

H-France Salon
Volume 13, Issue 18, #9

Prof. Emily Marker
HISTORIES OF IMPERIALISM
510:265:01 (History) | 014:381:03 (Africana Studies)

From iconic children's tales like *Tarzan* and German-style beer made in Namibia to English-speaking call centers outsourced to India, the residues of European imperialism are all around us. This course explores the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of European imperial expansion and colonial rule from the mid-nineteenth century to the dissolution of European empires in the two decades after World War II. Using narrative histories, historical documents, fiction, and film, we will consider imperialism's impact on Europeans and European society; African, Indian, and Asian experiences and critiques of colonial and imperial power; the forces that ultimately led to the collapse of European empires; and the afterlives of empire in our globalized world.

*This is a mid-level introduction to the history of imperialism in global perspective. Its anchoring texts in the first two-thirds of the course center on the Belgian Congo, British India, and French Indochina. This selection serves several purposes: it emphasizes that imperialism was a transnational European project; it highlights transregional colonial experience; and it encourages a comparative perspective with regards to both colonizers and colonized. The course's treatment of French Indochina also introduces a more unified imperial framework, putting Vũ Trọng Phụng's interwar satirical novel, *Dumb Luck*, in conversation with contemporary French cultural material about other parts of the empire, and later, juxtaposing Ho Chi Minh's and Aimé Césaire's postwar writing on decolonization.*

*The centrality of racism and processes of racialization in imperial and colonial relations of power is the underlying theme of the course. It is approached through different lenses across the units, primarily: violence, extraction, and exploitation; sexuality; and "civilization." Another recurrent theme is African Americans' complex roles in anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, from William Sheppard and George Washington Williams in the Congo Reform Movement at the turn of the twentieth century to Richard Wright in the era of decolonization. We consider this alongside African Americans' complicated place in the European colonial imagination, illustrated by Josephine Baker's performance in *Princesse Tam-Tam*.*

This course requires significant scaffolding to set students up for success. That involves not only preparing them to engage with material that graphically depicts racist violence and sexual exoticization, but more importantly, to train them how to speak openly and honestly about how racism actually works, in the past and in the present. To do this, I open the class with an exercise (Appendix A) asking students to dissect what makes talking about histories of imperialism and racism so difficult today. Their responses become the basis of a collectively drafted "Class Constitution" (Appendix B), that they all have to sign at the end of the first week of class. The

students are then accountable to one another for working through the difficult conversations and challenging material we encounter over the course of the term.

Books for Purchase:

Stephen Howe, *Empire: A Very Short Introduction*

Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* [**5th Norton Critical Edition**]

E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India*

Vũ Trọng Phụng, *Dumb Luck: A Novel*

Course Requirements

Participation	20%
Assignments	20%
Quizzes	10%
Response Papers (4)	10%
Midterm Paper	20%
Final Exam	20%

All papers should be typed, double-spaced, with 12-pt font and 1-inch margins. They should be spell-checked and carefully proofread. Each response paper should be at least one full page. Midterm papers should be 5-6 pages. Due dates are clearly indicated on the syllabus. Papers will be docked half a grade (+/-) for each day they are late.

Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance is the most basic component of class participation. You are expected to attend all class sessions. You are permitted two absences over the course of the term. You do not need to tell me why you are absent – everyone gets two freebies, *but only two*. Further absences will lower your participation grade. If you miss more than five classes over the course of the term you cannot get an A in this class, no matter how good your written work.

Office Hours

You must come to office hours at least once over the course of the term. This also counts toward your participation grade. If you cannot come during my regularly scheduled hours, we can arrange to meet another time. Beyond these mandatory meetings, you are very welcome to stop by or make an appointment as often as you please!

Electronics

Our classroom is like an airplane: phones must be turned off and stowed away before we begin. If you use your phone during class you will be asked to leave, which will count as an absence.

For students without accommodations, the use of laptops, iPads, and other e-readers is only allowed during discussion of electronic readings, during which time the wifi must be TURNED OFF (meaning you must download readings prior to coming to class). Electronic devices are prohibited in the classroom at all other times, which means you are expected to take notes by hand.

Classroom Decorum

This classroom is a communal, active learning environment. Your full attention and respect for others are crucial for fostering a distraction-free and supportive workspace. You are expected to come to class on time, to refrain from private conversations, and to be patient and generous with your peers. In this course especially, we will consider difficult themes, divisive issues, and sensitive material. Consideration for the views and sensibilities of others is key to ensuring productive conversations in the classroom.

Plagiarism

All writing in this class must be in your own words. DO NOT CUT AND PASTE ANYTHING, FROM ANYWHERE, EVER, into a document you are handing in. Always re-read your work before submitting it to make sure that any language or ideas that are not your own did not creep into your writing inadvertently. If you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism, come talk to me. You should also familiarize yourself with University policy on academic honesty here: <https://deanofstudents.camden.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity>. Any case of plagiarism will automatically lead to a failing grade and will be reported to the administration.

