The central goal of this course is to examine the relationship between democracy and empire that is displayed repeatedly in history: the Athenian polis, the Roman republic, parliamentary Great Britain, and the United States have each professed democratic principles while practicing a politics that was both exclusionary and imperial. But we focus on the American case.

Partly, we ask theoretical questions: What does it mean to call a state or nation an “empire”? What does the adjective “imperial” connote? What are theories (explanations) of American “imperialism”? By what conceptual means can we relate “democratic,” “national” (“American”) and “imperial” practices?

Partly, we ask historical questions: What is the relationship of democratic principles, claims about nationhood, exclusionary practices (that racialize some while enfranchising others), continental expansion, and global power in American history? How do we explain the ways that “liberalism” in practice, despite universalist professions, has displayed racial and imperial entailments? Has the “imperial” power of the American nation-state changed over time? How were continental expansion and then global power justified? How was mass support recruited? What are the dominant (“hegemonic”) narratives that link nationhood (“America”) to “democracy” —and to imperial power? (How is the “imperial” dimension of state power both asserted and disavowed by these narratives?)

Partly, we ask if post-9/11 politics repeats and transforms inherited political languages and historical patterns of conduct: Is the “war on terror” unprecedented and necessary? Or is it related to historical white supremacy over Indians and slaves, and to a hundred years of anxiety about aliens and communism? Does it signal an empire in ascendency or decline? How are we to explain the increased power of the national-security state, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as increasing covert operations world-wide?

Lastly, we use theory and history to ask political questions: does global power threaten democratic practices? After 9/11 did the U.S. enter a “crisis of the republic,” and if so, what is to be done? If there is imperial or national decline, what are its symptoms in “domestic” politics? Can declining global power, economic hardship, and increased mobility/migration of people be made a condition of democratic political possibility rather than of cultural resentment and political recrimination? To address what is happening, do people need new information to remedy an unfortunate ignorance? Do they need a new perspective on what they already “know” in some sense, but have failed to really acknowledge or make salient in politically constructive ways? By what idioms (vocabularies, narratives, metaphors) can critics and activists address a mass public about the causes of and remedies for its current circumstances? What forms of address, genres, or rhetoric might be felicitous?

Five years ago, these questions illuminated the 9/11 moment and the two wars following it during the Bush Presidency, but these question seem even more pertinent now, in our historical moment, a moment characterized by: the election of a president said to signify a post-civil rights progress; ongoing state violence in a war on terror”; racial backlash, and pervasive anxiety about economic and national decline; by political polarization in the political elite and ideological stalemate in the wider culture. What arguments or narratives might open ideological space for democratizing politics? In what actual spaces and practices is change already unfolding?
The course is structured into three broad sections. The first section is theoretical: we read contrasting theories of empire and contrasting theories of politics, each configuring nation, state, race, and capital, each involving views of what drives human action. The second section of the course is broadly historical, unfolding a selective history of the United States since the cold war. The third section focuses on history & politics since 9/11.

Required texts in order of use:
Alexis de Tocqueville - Democracy in American (volume one & two)
Carl Schmitt - The Concept of The Political
Carl Schmitt - Political Theology
David Harvey, The New Imperialism
Chalmers Johnson - Sorrows of Empire
Andrew Bacevich - The Limits of Power
Norman Mailer, Why Are We In Vietnam?
Wendy Brown, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty
xeroxed packet provided free

Course Requirements:
* because we meet once a week, attendance is mandatory
* one-page typed response paper each week (grading is optional)
* one 5 page critical essay
* one 10-page project relating thematic concern and text/movie
* class participation can help your grade

Optional Texts for projects:
Hannah Arendt, Imperialism
J.M.Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
Norman Mailer, Armies of the Night

Optional movies for projects:
The Manchurian Candidate (original vs remake)
Fog of War
Three Kings
V for Vendetta
Minority Report
25th Hour
Syrianna

upcoming events linked to course themes:
counter-insurgency conference, Thursday Sept 22

a “coffee house” discussion of 9/11 and its impact ten years later -
Monday Oct 17 6-8 Kimball Lounge

showing of the film, “Three Kings” - date t.b.a.

plagiarism: the use of the words or work of others without attribution is punishable by an F in the course. If you have any question about what would count as plagiarism, please ask for clarification.
9/6 Introduction

