The goal of this course is not to define kinds of empire or to narrate its historical transformation, though we will consider these issues. Our goal, rather, is to consider how “empire” has been represented, defended, and opposed in American politics. We will focus especially on anti-imperial voices, to consider how they depict what “empire” is and why it is dangerous or wrong, as well as how they justify their opposition and imagine alternatives. We will move through the history of such voices, from critics of the 1787 Constitution to Henry Thoreau and other abolitionist critics of the Mexican War and then of the Spanish-America War, and from critics of World War Two to critics of Vietnam. We will analyze how arguments about and against empire are related to arguments about capitalism, race, masculinity, modernity, and democracy. We will explore the recurring patterns of metaphor, narrative, and argument in this chorus of voices, and analyze the problems, dangers, and variants in their language. (For instance, do critics remain too much within a nationalist frame by telling nostalgic stories of loss and decline? Are they unintentionally imperialist in the kinds of racial privileges they assume? Do their alternatives to empire enact a wish to escape from valuable aspects of modernity or of democracy?) The course readings end with the Vietnam War, but final projects will consider how contemporary critics of empire do or should relate to these inherited idioms.

required texts:
Norman Mailer, Armies of the Night
James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time
Norman Mailer, Why Are We in Vietnam

course requirements:
* attendance is mandatory, un-excused absences hurt your grade
* preparation for class is part of your grade
* read the newspaper every day on foreign affairs and election coverage!
* response papers on readings
* two 5-page critical essays
* one optional project

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.
Introduction

Explanations I: causes, motives, meanings, myths

#2
read:
* Jane Burbank, “The Empire Effect”
* David Harvey, The New Imperialism, chap 2 (p26-87)
* Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 1-25
* Henry Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”

write:
* Compare how Harvey and Slotkin depict the character, causes, & impact of “American empire.” What is common/different?
* Harvey depicts deep tension between the “logics” of capitalism and of “sovereignty” - what does this mean politically?
* Characterize Harvey’s purposes in writing.
* Assess Slotkin’s claims about the frontier myth, national identity, and the idea of regenerative violence in American life
* Relate “myth” and “material” interests: do narratives only disguise interests - or shape how people define them?
* Do myths/stories die? Can we change/reject/remake them? What is Slotkin’s purpose in writing?
* How does Thoreau justify dissent - and cultivate it among his “neighbors” and “fellow citizens”?
* Does HT care only about personal purity (of conscience) or (also) about the character/fate of a republic?

Explanations II: patterns and repetition

#3
read:
* William Appleman Williams, Tragedy of American Diplomacy, 1-50
* Andrew Bacevich, “Afterward”
* Michael Rogin, “Liberal Society and the Indian Question”
* Michael Ignatieff, “The Burden”
* Mahmoud Mamdani, “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim”

write:
* Compare how Williams and Rogin explain the motive and meaning of national continental expansion and global power.
* How does Rogin relate “liberal society” to racialized violence? How does violent conquest relate to democratic language?
* How do 19th century Anglo-Americans define “American” identity? By positing what differences do they articulate identity?
* Are “liberalism” and “empire” (in)compatible?
* Is Ignatieff right to make exceptions to “save” liberal ideals? Is he thereby repeating/updating the killing of Indians?
* Mamdani says “cultural” arguments create demonology or melodrama. Out of issues we should construe in a “political” way. What way is that? Do Mamdani and Rogin resonate?

* Assess what is recurring (and unprecedented) in the events,
violence, stories, and symbolization of "the war on terror"
World Power and its Critics

**read:**
- FDR, “The Four Freedoms”
- Charles Lindbergh, selected speeches
- Henry Luce, “The American Century”
- Robert Westbrook, “Isolationism Re-considered”
- Robert Kaufman, *Ain’t My America*, 1-10, 66-96
- Chalmers Johnson, *Sorrows of Empire* 1-13/15-65

**write:**
- What are the key arguments against entering world war?
- Compare “national defense” to “national security.”
- Assess the arguments about “isolationism.”
- What values, principles, stories, memories, traditions do these critics invoke? When they say “we” to whom do they refer?
- Assess the “domestic” implications of global (econ/military) power. How is life “inside” related to policy “outside”?
- Is it possible to be a “world power” and remain democratic? Does world power require an anti-democratic economy/state? What are the “domestic” entailments of modern empire?
- Do anti-war/empire politics have entailments: “isolationism”? Nationalistic xenophobia? Parochial “localism”? Must anti-empire politics be anti-capitalist? Anti-corporate? Anti-free trade? Anti-modern?
- Is it possible to identify when a republic becomes an empire? Or is that very distinction a key to American exceptionalism?
- Explore your view of those who defend “republic, not empire.”

