

WGSS 492/692—Gender and US Empire
Thursdays 2:30-4 or 5pm
CLASS WILL BE HELD ON [ZOOM](#)
August 27-November 19, 2020
Professor Laura Briggs, ljbriiggs@umass.edu
Office hours Friday 2:30-3:30 on [zoom](#)
Course playlist: <https://rb.gv/m4ppcw>

There is an old debate among historians of the United States over whether to consider the US an empire; the answer turns, basically, on how you define "empire." This course is not very interested in that question. Rather, it begins with the problem of how to collapse two very different faces of the analysis of US imperialism. One is public/boy/policy/official: the military, diplomacy, NGOs, and medicine and science. The other is private/girl/racialized/marginal: questions of gender, children, race, indigeneity, sexuality. The course, asks, then: how has the United States gained influence globally through settler colonialism, territorial government, military interventions, counterinsurgency, the rule of experts, military bases, and U.S. global markets? What is the relationship of enslavement and debt in the context of the Americas? How have scholars in a variety of fields, including particularly history, anthropology, and interdisciplinary queer, feminist, ethnic, and American Studies, shed light on how gender, racialization, and sexuality are configured and reconfigured in relationship to US empire? This seminar will be reading-intensive.

Required texts

Yarimar Bonilla, and Marisol LeBrón. *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*. Haymarket Books, 2019.

Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and US Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (University of California Press, 2002). (available as an ebook through the UMass libraries.)

Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*. Coffee House Press, 2017.

Sunaina Maira, *Boycott! The Academy and Justice for Palestine*. UC Press, 2018.

Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*. Univ of California Press, 2019.

J. Kehaulani Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Meredith Tax, *A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight the Islamic State*. New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2016.

Organization of the class. You can choose whether to take all of this class synchronously, or part asynchronously. I've heard from some people that 2.5 hours is just too long to be on Zoom, and from others that they'd far prefer it to films/podcasts/other multimedia engagement. Either is fine by me, so what I propose is this. The class will meet for 2.5 hours, but I genuinely want some people to leave at 4 pm, after 1.5 hours. What I ask those folks do instead is to go watch the film for the week, and (maybe) do (a little bit of) research on context, and post something thoughtful, engaged, and opinionated on the course Facebook page (yes, I hate using that commercial platform that sells your data. However, there is nothing like it for producing passionate engagement with interesting media...). I ask everyone to look at the FB page before the next

meeting of the class. This will solve one of the big intellectual problems of the course—the difficulty in producing an engagement with historically complex, fact-intensive questions while at the same time paying attention to forms of queer/feminist critique. We will basically split our efforts, asking some to produce the historically rich account while others produce the sharp analysis. As Meredith Tax says, anti-imperialism without solidarity is meaningless. And there can be no solidarity without systematically acquired, extensive knowledge of the sort that is not readily available from newspapers or other usual sources. None of the films is perfect, and some are passionately partisan, so make sure you take that into account as you watch and write about them.

It must also be said clearly that there are no right answers or political orthodoxies in this course. Universities provide us the privilege and pleasure of reading together and learning from each other. Nothing is on the syllabus because it is “right.” Our job in this class is to create an intellectual community, one in which we are all enriched by each others’ readings. We will be discussing weighty, critical issues, which is why we need each other’s help to think well and to try to understand how the reading can (or fails to) speak to our situation in the world. This imposes on each of us the responsibility of coming to class with the reading done, speaking up about our insights and questions, and listening respectfully to each other (which is not to say always agreeing). It’s worth noting that these are not clear left/right or Democrat/Republican issues. Both parties are deeply implicated in the work of imperialism.

For this class to work well, everyone needs to talk and think out loud. In order to facilitate this, we need to exhibit the highest level of respect for each other. Nobody here is disposable (this should go without saying, but sometimes we need to remind each other.) Your class participation grade will rest on how successfully you show engagement with the material and with your classmates. This course is not a competition over who has “good” or “bad” politics (whatever we may consider those to be), it is an honest exploration of various kinds of political and intellectual positions, and the ways these have been historically constituted. Students are encouraged to bring questions, change their minds, make counter-arguments, and voice politically unpopular positions in class. While intellectual and moral passion, as well as lively disagreement (including with the instructor) are valued, ad hominem and ad feminam attacks will not be tolerated, nor will harassment, slurs, or disparagement of any group.

