

ISS 1123: The End of Empires: Imperialism to Decolonization

Quest 1: Justice and Power

I. General Information

Class Meetings

- Fall 2025
- 100% In-Person, No GTAs, 35 Residential
- M W F | 5:10PM - 6:00PM
- CSE 0453
- 3 Credits

Instructor

- Barnaby Crowcroft
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- *Office Hours:* M | 2:00 - 3:00 | F | 2:00 - 3:00

Course Description

Empires, rather than nation-states, have always been the principal actors in the history of world events. Yet less than 75 years ago, in the middle of the twentieth century, they suddenly disappeared throughout the world. Today, we live in a world which, for perhaps the first time in human history contains – officially at least – no empires. How can we explain this transformation? What is the nature of the political world in which we now live? How is it different to those that have come before – and why? What does it mean for a political community to be independent? This multidisciplinary course considers a stretch in the history of Western civilization – from the age of imperialism to the era of global decolonization – in which a world inhabited empires was replaced by one of nation-states. We approach these questions by studying some of the Great Books that have shaped and responded to these changes, including memoirs, fiction, poetry, and modern works of interpretation. In exploring major debates over empire and independence, students will also explore ideas about political order, concepts of self-government and self-determination, and the larger questions of what men and women live by.

Quest and General Education Credit

- Quest 1
- Humanities
- Writing Requirement (WR) 2000 words

This course accomplishes the [Quest](#) and [General Education](#) objectives of the subject areas listed above. A minimum grade of C is required for Quest and General Education credit. Courses intended to satisfy Quest and General Education requirements cannot be taken S-U.

The Writing Requirement (WR) ensures students both maintain their fluency in writing and use writing as a tool to facilitate learning.

Course grades have two components. To receive writing requirement credit, a student must receive a grade of C or higher and a satisfactory completion of the writing component of the course.

Required Readings and Works

- Required Readings: Students should purchase Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* and Naguib Mahfouz, *Karnak Café*, in any available edition.
- Additional *required* readings will be available as PDFs on Canvas.
- The writing manual for this course is: *Elements of Style*, 4th edition. (1999). ISBN: 9780205309023.
- Materials and Supplies Fees: N/A

Course Objectives

1. Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential ideas about imperialism, self-government and the history of decolonization.
2. Identify, describe, and explain key ideas and questions about imperialism, decolonization and broader nineteenth and twentieth century world history.
3. Analyse how ideas about society and self-government operate from the era of empire to the present.
4. Analyse and evaluate specific accounts of human reaction to concepts that challenge our own notions of self-government and imperialism, using close reading, critical analysis, class discussion, and personal reflection.
5. Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts.
6. Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class discussion and debates, with clear oral presentation and written work articulating students' personal experiences and reflections on democracy.
7. Connect course content with students' intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond.

8. Reflect on students' own and others' experience with thinking about the practical consequences of belief in ideas about imperial rule and self-government, in class discussion and written work.

II. Graded Work

Description of Graded Work

1. Active Participation and Attendance: 20%

a. Participation: 10%

- i. An exemplar participant shows evidence of having done the assigned reading before each class, consistently offers thoughtful points and questions for discussion, and listens considerably to other discussants. See participation rubric below. (R)

b. Class Attendance: 10%

- i. On-time class attendance is required for this component of the course grade. Class attendance will be recorded daily. You may have two unexcused absences without any penalty, but starting with the third class missed your grade will be affected. Starting with the third unexcused absence, each unexcused absence reduces your attendance grade by 2/3: an A- becomes a B, and so on.
- ii. Except for absence because of religious holiday observance, documentation is required for excused absences, [per university policy](#). Excessive unexcused absences (10 or more) will result in failure of the course. If you miss 10 or more classes (excused or not), you will miss material essential for successful completion of the course.

2. Experiential Learning Component (Rare Books Library Session): 10%

During the semester, the class will visit the Harold & Mary Jean Hanson Rare Book Collection in the UF Smathers Library and explore manuscripts in the African Studies collections relating to empire and decolonization. Students will be introduced to the Library's African Studies Collections and its primary Students will experience handling these rare materials with their own hands and examining them directly. They will complete a short assignment during the session about the materials in relation to themes in the course (instructions to be given during the session). Date: TBA.