Course Schedule¹

WEEK 1

Wednesday, January 23 Introduction

WEEK 2

Monday, January 28

- Howe, *Empire*: 1-8
- DUE: Worksheet #1: Difficult Dialogues Guidelines *See APPENDIX A*

Wednesday, January 30

- Howe, *Empire*: 9-34
- DUE: Worksheet #2: Key Words

WEEK 3

Monday, February 4

- Howe, *Empire*: 50-103
- DUE: Worksheet #3: Empires - by Land and by Sea

¹ All readings and assignments are subject to change at my discretion.

Wednesday, February 6

- BBC 4, “Racism: A History,” Episode 2, “Fatal Impacts” [59min] [Sakai]
- DUE: Worksheet #4: Race and Empire in the 19th Century – An Overview

This has been my preferred documentary on nineteenth-century racism. Howe’s Empire is an easily digestible overview of the history of empires and imperialism, but its treatment of racism leaves much to be desired. The BBC piece functions here as a framing device for thinking about the centrality of racism in all imperial projects for the rest of the course. It is short, accessible, and has a clear argument and narrative arc. It features a compelling array of historians of race and empire on camera, including Catherine Hall, Mike Davis, Henry Reynolds, and many others. As of 8/12/21, it was available on dailymotion [here](#). Parts of Raoul Peck’s Exterminate All the Brutes, would also work well.

WEEK 4**Monday, February 11**

- Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*: 1-46 [Intro, Prologue, Chs 1-2]
- Map Quiz: Contemporary Africa

I frame contemporary ignorance of African geography as a colonial legacy that sustains global inequality and racism today. I therefore impress upon the students the importance of familiarizing themselves with the continent. A website that provides free map quiz materials also has a [map quiz game](#) as a study tool that students really enjoy.

Wednesday, February 13

- Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*: 47-74 [Chs 3-4]
- DUE: Worksheet #5: The Belgian Congo, Part I: The New Imperialism

During this session, we read excerpts from Jules Ferry’s “Speech Before the Chamber of Deputies, March 28, 1884” (on colonial expansion) in class.

WEEK 5**Monday, February 18**

- Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*: 75-114 [Chs 5-7]
- Map Quiz: Colonial Africa

Wednesday, February 20

- Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*: 115-139 [Ch 8]
- George Washington Williams, “An Open Letter,” in *Heart of Darkness*: 126-139
- DUE: Worksheet #6: The Belgian Congo, Part II: The International Context

WEEK 6**Monday, February 25**

- Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*: 3-77 [all]
- DUE: First Short Response Paper

Wednesday, February 27

- Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Heart of Darkness*: 306-319
- Edward Said, "Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*," in *Heart of Darkness*: 361-368
- DUE: Worksheet #7: Achebe and Said

WEEK 7**Monday, March 4**

- Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*: 140-181 [Chs 9-11]
- David Denby, "The Trouble with 'Heart of Darkness,'" *The New Yorker* 11/6/95 [Sakai]
- DUE: Discussion Qs

Wednesday, March 6

- Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*: 185-224 [Chs 12-14]
- Roger Casement, "The Congo Report," in *Heart of Darkness*: 145-155
- DUE: Midterm Paper Proposal

WEEK 8**Monday, March 11**

- Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*: 225-274 [Chs 15-17]
- DUE: Discussion Qs

Wednesday, March 13

- Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*: 275-306 [Chs 18-19]
- Encyclopedia Entry on the Herero Genocide [Sakai]
- DUE: Discussion Qs

****MID-TERM PAPER DUE: Friday, March 15 by 5PM****

WEEK 9

**** NO CLASS ****

WEEK 10**Monday, March 25**

- Forster, *A Passage to India*: 1-132 [Part I, "Mosque"]
- Encyclopedia Entry on "Imperialism and Gender" [Sakai]
- DUE: Themes & Passages

During this session, we read two primary documents in class: Mokshodayani Mukhopadhyay's "The Bengali Babu" (1882) and Two Letters from Indian Soldiers on the Western Front (1915), in Bonnie Smith, ed., Modern Empires, A Reader (Oxford 2017)

Wednesday, March 27

- Forster, *A Passage to India*: 135-199 [Part II, “Caves”: Chs XII-XIX]
- Map Quiz: The British Empire

WEEK 11**Monday, April 1**

- Forster, *A Passage to India*: 199-314 [Part II con’t: Chs XX-XXXII]
- DUE: Second Short Response Paper

Wednesday, April 3

- Forster, *A Passage to India*: 317-362 [Part III, “Temple”]
- Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire*: Intro, p1-8; Ch 5, p113-136 [Sakai]
- DUE: Discussion Qs