Cold War I: welfare liberalism and anti-communism

**read:**
- Robert Rosenbaum, “Levittown”
- Dwight Eisenhower, “Farewell Address”
- JFK, speeches
- C.Wright Mills, selected essays
- Tocqueville, “Why Revolutions Become Rare” (from *D in A* vol.2)
- Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style”
- Michael Rogin, “Political Repression”

**write:**
- How do JFK speeches echo/revise recurring mythic themes?
- What values, principles, stories, memories, traditions do these critics invoke? When they say “we” to whom do they refer?
- Assess the “domestic” implications of global (econ/military) power. How is life “inside” related to policy “outside”?
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- Explore your view of those who defend “republic, not empire.”

**FIRST PAPER DUE MONDAY OCTOBER 5 by NOON**
Cold War II: imagining insurgency

**read:**  
* Baldwin, selected essays  
* Norman Mailer, “The White Negro”  
* James Baldwin, The Fire Next Time

**write:**  
* Assess NM’s theory of the crisis/problem in American life. What divisions, splits, silences does he identify?  
* How does NM use the idea of blackness to imagine a counter-cultural and civil rights politics? Does he merely invert a demonized/racist image?  
* Assess NM’s idea of an “existential politics.”  
* How does JB see imagination of blackness (of “the Negro”) shaping American life?  
* For JB what is unsaid or unspeakable by/to those who call themselves white? Why be invested in whiteness? What does JB mean by their “innocence” (as opposed to ignorance)?  
* How does JB relate white fear of blackness to anti-communism?  
* How does JB depict the situation/dilemmas of those marked black?  
* Why must blacks free/redeem whites? Why reject violence?  
* Why should whites care about racialized inequality?  
* What is JB’s view of the past and its power?  
* How does JB remain attached to the idea of American promise?
Sixties I: the idiom/arguments of social movement activists

**#7**

**for Oct 16 (first week) read:**

* civil rights movement history, docs and timeline
* Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), documents
* Black Panther Party, documents
* Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, chapter 16
* Nikhil Singh, “Democracy and Color”

**write:**

* 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 idioms did they justify action?
  * What were their arguments with each other?
  * How do critics relate race, nation, and empire?
  * What does it mean to interpret ghettos as colonies, and to identify Black Americans with/as Vietnamese?
  * What is the status of the nation (“America”) in these docs? Does anti-imperialism mean going against/beyond the national frame?
  * How do these critics define “freedom” and imagine “democracy”? For these critics what is “politics” & where does it occur?

**for Oct 23 (second week) read:**

* Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement”
* Hanna Pitkin, “On Participation”
* SDS, speeches against the Vietnam War
* Norman Mailer, 1965 anti-war speech at Berkeley
* history of war protest movements

**write:**

* Assess “participatory democracy” as a vision of politics & life.
  * Assess/compare explanations/critiques of the Vietnam War.
  * What is “the system”? What does this metaphor enable/preclude a critic seeing/saying?
  * Does world power undermine democratic life?
  * For critics what does anti-war/anti-imperial politics entail?
  * Do they seek a “return” to/recovery of true ‘American’ ideals?
  * What is the status of the nation (“America”) in these docs? Does anti-imperialism mean going against/beyond the national frame? How do these critics define freedom and democracy?
  * At what sites does “politics” occur? Is it a distinctive aspect of every activity/institution, or a specific activity linked to formal citizenship?