3. In-class Reading Quizzes: 20%

- a. Reading quizzes will be administered at the start of class on Fridays, five times throughout the semester. They will test the student's knowledge of the week's readings, and will contain short-answer, true/false, and multiple-choice questions. Instructor will provide written feedback on your short-answer questions. See examination rubric below. (R)
- b. Quiz dates: Wk. 5 (Sep 18th), Wk. 7 (Oct 3rd), Wk. 11 (Oct 31st), Wk. 13 (Nov 4th)

4. Midterm Examination: 25%

- a. In Week 8, a midterm examination will be administered in class. The examination will be an in-class, 50-minute exam including essay and short-answer questions. Instructor will provide written feedback on your essay and/or short-answer questions in order to give the opportunity to improve writing skills ahead of the Final Analytical Paper. See examination rubric below. (R)

5. Final Analytical Paper: 25%

- a. During Week 15, you will submit a 2,000 word (minimum) analytical essay addressing a short story, novel or other historical text to be agreed with Instructor, at the latest, by Week

8 (Oct 10th). You will develop an analytic argument related to the themes of the course and your chosen study. Your paper must refer at least four course readings. See Canvas for more details. Professor will provide written feedback. See writing rubric below. (R)

- b. Instructor will evaluate and provide written feedback, on all the student's written assignments with respect to grammar, punctuation, clarity, coherence, and organization.
- c. You may want to access the university's [Writing Studio](#).
- d. An additional writing guide website can be found at [OWL](#).

III. Annotated Weekly Schedule

Week	Topic, Homework & Assignment
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Empires and Independence — Class dates: August 22 — Summary: Empires have always driven history and shaped the lives of the world's inhabitants – yet today they have not only disappeared but are regarded as wholly negative things. This section will introduce some major concepts and questions of the course and of the revolutionary shift between empire and independence. We will also discuss the value of looking at literary works to explain political ideas and phenomenon in history. — Readings: Niall Ferguson, 'Empires with Expiration Dates' (<i>Foreign Policy</i>, 2006) — Page count: 5
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Why Imperialism? I — Class dates: August 25, 27 & 29 — Summary: Why did people become involved in empire – and what kinds of societies produced them? Do imperial careers resemble ones that people pursue today? We begin our exploration of empire by looking at the early experience of one of the most famous political figures of the twentieth century – and youthful imperialist – Winston Churchill. — Readings: Winston Churchill's <i>My Early Life: A Roving Commission</i> (1930): Chap. 1 ('Childhood'), Chap.4 ('Sandhurst'), Chap.5 ('Fourth Hussars'), Chap.7. ('Hounslow'), Chap.9 ('Education'), Chap. 10 ('Malakand Field Force'), Chap. 11 ('The Mamund Valley') — Page count: 84
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Why Imperialism? II — Class dates: September 3, 5 & 8 — Summary: We continue our study of imperial motivation by looking at works by one of Britain's most famous imperialist authors, Rudyard Kipling. Looking at Kipling's characters we explore the diverse range of agents of empire and as the diversity of the imperial experience – from soldiers and civil servants to families and adventurers. — Readings: Rudyard Kipling: 'The Man who would be King' (1888), 'Only a Subaltern' (1888), 'Cupid's Arrows' (1888), 'The Education of Otis Yeere' (1885), 'Wressley of the Foreign Office' (1887), 'A Bank Fraud' (1887) & 'Pig' (1887) — Page count: 89