9/13 Liberalism and politics I: American exceptionalism, national expansion, racial domination

#2 read: * Tocqueville, Democracy in America volume one: (preface, 3/16/25-44/58-60/71/191-198/237-270/288-330 (120pgs)
* Michael Rogin, “Liberal Society and the Indian Question” (x)
* Amy Kaplan, “Left Alone with America...” (x)

write: * How does Tocq define “America” & what is “exceptional” about it?
* How does Tocq define the attributes of “democracy”?
* How does T theorize “politics” and “political liberty”?
  * Relate what T calls “democracy” to what Rogin calls “liberalism”
* How does Rogin view the motive/meaning of racialized violence?
* How does racial violence/exclusion enact “liberalism”?
* How do 19th century Anglo-Americans define “American” identity?
* Is the first American “empire” a continental conquest? How does violent conquest relate to democratic language?

9/20 Liberalism and Politics II: mass society and racial inequality

* Michael Rogin, “Political Repression”(x)

optional: * Michael Rogin, “Two Declarations”(x)

write: * What is “democratic despotism”? How does individualism enable it?
* How is “association” an “art” that “mitigates” it?
* Why does T think the advance of equality threatens practices of political liberty? (How does he define liberty?)
* T links equality to the state & makes dependence on it THE threat to liberty -why? Is the state rather a key resource in struggles for liberty (not only for equality)? Still, why is T not a libertarian?
* How does Rogin on race/empire amend Tocq on mass society? How is the idea of “democratic despotism” relate to race and empire? Is mass/commodity culture also “empire as a way of life” but with empire as such disavowed?

9/27 Liberalism and Politics III: Sovereignty, Identity & Antagonism

#4 read: * Carl Schmitt, Political Theology chaps 1/3/4 (p.5-15/36-66)
* Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political 19-79

write: * Why is the declaring “the exception,” establishing sovereignty, and naming “the enemy” crucial to and distinctive of “the political” -even to a democratic politics?
* Is there politics without antagonism? How would Obama & S argue?
* Is S correct that “liberalism” avoids the elements of “decision” and “enmity” he makes central to politics?
* do white supremacy, political demonology, or populism (of the left or right) reveal “Schmittian” aspects of American liberalism?
  * Does S explain or justify the “war on terror”? Can exception, sovereignty, and enmity be crucial to a democratic politics?
#5

**read:**
* Michael Ignatieff, “The American Empire: The Burden” (x)
* Niall Ferguson, “the Unconscious Colossus” (x)
* Amy Kaplan, “Violent Belonging…” (x)
* Talal Assad, On Suicide Bombing (chap 1/x)
* Mahmood Mamdani, “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim….” (x)
* Lila Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?”(x)
* editorial pieces about 9/11 and the Iraq war

* Are “liberalism” and “empire” (in)compatible? Are Ignatieff and Ferguson right: make “exceptions” to “save” liberal principles?
* Is the war on terror an example of Schmittian politics -and so, of its dangers, or of its value?
* Asad denies a distinction between legitimate (state/sovereign) and illegitimate (terrorist) violence: why/do you agree?
* Is the war on terror a case of demonology: 9/11 did happen, but how was it symbolized/made meaningful? What counts as demonizing?
* Mamdami (and Abu-Lughod) argue that “cultural” arguments create demonology or melodrama out of issues we instead should construe in a “political” way? What way is that?

* assess what is recurring and what unprecedented in the events, violence, stories, and symbolization of “the war on terror”

**paper due:** Friday 10/7

**Columbus Day - no class - two weeks between sessions**

**Theorizing Imperialism I (capitalism) & II (militarism)**

**the first week read (as if for 10/11):**
* David Harvey, The New Imperialism (chaps 1,2,4,5 = 200 pages)
* Laura Ann Stoller, Imperial Formations, “introduction” (x)

**second week read (for class on 10/18):**
* Chalmers Johnson, Sorrows of Empire (1-37/255-312 = 90 pgs)
* Andrew Bacevich, The Limits of Power (15-66/170-182 =65 pgs)
* Fernando Coronil, “After Empire” (x)

Harvey’s theory derives imperialism from capitalism, Johnson emphasizes militarism, and Bacevich sees “empire as a way of life,” i.e. as a problem less of policy than of culture. Discussion on October 18 will focus on the difference these differences make.