**#8**

Relating “politics” to “protest” “reform” and “revolution”

**read:**

* Bayard Rustin, “From Protest to Politics”
* Staughton Lynd, “Coalition Politics or Non-Violent Revolution?”
* Hannah Arendt, “On Civil Disobedience”
* Michael Rogin, “In Defense of the New Left”

**Write:**

* Assess the debate between Rustin (for electoral and coalition politics to gain legislative power) and Lynd (for mass mobilization and action to re-found a republic.) Is Rustin right to distinguish ‘protest’ from ‘politics’ and worry that radicals marginalize themselves? Is Lynd right to fear that dissent is co-opted by the democratic party? Do they invoke “democracy,” but reveal different meanings?
* Is civil disobedience a credible form of politics?
* Is politics a distinctive aspect of every activity/institution, or a specific activity tied to formal citizenship? Both?
* How does Rogin “defend” the new left? (Why) did it fail? How is “ideology” a problem—or necessity—in opposition politics? 11/6 dramatizing politics: history as novel/novel as history

#9 read: * Norman Mailer, Armies of the Night (145 pages total)
  Book One
  Part I (3-52)
  Part II: section 1/2 (53-79)
  Part III: sections 5-6 (116-131)
  Part IV: sections 2-3 (139-155)
  Section 7 (181-189)
  Sections 10-11 (212-216)
  Book Two
  1-3 (219-236); 6 (254-63); 9-11 (278-288)
* Wayne Booth, “Metaphor as Rhetoric”

write: * Assess M’s “existential politics.”
  * How does NM define the key problem/crisis in American life?
  * Does NM repeat/replenish a myth of America he should reject?
  * Assess how he explains the Vietnam War and justifies protest.
  * Assess his idea of “history as novel/novel as history.” Why does understanding require a novelist’s subjectivity & technique?
  * What is he doing by making himself the protagonist in the story? How is he actor, witness, judge, prophet? Does participating enable him to get at the meaning/truth of the event?
  * How does he view/judge the young protestors? Does he take sides?
  * How do metaphors matter in M’s text? in politics?
  * Why does he keep invoking the American civil war?
  * What does it mean to be a “left conservative”?

11/13 genres of protest
#10 read: * Eugene McCarthy, speeches
* Martin Luther King, speeches
* Allan Ginsberg, “Wichita Vortex Sutra”
* Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics”

write: * Assess the rhetoric/politics of MLK/Ginsberg’s prophetic voices
  * Assess differences between “political” speech (McCarthy), “sermon” (MLK), “poem” (Ginsberg): does form matter?
  * What is the status of the nation (“America”) in these docs?
  * How does language matter (a) in explaining the (causes of) war & (b) in creating an alternative to war?
  * Assess Arendt’s diagnosis of the war -compare it to...?

11/20 En-gendering nationhood by narration and violence
#11 read: * Norman Mailer, Why Are We In Vietnam?

write: * Assess the difference between treatises on empire & this novel.
  * Compare an “argument” presuming the rational interests of elite actors, and a “fiction” dramatizing fantasy/irrational motives
  * Are narratives/metaphors needed to grasp the appeal of violence and the meaning of empire?
* Does NM’s language (in form and style) embody/answer “why we are in Vietnam?” Is language/style related to “content”?
* Does M teach a lesson about the meaning of empire/Vietnam? How?
* Does the novel contain/enact/dramatize a “theory” about the war?
* Is the novel misogynist and racist, or does it portray how race & gender relate to violence? (Remember: Mailer is not DJ)
* Is this novel pertinent today?
* what genre is the novel: tragedy? Comedy? Satire?

11/27
Engendering Alternative voices, spaces, practices
#12
read:
* Susan Griffin, “The Way of All Ideology”
* Audre Lorde, “The Uses of Anger”
* Romand Coles, “the radical ordinary”
* Gloria Anzaldua, “Borderlands”
* Adrienne Rich, “In the Wake of Home”

Second paper due Friday November 30 by noon

12/4
Disavowal, Repetition, and Reaction
#13
read:
* Ronald Reagan, “City on a Hill”
* William Addams, “Remembering Vietnam”
* Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, conclusion
* Linda Bose, “Techno-muscularity”
* Barack Obama, Nobel Address

write:
* 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?amnesiac? Critical?
* Do myths (about America, or the frontier, or regeneration by violence) ever die? How or when do we let go of them? Why not?
* Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize speech defends just war and national security. How would previous critics analyze his speech?