WGSS 492--Grading and structure of assignments

Break-down of final grade, by percent:

20--class discussion (including on the course Facebook page)

15--1st paper (2 pp.), due Sept. 10

20--2nd paper (5 pp.), due Sept. 24

20--3rd paper (5 pp.), due Oct. 29

25—5-7pp. final paper and extended post to course FB page, due December 3.

Assignments are detailed in the syllabus, below. Make sure you read the whole syllabus ahead of time.

All papers will be due before the class meeting in a drop box in the class learning management system, Moodle.

692—Grading and assignments

Can be the same as above, or

60—final 12-18 pp research paper

40—class discussion

Week-by-week list of readings**Part one: Terms of Empire****August 27: State of the Conversation**

Amy Kaplan on the silencing and “coming out” of empire to characterize US foreign policy:

Kaplan, Amy. “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture.” In *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, edited by Amy and Donald Pease Kaplan, 3–21. Durham: Duke, 1993.

Kaplan, Amy. “Violent Belongings and the Question of Empire Today.” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (2004): 1–18.

The recent imperial past (some very short articles)

Getachew, Adom. “[Colonialism Made the Modern World. Let’s Remake It.](#)” *The New York Times*, July 27, 2020.

Mayer, Jane. “[Torture and Obama’s Drone Program.](#)” *The New Yorker Blogs* (blog), February 15, 2013.

Drehle, David Von. “[Trump’s Mercenary Foreign Policy Confirms What Our Worst Critics Say of Us.](#)” *Washington Post*, January 17, 2020.

Shikha Dalmia, “[America First Is American Imperialism by Another Name.](#)” *The Week*, June 22, 2019.

Documentary: *The Revolution Will Not be Televised—Chavez: Inside the Coup* (Donnacha O’Briain, Kim Bartley, 2003, 74 minutes)

September 3--The rise of “settler colonialism” as critique, and post-/de-/anti-colonial studies:

Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies.” *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001): 829–65.

Iyko Day, “Being or nothingness: Indigeneity, antiblackness, and settler colonial critique.” *Critical Ethnic Studies* 1, no. 2 (2015): 102-121.

Jodi A. Byrd, “Still Waiting for the ‘Post’ to Arrive: Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and the Imponderables of American Indian Postcoloniality.” *Wicazo Sa Review* 31, no. 1 (July 8, 2016): 75–89.

Maile Arvin, “Indigenous Feminist Notes on Embodying Alliance against Settler Colonialism.” *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 18, no. 2 (2019): 335–57.

Documentary *Reel Injun* (Neil Diamond, 2010, 85 minutes)

Part two: The Refugee is the Paradigmatic Figure of the 21st Century**September 10--The Middle Eastern present: Syria and the Kurds**

Meredith Tax, *A Road Unforeseen: Women Fight the Islamic State*. New York: Bellevue Literary Press, 2016.

Documentary: *Turtles Can Fly* (Bahman Ghobadi, 2004, 97 min).

Paper due: 2 pp., before the class meeting. Reflect on any or all of the scholarly articles on “empire,” settler colonialism, and anti-/post-/de-colonial critique. Write something thoughtful, analytic, and opinionated, taking a position in any of these debates.

September 17--The Indigenous Present: Fights Over Kinship, Children, and Sexual Violence

Mark Rifkin, Romancing Kinshp: A Queer Reading of Indian Education and Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories*. *GLQ* 1 January 2006; 12 (1): 27–59.

Scott Morgensen, “Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (April 1, 2010): 105–31.

Kim Tallbear, “[Making Love and Relations Beyond Settler Sex and Family](#),” in Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway, eds., *Making Kin Not Population: Reconceiving Generations*. Chicago, IL: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018, pp. 145-166.

Mary Kathryn Nagle and Sarah Deer, “[McGirt v. Oklahoma: A Victory for Native Women](#),” *George Washington Law Review* (July 20, 2020).

Documentary: *Dawnland* (Adam Mazo, Ben Pender-Cudlip, 2018, 86 min)

September 24--The Latin American Present: Refugee Crisis, Drug Wars, and Free Trade

Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*. Coffee House Press, 2017 (70pp).

