literary topics course, depending on the balance of readings and types of assignments.*)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

While popular opinion associates the height of U.S. empire with the Spanish-American War, American Studies scholars have demonstrated that U.S. imperialism can be traced to the beginnings of the country, and infiltrated nearly every aspect of American life. This course will focus on nineteenth-century cultural responses to U.S. empire, drawing on interdisciplinary methods to trace the global ties forged by American territorial and commercial expansion. The novels we will read express a range of responses to U.S. imperial efforts—from critiques of colonialism, to anxious constructions of racial hierarchies, to absurd satires of American conquest. As we will see, the United States' efforts to establish itself as a world power became visible in intimate relationships, overseas travel, artistic practices, domestic spaces, economic ventures, and urban centers of migration throughout the nineteenth century. By drawing attention to the many different manifestations of U.S. imperial ambition, this course will invite you to question the ways that American identity is constructed, and to examine how nineteenth-century discourses continue to shape today's culture.



Elihu Vedder (American, 1836–1923), “The Questioner of the Sphinx,” 1863

REQUIRED TEXTS

Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*. New York: New York UP, 2007.

Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok and Other Writings on Indians* (1824)

Herman Melville, *Typee* (1846)

Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Story of Avis* (1877)

William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885)

Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889)

Pauline Hopkins, *Of One Blood* (1903)

Sui Sin Far, *Mrs. Spring Fragrance* (1912)

ASSIGNMENTS

Historical and Cultural Contexts presentation (25%)

You will be responsible for a ten-minute presentation that contextualizes the day's reading through interdisciplinary connections to history, politics, economics, culture, visual art, or literary criticism. In choosing your topic, you may select from the suggested historical and cultural contexts readings, or you may create your own topic that illuminates the fiction we're reading. Try to select a topic that could inform your final essay.

Blog Posts: Empire in Contemporary Culture (20%)

Drawing examples from twenty-first-century pop culture, politics, and current events, you will contribute four posts to a shared class blog in which you analyze contemporary responses to U.S. empire in light of their nineteenth-century predecessors. These posts should be thoughtfully written but more conversational in tone than other academic writing, and should take advantage of the digital format to incorporate images, videos, and links to sources. These responses will provide material for our discussions and encourage you to draw connections between nineteenth-century culture and today's world.

Final Essay (40%)

You will write one final essay that presents a coherent, unified argument about one of the texts we will read this semester, drawing on the historical and cultural contexts discussed in class to analyze the author's response to American empire, broadly conceived. Essays should be 5–7 pages long; successful essays will develop a specific focus to present a debatable, convincing argument; effectively incorporate ample textual evidence to support your argument; demonstrate incisive literary analysis of that textual evidence; employ logical organization on both paragraph and sentence levels; and be carefully copyedited for clarity, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. These goals are most likely to be achieved if you allow yourself plenty of time to draft, respond to feedback from readers, and revise, so you will be required to draft and submit smaller pieces of your essay throughout the class. This includes a 1-paragraph proposal, a 1-page close reading, an initial draft, and a final revised draft.

Participation (15%)

Active, regular participation is a basic expectation of this course, and includes completing the assigned reading, bringing a copy of the reading with you to class, and contributing actively in class discussions. I encourage you to share your ideas freely, even if they are less developed than they might be if they were written. I also realize that personality types differ, so work in small groups will provide alternative opportunities to participate for those who are shy about talking to the class as a whole.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Introduction: Empire and Deconstructing Myths of American Identity (1 week) <i>Watch:</i> <i>The Americans</i> : “Pilot” (2013) Required readings: <i>Keywords</i> , “Empire,” “America,” “Nation,” “Exceptionalism”
Colonialism and Conquest (2 weeks) Required readings: Lydia Maria Child, <i>Hobomok and Other Writings on Indians</i> (1824) Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) Suggested historical and cultural contexts readings: Amy Kaplan, <i>The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture</i> . Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005. <i>Keywords</i> , “Indian,” “Colonial”
Exploration and the Geographies of Empire (2 weeks) Required readings: Herman Melville, <i>Typee</i> (1846) Suggested historical and cultural contexts readings: Hsuan Hsu, <i>Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. <i>Keywords</i> , “Globalization,” “Civilization”
Domesticity and the Gendered Arts of Empire (2 weeks) Required readings: Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, <i>The Story of Avis</i> (1877) Suggested historical and cultural contexts readings: Laura Wexler, <i>Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism</i> . Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000. Kristin L. Hoganson, <i>Consumers’ Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920</i> . Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2007. <i>Keywords</i> , “Domestic,” “Aesthetics,” “Gender”

<p>Economic Expansion (2 weeks)</p> <p>Required readings: William Dean Howells, <i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i> (1885)</p> <p>Suggested historical and cultural contexts readings: John Steele Gordon, <i>An Empire of Wealth: The Epic History of American Economic Power</i>. New York: HarperCollins, 2004. Hildegard Hoeller, <i>From Gift to Commodity: Capitalism and Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction</i>. Durham, N.H.: U of New Hampshire P, 2012. <i>Keywords</i>, “Economy,” “Capitalism,” “Corporation”</p>
<p>Anti-Imperialism and Satire (2 weeks)</p> <p>Required readings: Mark Twain, <i>A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court</i> (1889)</p> <p>Suggested historical and cultural contexts readings; John Carlos Rowe, <i>Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II</i>. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. <i>Keywords</i>, “Democracy,” “Modern,” “White”</p>
<p>Race and Orientalist Ventures (2 weeks)</p> <p>Required readings: Pauline Hopkins, <i>Of One Blood</i> (1903)</p> <p>Suggested historical and cultural contexts readings: Malini Johar Schueller, <i>U.S. Orientalisms: Race, Nation, and Gender in Literature, 1790-1890</i>. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998. <i>Keywords</i>, “Race,” “Orientalism”</p>
<p>Immigration and Conflicting Cultures (1 week)</p> <p>Required readings: Sui Sin Far, <i>Mrs. Spring Fragrance</i> (1912)</p> <p>Suggested historical and cultural contexts readings: Hsuan Hsu, <i>Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature</i>. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. <i>Keywords</i>, “Immigration,” “Asian,” “Culture”</p>