4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Love and Trade — Class dates: September 10 & 12 — Summary: In the beginning, empire was driven by trade, and for many empire spelt economic opportunity well into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it could also satisfy other appetites and relationships, with happy and unhappy results. This week we explore a dark story of love and trade in empire in the Pacific Islands, by an author better known for his children's adventure fiction, R.L. Stevenson. — Readings: Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Beach at Falesa' — Page count: 71
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Heroism and Empire — Class dates: September 15, 17 & 18 — Summary: How important was heroism to empire? Is it possible to be both heroic and an imperialist? Would we still consider the actions of some the heroes of empire as heroic today? We will probe these questions through a study of the epic story of General George Gordon's 'Last Stand' at Khartoum in 1884-5, as told by the famous essayist Lytton Strachey, and in Gordon's own diaries. — Readings: Lytton Strachey, 'The End of General Gordon' (in <i>Eminent Victorians</i>, 1918), & <i>General Gordon's Khartoum Journal</i>: entries for November 26 - December 14, 1884. — Page count: 113 — Assessment: Reading Quiz #1 (September 18)
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Exploitation and Atrocity I — Class dates: September 22, 24 & 26 — Summary: This week we look at a great work by one of the most influential novelists of empire – and former-merchant seaman – Joseph Conrad. Focusing on the period of the infamous 'Scramble' for Africa, we will explore how imperial exploitation was possible in the world and how far imperialists could get away with it. — Reading: Joseph Conrad's <i>Heart of Darkness</i> (1899) — Page count: 84
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Exploitation and Atrocity II — Class dates: September 29, October 1 & 3 — Summary: We conclude our reading of Conrad with two stories set at sea around his other major imperial-literary world, Southeast Asia. Moving into the history of the early-twentieth century, when Conrad was writing, we will also consider ideas about globalization and empire, and the question of 'Orientalism' in European portrayals of the non-Western world. — Readings: Joseph Conrad: 'Youth' (1898), 'Karain' (1897) & 'The Secret Sharer: An Episode from the Coast' (1910)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Page count: 104 — Assessment: Reading Quiz #2 (October 3)
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Imperial Demise I — Class dates: October 6 & 8 — Summary: This week, we look at the stories and essays of one of the most influential anti-imperialist authors working in the run-up to and during the Second World War: George Orwell. Our discussion of the beginning of the end of empire will consider questions about the early drivers of decolonization: whether, for example this was driven by resistance from colonized populations, or a loss of belief in the imperial mission at home. — Readings: George Orwell: 'Shooting an Elephant' (1936) — Page count: 5 — Assessment: Midterm Examination (October 8)
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Social Class and Empire — Class dates: October 13, 15 & 17 — Summary: Was imperialism the product of hierarchical and aristocratic societies – and did democratic social and political change make empire unsustainable? How far do modern Western societies resemble the ones which presided over the era of empire? This week we will discuss the relationship between social class and empire with reference to a short story by Somerset Maugham, a keen observer of empire between the wars and a consummate snob. — Readings: Somerset Maugham: 'The Outstation' (1926), 'The Letter' (1926) & 'Mr. Know-All' (1924) — Page count: 65
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Imperial Demise II — Class dates: October 20, 22, 24 — Summary: We conclude our exploration of causes of empire's decline through a study of one of the great satirical novels of decolonization, Anthony Burgess' <i>Malayan Trilogy</i> (1956-9). We look at the insights this closely observed contemporary account can give us into the politics of movements against empire. We also explore the role satire and humor play as solvents of imperial values. — Readings: Anthony Burgess's <i>Enemy in the Blanket</i> (1958), Chaps. 1, 6 - 10, 15 & 16 & Bill Schwarz, 'End of Empire and the English novel since 1945' (2011) — Page count: 87

11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Modernization and Traditional Society — Class dates: October 27, 29 & 31 — Summary: Is technological modernity indelibly linked to the decline of empire as a political form? Are ideas about political order down-stream of economic development? This week, we look at a classic Middle Eastern literary representation of the passing of traditional society and onset of Western-led modernization in the Arabian Peninsula. — Readings: Abdulrahman Munif, <i>Cities of Salt</i> (1987), Chaps.1-10 — Page count: 80 — Assessment: Reading Quiz #3 (October 31)
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Dilemmas of Post-colonialism — Class dates: November 5 & 7 — Summary: What are the dilemmas that face new nations asserting independence? To what extent are these legacies of empire – and can imperial inheritances be overcome? This week we will explore concepts and ideas that are crucial to understanding modern politics in the non-Western world through some of the works of one of Africa’s great post-colonial authors, Chinua Achebe, as well as a recent, contrarian take on the author and his significance by an American political scientist. — Readings: Chinua Achebe: ‘The Sacrificial Egg’ (1959), ‘Dead Men’s Path’ (1953), ‘Akueke’ (1960), ‘The Voter’ (1965), ‘Girls at War’ (1970) — Page count: 55 — Assessment: Analytical Paper DRAFT (Due April 10 by 6 PM)
13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Independence and Disillusionment I — Class dates: November 10, 12, 14 — Summary: How can we grapple with the paradox that independence from empire could result in less freedom and political liberty than before? What can this tell us about the use of concepts like empire and nation? How important were imperial legacies against more immediate political contexts? In addressing such questions, this week we begin Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz’s classic account of political repression and military rule in Egypt. — Required Reading: Naguib Mahfouz, <i>Karnak Café</i> (1974) — Page count: 99 — Assessment: Reading Quiz #4 (Nov 14)

