



## Ages OF Empire

### Module Coordinator

#### What will you learn from this Elective?

### Dr Robert Armstrong, Dr Graeme Murdock

The module will use the study of 'imperial moments' to open out broader questions about the nature, meaning and impact of empires from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. These could include how a seemingly insatiable European demand for beaver pelts for the manufacture of waterproof headgear sparked an ever-expanding fur trade in North America in the eighteenth century drove a colonial frontier deeper into the continent, shaped relationships between Europeans, especially the French, and First Nations peoples, radically altered indigenous societies and cultures and effected profound change in regional ecological balance. Or how the Russian Empress Catherine II embarked on a six-month tour to inspect following the annexation of Crimea, a trip perhaps best remembered for 'Potemkin villages', fake settlements allegedly presented along the route to impress Catherine and an episode revealing of Russia's ideology of empire and indeed about the ideals and realities of expanding empires. Topics will include political, cultural, social and intellectual developments, spread geographically from Asia to the Americas, Europe to Africa and Oceania.

Your learning will span key historical events and developments, combining focused lectures and reading with space to develop your own interests.

The module aims to:

- introduce students to a new subject area, and to current research about the history of empires.
- enable students to assess both past developments in the history of empires (using different sources, methodologies and techniques) and also to consider issues and concerns of major import for understanding the contemporary world.
- allow students to address the wider implications of specific topic or incident in the history of empires, by means of critical analysis, fostered through direct teaching, seminar and group discussion, formative assignments and independent student research.
- facilitate students in enhancing their reflective, analytical, critical and presentation skills through interlocking formative and summative assessments about the histories of empires.



## Student Workload

- Eleven one-hour lectures
- Four tutorials. These will be used to debate issues arising from the two previous lectures, using structured discussion (including pre-circulated questions). Space will be devoted to an essay-planning exercise, including discussion of the requirements for essay-writing in the humanities and of topics and readings.
- Approximately 30 hours of independent reading and other preparation linked to the lectures and tutorials.
- Approximately 24 hours of participation in group activities: producing a five-minute video presentation on a group-selected, independently-researched 'imperial moment', and watching and responding to other groups' presentations.

Approximately 38 hours of assessment preparation: Students will be required to write and submit a short document analysis and a longer essay for assessment.

## Assessment Components

- **Essay: 70% of total grade.** This independent research project will see students analyse the character and consequence of a chosen 'imperial moment'. The essay may build from material covered in lectures, tutorials, group work, assigned readings and reading lists and address a topic agreed with the module coordinators, and relates the incident or text chosen to wider themes from the module. Word count: 2500 words.
- **Group Project presentation: 30% of total grade.** Students will work together in small groups, use resources in Trinity Library as well as online, to produce a short presentation on group-selected, independently-researched 'imperial moment'.
- **Formative assessments:** there are two formative assessments, which do not carry a mark towards the final grade, but serve as important preparation for graded assignments, and as training in historical methods and skills. There are:
  - **Source analysis.** A response paper, arising from group tutorial discussions, offering a short analysis of an individual text/image/document representing an 'imperial moment'. Word count: 400 words.
  - **Group Project presentation response.** An uploaded report on a presentation video produced by one other group, as peer-review exercise, helping to develop critical historical skills.



### Indicative Reading List

John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: the rise and fall of global empires, 1400-2000* (2007)

Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in world history* (2010)

Philippa Levine, *The British empire: sunrise to sunset* (2007)

C.A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world 1780-1914* (2004)

### Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

**1. Demonstrate an ability to critically evaluate episodes and related sources reflecting key developments and concepts in imperialism and colonialism.**

In order to adequately address the 'big picture' of imperial impacts over time, students will engage with concrete examples of 'what' occurred, 'how' encounters were resolved, and 'why' decisions were taken, responses formed or results accomplished. These would cover a highly diverse range of 'imperial moments' from the formation of multi-ethnic families to the implementation of policies of racial exclusion, from violent combat encounters to transformations in the natural world. While these open up new areas of knowledge, as 'imperial moments' they will prove accessible to students from a range of backgrounds. Critical evaluation will include formative assessments through source analyses, but feed through to summative essays, and will permeate discussion in tutorials and groupwork settings. It will draw upon materials and methodologies associated with multiple disciplines.

**2. Evidence a capacity to critically engage with debates and multiple perspectives in past colonial and imperial encounters.**

Lectures, tutorials and set readings will draw attention to the lively debates surrounding questions in imperial and colonial pasts, and provide space for students to directly engage with them. Groups formed among students from diverse backgrounds will provide opportunities for students to address problems and issues from their own multiple perspectives, and to draw upon these in producing group presentations. These in turn will create a space for the communication of shared ideas and diverse approaches. As with the formative assessments, the presentations and their peer evaluations allow for ongoing development of critical skills and openness to a range of approaches and ideas.

**3. Research, analyse and synthesize evidence relating to problems and issues in the study of empire and colonialism.**

At the core of the module is commitment to international, comparative and multidisciplinary study, and an equal commitment to fostering student abilities to develop independent research, reading widely but critically and moving towards a summative essay assignment. Students are encouraged to allow their own scholarly curiosity to shape their approach, while being carefully mentored towards suitable topics and resources. Students will be able to build on their formative assignments to hone their skills, above all in the



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analysis and synthesis of evidence and arguments.

**4. Develop arguments which address the complexity and broad relevance of topics in the study of empire, connecting concrete evidence to conceptual and thematic understanding.**

Avoiding easy answers to complex questions is as essential in understanding the impact of empire and colonization as in any other area of academic study. Students have opportunities to test arguments in class discussion, formative assessments, and group presentations, and in their final essay assignment. In each case careful attention to evidence will be balanced against an awareness of the importance of 'big ideas', conceptual or thematic. Students' ability to handle complexity in real-world situations, past or present, is a prerequisite for responsible intellectual and ethical response to demanding conditions and dilemmas.