**ONE 1-page response paper for the two weeks of readings to submit 10/18:**
* Compare how authors depict the character, causes, & impact of “American empire.” What is common/different?
* Does Harvey (like Schmitt) see deep tension between the “logics” of capitalism and of “sovereignty”? What is the impact/meaning of this tension for understanding “imperialism”?
* Compare how authors depict the “internal”/“domestic” (political and cultural) meaning of global (economic/military) power?
* Do H/J/B presume a center-to-periphery (top-down) model of politics? Do they miss how the center/domestic is SHAPED by what it calls peripheral/foreign?
* Do J/B tell stories of decline/corruption, e.g. from “republic” to “empire”? (What KIND of narrative do they use?) Alternatives?
* What is the relationship between “globalization” and “empire”?
Theorizing Imperialism III: Dramatizing Empire as psycho-drama

* Tocqueville, Democracy in America vol 2, 71-78
* Norman Mailer, Why Are We In Vietnam (entire)
* Wayne Booth, “Metaphor as Rhetoric” (x)

* Assess the difference between treatises on empire & a/this novel
* Assess the difference between an “argument” presuming rational interests of elite actors, and a “fiction” dramatizing fantasy & irrational motivation

* What is the role of narrative metaphor in understanding the appeal of violence and the meaning of empire?
* Does Mailer’s language (in form and style) communicate a view of “why we are in Vietnam?” Is language/form related to “content”?
* Does M teach a lesson about the meaning of empire/Vietnam? How?
* Is the novel itself misogynist (and racist) or does it portray in visceral ways the bond of race/gender and violence? (Remember: Mailer is not DJ)
* Is this novel pertinent today?

Idioms of Resistance I: republic not empire

* John Schaar, “Anti-Federalists Arise” (x)
* documents on Spanish-American War
* Randolph Bourne, “War & the Intellectuals” etc (x)
* FDR & anti-world war documents (x)
* Robert Westbrook, “Isolationism reconsidered” (x)
* Ron Rosenbaum, “Levittown” (x)
* Dwight Eisenhower, “Farewell Address” (x)
* C.Wright Mills, selected essays (x)
* Bill Kaufman, Not My America (intro/chap 2) (x)

* What are the key arguments of critics of empire/imperialism? What is the problem? What is the cost of empire, and to whom? How does imperialism jeopardize/destroy local democratic practices?
* What is the language of these critics - what values, principles, ideas, stories, memories, traditions do they invoke? When they say “we” to whom are they referring and who is it they are addressing?
* Assess the arguments on behalf of what is pejoratively called “isolationism.”
* If “conservatives” have been anti-imperialist, is there a possible alliance with critics on the “left” -on what basis?
* If modern imperial power is linked to an industrial corporate economy, consumer culture, and violent state power, what alternate way to organize social life do critics propose?
* Is it possible to be a “world power” and democratic? Does world power require an anti-democratic political economy & centralized state? What are the necessary entailments of modern empire?
* Correspondingly does an anti-imperialist politics have necessary entailments, like “isolationism” or non-violence (in foreign policy) and de-centralized, small-scale “localism”? Must anti-imperial politics be anti-capitalist, anti-corporate, or neither?
* Do these critics of American empire seem nationalistic, insular, parochial, nostalgic? Is the defense of a republic “anti-modern”? Or, do Bourne and Mills signal a “cosmopolitan anti-imperialism”?
* What is/should be the role of intellectuals/media in a republic?

Idioms of Resistance II: cold war and 60's expressions
* John F. Kennedy, speeches (x)
* C.Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left" (x)
* Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement”
* SNCC documents (x)
* Stokely Carmichael, “What we Want” (x)
* Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics” (x)
* SDS anti-war documents (x)
* Staughton Lynd, “Coalition Politics or Non-Violent Revolution”
* Black Panther Party Platform (x)
* Allen Ginsberg, “Wichita Vortex Sutra” (x)
* Martin Luther King, “A Time to Break Silence” (x)
* Bill Kaufman, Not My America (chap 3)

* In the 60's moment, the racial and imperial practices of the American regime were challenged by differently situated critics, but: what did they want? By what language (local “native” idioms?) did they justify action? With whom did they identify? Who did they address? Do SNCC & SDS docs differ?
* Assess the argument between Rustin (for entering electoral and coalition politics to gain legislative power) and Lynd (for mass mobilization and action outside the formal political process) Is Rustin right to worry that radicals marginalize themselves? Is Lynd right to fear co-optation by the democratic party?
* Assess the politics in the “prophetic” voices of Ginsberg/MLK. What is the status of the nation (“America”) in these docs? Does anti-imperialism carry critics beyond/against the national frame?