14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Final Papers Conference — Class dates: November 17, 19, 21 — Summary: In this last week, the class will convene a miniature academic conference, in which students will each present final paper topic proposals on a series of panels for group discussion and criticism. Panel themes will include topics including 'Individuals and Empire', 'New Perspectives on Kipling for 2025', and others.
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Topic: Re-examining Empire and Independence — Class dates: December 1 — Summary: In our last session, we will reflect in class discussions on the varieties of empire and independence that we have studied throughout the course. How has studying these ideas and these literary representations shaped your own understanding of political order and political organization in the world? This class will contain discussion questions submitted by students. — Assessment: Analytical Paper Due This Week (December 3 by 6 PM)

IV. Grading Scale and Rubrics

Grading Scale

For information on UF's grading policies for assigning grade points, see [here](#).

A	94 - 100%		C	74 - 76%
A-	90 - 93%		C-	70 - 73%
B+	87 - 89%		D+	67 - 69%
B	84 - 86%		D	64 - 66%
B-	80 - 83%		D-	60 - 63%
C+	77 - 79%		E	<60

Grading Rubrics

Participation Rubric

A (90-100%)	Typically comes to class with pre-prepared questions about the readings. Engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others and consistently elevates the level of discussion.
B (80-89%)	Does not always come to class with pre-prepared questions about the reading. Waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.
C (70-79%)	Attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion. Is only adequately prepared for discussion.
D (60-69%)	Fails to attend class regularly and is inadequately prepared for discussion. Is an unwilling participant in discussion.
E (<60%)	Attends class infrequently and is wholly unprepared for discussion. Refuses to participate in discussion.

Examination Rubric: Essays and Short Answers

	Completeness	Analysis	Evidence	Writing
A (90-100%)	Shows a thorough understanding of the question. Addresses all aspects of the question completely.	Analyses, evaluates, compares and/or contrasts issues and events with depth.	Incorporates pertinent and detailed information from both class discussions and assigned readings.	Presents all information clearly and concisely, in an organized manner.
B (80-89%)	Presents a general understanding of the question. Completely addresses most aspects of the question or address all aspects incompletely.	Analyses or evaluates issues and events, but not in any depth.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details but does not support all aspects of the task evenly.	Presents information fairly and evenly and may have minor organization problems.
C (70-79%)	Shows a limited understanding of the question. Does not address most aspects of the question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating accurate, relevant facts.	Includes relevant facts, examples and details, but omits concrete examples, includes inaccurate information and/or does not support all aspects of the task.	Lacks focus, somewhat interfering with comprehension.
D (60-69%)	Fails fully to answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events beyond stating vague, irrelevant, and/or inaccurate facts.	Does not incorporate information from pertinent class discussion and/or assigned readings.	Organizational problems prevent comprehension.
E (<60%)	Does not answer the specific central question.	Lacks analysis or evaluation of the issues and events.	Does not adduce any evidence.	Incomprehensible organization and prose.