12/11
Redeeming history
#14
read:
* Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility”
* Walter Benjamin, “Theses on History”
* William Carlos Williams, In the American Grain, “The Virtue of History”
EMPIRE: FIRST PAPER

consider various definitions of “empire” to analyze American national power.

Compare how Harvey and Williams, on the one hand, and rogin and slotkin, on the other hand, depict, explain, analyze, diagnose understand “empire” in the American case. Assess their contrasting vocabularies and perspectives.

Relate “myth” and “material” interests: do narratives only disguise interests -or shape how people define them?

Assess the relationship between arguments about “material interests” of classes or nations, or about the “logic” of markets and capital, and arguments about irrational motivation, anxiety, fantasy, ideological entrapment, mythic investments, and symbolisms of identity/difference

Use the readings to depict the constituent elements and consequences of “American exceptionalism” as an ideology. Can it be remade or redefined in ways that further democratic ends, or must it be relinquished so that the United States can finally see itself as one profane nation among others?

How does Thoreau justify dissent? by his example and words does he also try to cultivate/engender dissent among his “neighbors” and “fellow citizens”?

How does Rogin define the constituent/key elements of the “liberal” regime in the United States? What social practices and cultural ideals constitute or characterize it? How does the dispossession of native peoples at once express and illuminate (not only contradict) its core practices and axioms?

Analyze the racial dimension in “nation-building” -how do constructions of race and imagination of nationhood relate, especially in a nation that claims to have a civic rather than ethnic identity?

Analyze the imperial dimension of nation-building: in what ways has the making of an “American” nation-state been inseparable from an “imperial” politics? What do “empire” or “imperial” mean in the American case?

Are “liberalism” and “empire” compatible? (Is Ignatieff right to make exceptions to “save” liberal ideals? Is he thereby repeating/updating the killing of Indians?) Are imperial practices necessary to found, secure, and save liberal ideals? Do imperial practices undermine liberal ideals?

Mamdani says “cultural” arguments create demonology or melodrama about issues we should construe in a “political” way. What way is that? What would be a “political” rather than “cultural” explanation of American conduct? (Does Rogin make a political or a cultural argument about anglo-american policy in Mamdami’s terms?)

Assess what is recurring (and unprecedented) in the events, violence, stories, and symbolization of “the war on terror.” Is “counter-subversive demonology” a changing-same? How and why?

Assess the “domestic” implications of global (econ/military)power. How is life “inside” related to policy “outside”? Is it possible to be a “world power” and remain democratic? Does world power require an anti-democratic economy/state? What are the “domestic” entailments of modern empire?

Do anti-war/empire politics have entailments: “isolationism”? nationalistic xenophobia? parochial “localism”? Must anti-empire politics be anti-capitalist? anti-corporate? Anti-free trade? Anti-modern?
Is it possible to identify when a republic becomes an empire? Or is that very distinction a key to American exceptionalism?

Explore your view of critics (Thoreau, Williams, Bacevich, Johnson, Kaufman) who defend “republic, not empire.” What values, principles, stories, memories, traditions do they invoke? When they say “we” to whom do they refer?

CWM is right: the US is a mass society because people are atomized by the ideology of individualism, homogenized by consumer culture, and mobilized by a national security state. All but an elite are privatized and powerless. No, American society is fundamentally divided by hierarchies of power and identity., Arguments about mass conformity disguise how divided Americans are by structures of class, race, gender, sexuality, as well as by conflict over identity and membership. Assess the idea of “mass society”

Kaufman, Tocqueville, Mills, and Thoreau argue that democratic political practices must be localized and de-centralized, must involve real power and decision, and must be pervasive. They suggest a ‘horizontal’ vision of politics organized not around the state, sovereignty, and nationhood, but at smaller scales. Assess this localized, de-centralized anti-statism. (Note: they do not defend the individualism and markets rather than the state, but publics and collective goods organized locally.)

What is “politics,” anyway? Is it a distinctive activity located at particular sites or involving specific institutions? Is it a dimension of every activity in every domain of life? In turn, what is a “democratic” politics or culture? How (by what beliefs, customs, practices) is “democracy” fostered or sustained, and against what obstacles?
SECOND PAPER

* Do myths/stories die? Can we change/reject/remake them? What is