WEEK 12**Monday, April 8**

- French Colonial Exhibition of 1931 images and essay [Sakai]
- Jean de Brunhoff, *The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant*
- Edmond de Gréville (dir.), *Princesse Tam Tam* (1935) [77 min]
- DUE: Discussion Qs

Wednesday, April 10

- Phụng, *Dumb Luck*: 33-79 [Chs 1-6]
- DUE: Themes and Passages

WEEK 13**Monday, April 15**

- Phụng, *Dumb Luck*: 80-133 [Chs 7-14]
- Peter Zinoman, Introduction to *Dumb Luck*: 1-24
- Map Quiz: The French Empire

Wednesday, April 17

- Phụng, *Dumb Luck*: 134-189 [Chs 15-20]
- DUE: Third Short Response Paper

WEEK 14**Monday, April 22**

- Encyclopedia Entries: Overview; Africa and WWII; Japanese in Southeast Asia [Sakai]
- Ho Chi Minh, Declaration of Independence of Vietnam
- DUE: Worksheet #8: WWII and the Crisis of Empire

Wednesday, April 24

- Hitler on the Colonization of the East [Sakai]
- Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (excerpts) [Sakai]

- DUE: Discussion Qs

This pair of readings makes a tremendous impression on students (I also teach these sequentially in my Western Civ survey). The first document is a collection of passages from Hitler's secret speeches to the SS in 1941 and 1942 on the colonization of the East, reprinted in Sax and Kunst, eds., Inside Nazi Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich (1992). Students are amazed how explicitly Hitler compares the Nazi conquest of Russia, Poland, and Ukraine to British colonization in India, which is a perfect set-up for Césaire's argument that Nazism is a natural outgrowth of European colonialism and racism, which only became intolerable to most Europeans when its victims were white.

WEEK 15

Monday, April 29

- Howe, *Empire*: 104-121
- Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain* (excerpts) [Sakai]
- DUE: Worksheet #9: Decolonization

Wednesday, May 1

- Raoul Peck (dir.), *Lumumba* (2000) [115 min]
- Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*: 309-318
- DUE: Fourth Short Response Paper

WEEK 16

Monday, May 6

- Howe, *Empire*: 122-130
- Dennis O'Rourke (dir.), "Cannibal Tours" (1988) [67 min] [Sakai]
- DUE: Final Exam Prep

This final class brings us into the present, but also more or less full circle – a key tension we work through in our concluding discussion. The extraordinary documentary "[Cannibal Tours](#)" follows a group of wealthy European and American tourists on a river cruise in Papua New Guinea in the 1980s. The set-up recalls Heart of Darkness, and the views expressed by the tourists, their encounters with the villagers as they make their way up the river, and the economic and power relations undergirding those interactions, force the students to confront the contemporary social, cultural, economic, and global legacies of the histories of imperialism we have studied all term.

****Take-Home Final Exam DUE Monday, May 13 by 5PM****

APPENDIX B
Class Constitution (Spring 2019)

In this class, we recognize that everyone in the room has their own personal, emotional connections to the history we are studying. We may all be self-conscious or uncomfortable discussing certain topics, but we will experience that discomfort differently depending on whether we identify with dominant or historically marginalized groups. In this sense, we recognize the emotional, psychological, and political stakes in our course material are not the same for everyone. We all agree to do our best to keep that awareness in mind as we discuss topics like racism and white supremacy, racist/gendered violence, systemic exploitation, expropriation of land, and ideologies and practices of domination of various kinds.

As we recognize that our different life experiences and backgrounds shape our perspectives, we also acknowledge that certain experiences and backgrounds might give some of us more insight into histories of empire than others. Some people in the room may be more familiar with the course material than others; some might be confronting certain ideas and concepts for the first time. We will be patient with each other, as we recognize not everyone is coming from the same place.

We agree to make an effort to engage with each other's positions and arguments respectfully even when we passionately disagree, and to not respond with personal attacks. We understand that we do not have to agree on everything in order to work together in class or in future endeavors. There are times when it is okay to agree to disagree.

We agree to not interrupt each other and to practice committed listening when someone else is speaking, even when someone is saying something we may not want to hear.

We recognize that a crucial part of respecting each other is getting to know one another and will make an effort to address each other by name. But we also recognize that there are limits to what we can know (or think we know) about each other, and we will remain sensitive to that fact.

We will do our best to come to class with an open mind, and we will pay attention to our own resistances to changing our ideas and opinions. Furthermore, we will keep in mind that the objective of this class is to learn, both from our professor and each other. In learning we will try to become more well-rounded and thoughtful individuals.

We accept that there are risks to having frank conversations about our course material. We will do our best to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, to try to slow down and calm our gut reactions when we hear or see something that offends us, and to try to work through offensive, insensitive, or awkward comments together as a group, helping each other understand why something might rub someone the wrong way.

The professor will be an active facilitator and mediator in class discussions.