Writing Rubric

	Thesis and Argumentation	Use of Sources	Organization	Grammar, mechanics and style
A (90-100%)	Thesis is clear, specific, and presents a thoughtful, critical, engaging, and creative interpretation. Argument fully supports the thesis both logically and thoroughly.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are well incorporated, utilized, and contextualized throughout.	Clear organization. Introduction provides adequate background information and ends with a thesis. Details are in logical order. Conclusion is strong and states the point of the paper.	No errors.
B (80-89%)	Thesis is clear and specific, but not as critical or original. Shows insight and attention to the text under consideration. May have gaps in argument's logic.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are incorporated but not contextualized significantly.	Clear organization. Introduction clearly states thesis, but does not provide as much background information. Details are in logical order, but may be more difficult to follow. Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	A few errors.
C (70-79%)	Thesis is present but not clear or specific, demonstrating a lack of critical engagement to the text. Argument is weak, missing important details or making logical leaps with little support.	Primary (and secondary texts, if required) are mostly incorporated but are not properly contextualized.	Significant lapses in organization. Introduction states thesis but does not adequately provide background information. Some details not in logical or expected order that results in a distracting read. Conclusion is recognizable but does not tie up all loose ends.	Some errors.
D (60-69%)	Thesis is vague and/or confused. Demonstrates a failure to understand the text. Argument lacks any logical flow and does not utilize any source material.	Primary and/or secondary texts are almost wholly absent.	Poor, hard-to-follow organization. There is no clear introduction of the main topic or thesis. There is no clear conclusion, and the paper just ends. Little or no employment of logical body paragraphs.	Many errors.
E (<60%)	There is neither a thesis nor any argument.	Primary and/or secondary texts are wholly absent.	The paper is wholly disorganized, lacking an introduction, conclusion or any logical coherence.	Scores of errors.

V. Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the [Quest](#) the [General Education student learning outcomes](#) for Humanities (H).

[Humanities \(H\)](#) Humanities courses must afford students the ability to think critically through the mastering of subjects concerned with human culture, especially literature, history, art, music, and philosophy, and must include selections from the Western canon.

Humanities courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and theory or methodologies used within a humanities discipline or the humanities in general. Students will learn to identify and to analyze the key events, influences, and biases that shape thought. These courses emphasize clear and effective analysis and approach issues and problems from multiple perspectives.

Content: *Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, theories and methodologies used within the discipline(s).*

- Identify, describe, and explain the methodologies used across humanities disciplines to examine essential ideas about imperialism, self-government and the history of decolonization (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** midterm exam, analytical essay, in-class reading quizzes.
- Identify, describe, and explain key ideas and questions about imperialism, decolonization and broader nineteenth and twentieth century world history (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** midterm exam, analytical essay, in-class reading quizzes.

Critical Thinking: *Students carefully and logically analyse information from multiple perspectives and develop reasoned solutions to problems within the discipline(s).*

- Analyse how ideas about society and self-government operate from the era of empire to the present (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** analytical essay, midterm exam.
- Analyse and evaluate specific accounts of human reaction to concepts that challenge our own notions of self-government and imperialism, using close reading, critical analysis, class discussion, and personal reflection. (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** analytical essay, midterm exam.

Communication: *Students communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms appropriate to the discipline(s).*

- Develop and present clear and effective written and oral work that demonstrates critical engagement with course texts (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** analytical essay, midterm exam.
- Communicate well-supported ideas and arguments effectively within class discussion and debates, with clear oral presentation and written work articulating students' personal experiences and reflections on democracy (Quest 1, H). **Assessment:** active class participation, experiential learning component.

Connection: *Students connect course content with meaningful critical reflection on their intellectual, personal, and professional development at UF and beyond.*

- Connect course content with students' intellectual, personal, and professional lives at UF and beyond. (Quest 1). **Assessment:** experiential learning component, analytical paper.
- Reflect on students' own and others' experience with thinking about the practical consequences of belief in ideas about imperial rule and self-government, in class discussion and written work (Quest 1). **Assessment:** experiential learning component, analytical paper.

VI. Quest Learning Experiences

1. Details of Experiential Learning Component

During the semester, the class will visit the Harold & Mary Jean Hanson Rare Book Collection in the UF Smathers Library and explore manuscripts in the African Studies collections relating to empire and decolonization. Students will be introduced to the Library's African Studies Collections and its primary Students will experience handling these rare materials with their own hands and examining them directly. They will complete a short assignment during the session about the materials in relation to themes in the course (instructions to be given during the session). Date: tba

2. Details of Self-Reflection Component

Self-reflection is built into many of the assignments, primarily through the reading questions that students create, the analytic essay assignment, and the democracy experiential learning assignment. In these opportunities for self-reflection offered by specific activities throughout the course, students will reflect on the broader implications of the themes of the course, considering the impact to themselves and/or to a wider community.

VII. Required Policies

Academic Policies

All academic policies in this course are consistent with university policies, which can be found at <https://go.ufl.edu/syllabuspolicies>