**Defensive Nationalism I: militarism & culture after Vietnam**

* Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics” (x)
* William Addams, “Remembering Vietnam” (x)
* Marilyn Young, “Permanent War” (x)
* Linda Bose, “Techno-muscularity and the ‘Boy Eternal’” (x)
* Jasbir Puar, “Mapping US Homonormativities” (x)
* Jane Mayer, “Whatever it Takes” (on the TV show “24” & torture)
* Jasbir Puar, “Abu Graib: Arguing Against Exceptionalism” (x)
* Judith Butler, “Violence, Mourning, Politics” (x)
* Barack Obama, Peace Prize Nobel Lecture: on Just war (x)

**Defensive Nationalism II:** neo-liberalism & culture war in the "post" civil rights era

* Michael Rogin, “Make My Day: Spectacle...in Imperial Politics”

* How Vietnam is remembered? What is forgotten? Why? Who decides?
* Is elite foreign policy a “symptom” of trauma-defeat in Vietnam?
* Assess the difference between analyzing empire via “rational” (class or national) “interests;” via anxieties and fantasies that involve, say, sex/gender; or via ideologies like anti-communism. Are these related? How?
* Are elites rational, or trapped in ideology & fantasy? Is the mass public invested in imperial violence, ignorant, or amnesiac?
* Analyze how advocates/critics frame/explain torture.
* Assess Puar’s argument about homophobia, violence, and empire.
* Assess how Butler addresses an imperial/national subject. Does her “ethical” approach relate to politics? (Imagine she & Schmitt analyzing each other)
* Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize speech defends just war and national security. How would Schmitt &/or Butler analyze his speech?
* Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism & the End of Liberal Democracy" (x)
  * George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness" (x)
  * Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style..." (X)
  * Thomas Franks, "The Real War" (x)
  * Ellen Willis, "Escape from Freedom" (x)
  * William Connolly, "The Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine"
  * Barack Obama and Al Sharpton, Speeches to 2004 DNC (x)
  * selected essays on the "tea party" movement & Obama
  * Michael Rogin, "American Political Demonology" (x)

  * what distinguishes "neo-liberalism" from the "individualism" that Tocqueville identified/named?
  * Has "neo-liberalism" captured/killed "democratic" principles?
  * Does "neo-liberalism" explain what American media calls "neo-conservatism" or now the "tea party" movement?
  * Are Christian evangelical/fundamentalists also "neo-liberal," or is a different analysis needed? Does Hofstadter’s account of "status anxiety" and "the paranoid style" help? Why/not?
  * is there a "backlash" to the racial insurgency, feminist and queer movements of the 60's and 70's? Do whites/men refuse to credit how inequality remains significant? (Why?)

* Since 1980, non-union working class people switched allegiance from the Democratic to the Republican Party. Assess different explanations of this realignment.
  * What explains the coalition between wall street and evangelicals in the Republican Party since 1980?
  * What is the best explanation of "culture war"? Of the tea party movement and intense hostility to Obama?

Rethinking Sovereignty

* Wendy Brown, Walled States, Waning Sovereignty chaps 1 & 4
* Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics" (x)
* Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy"
* Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility” (x)
* Bonnie Honig, “the Miracle of Metaphor” (x)

  * Is sovereignty a concept/fantasy inherently linked to violence?
  * Is sovereignty a concept needed for democratic practices?
  * Do we need to abandon or rework the idea of sovereignty?
  * Is "democracy" a regime to establish or an episodic insurgency?

Forms of Address/Narratives of Decline

* Tocqueville, Democracy in America vol 1 –“author’s introduction”
  * recent journalism on the “collapse” of “American empire”

  * does the American public need “honesty” and information about the relative economic/national decline of the US, to overcome its ignorance, or need a new frame of reference/narrative to make sense of what people already know? How should critics of empire address Americans about current global and national circumstances?
projects due Monday Dec 12 by 5pm