Sonia Nazario, “[Someone Is Always Trying to Kill You](#).” *The New York Times*, April 5, 2019.

Dawn Paley, *Drug War Capitalism*. Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2014. Chapter 1, pp. 10-37.

Documentary: *María en Tierra de Nadie* (2011, Marcela Zamora)

October 1--Sexual Violence, Torture, and the Empire of Bases and Sponsored Regimes

Kozue Akibayashi and Suzuyo Takazato, “Okinawa: women's struggle for demilitarization,” in Catherine Lutz and Cynthia Enloe. *The Bases of Empire: The Global Struggle against U.S. Military Posts*. NYU Press, 2009, pp. 243-269.

Araceli Esparza, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Justice for the Disappeared: Ana Castillo's Creative Writing and the Case of Sister Dianna Ortiz." *Feminist Formations* 25, no. 3 (2013): 1-32.

Emily Hobson, “Talk About Loving in the War Years: Nicaragua, Transnational Feminism, and AIDS,” in *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2016, pp. 120-154, 241-252.

Neel Ahuja, “Reversible Human: Rectal Feeding, Plasticity, and Racial Control in US Carceral Warfare.” *Social Text* 38, no. 2 (143) (June 1, 2020): 19–47.

DOCUMENTARY: [Taxi to the Dark Side](#). (2008, dir. Alex Gibney, 106 minutes).

October 8—The Academic Fight over Palestine/Israel (or, why is this the arena in which we talk about imperialism?)

Jasbir Puar, "Citation and Censure: Pinkwashing and the Sexual Politics of Talking about Israel." In *The Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, edited by Chatterjee Piya and Sunaina Maira, 281-98. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
Sunaina Maira, *Boycott! The Academy and Justice for Palestine*. UC Press, 2018.

DOCUMENTARY: *Life in Occupied Palestine* (dir. Balzer, 2007, 59 minutes).

October 15--Hawai'i and the Problem of Nationalism

J. Kehaulani Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty: Land, Sex, and the Colonial Politics of State Nationalism*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Documentaries: *Mauna Kea Temple Under Siege* (Joan Lander Puhipau, 2005, 51 minutes).
[Like a Mighty Wave: A Maunakea Film](#) (Puuhonue Puuhuluhulu, 2019, 15 min.)

October 22--Debt and Climate Crisis: The Case of Puerto Rico

Yarimar Bonilla, and Marisol LeBrón. *Aftershocks of Disaster: Puerto Rico Before and After the Storm*. Haymarket Books, 2019.

Documentary: *Aftershocks of Disaster: The Film* (Juan C. Dávila, 2020).

Part three: The History of Empire

October 29--History of the continent: Indigenous feminism's vision and extractive racial capitalism

Manu Karuka, *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*. Univ of California Press, 2019.

Documentary: *A Good Day to Die* (Lynn Salt, David Mueller, 2010)

November 5--1898 and its Aftermath

Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science and US Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (University of California Press, 2002).

Documentary: *La Operación* (Ana María García, 1982)

November 12--Deuling Cold Wars: Third Worldism and the US Turn to Authoritarianism

Robin D. G. Kelley, "'The Negro Question': Red Dreams of Black Liberation," and "Roaring from the East': Third World Dreaming," (chapters 2, 3) in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (UC Press, 2002), pp. 36-59; 60-109.

Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* "Atravesando Fronteras" in the Second edition, pp. 23-120.

Documentary: *The Trials of Henry Kissinger* (Eugene Jarecki, 2002)

November 19—Markets: Structural Adjustment, Gender, Sexuality, and Globalization

M. Jacqui Alexander, "Not just (any) body can be a citizen: The politics of law, sexuality and postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas." *Feminist Review* 48, no. 1 (1994): 5-23.

Jodi Kim, "Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism, and the Necropolitics of the Promise." *Social Text* 36, no. 2 (June 2018): 41-61.

V. Eudine Barriteau. "Structural Adjustment Policies in the Caribbean: A Feminist Perspective." *NWSA Journal* 8, no. 1 (1996): 142-56.

Karim Lamia, "Introduction: Neoliberalism, Microfinance, and Women's Empowerment." In *Microfinance and Its Discontents: Women in Debt in Bangladesh*, University of Minnesota Press, 2011, pp. xiii-xxxiii.

DOCUMENTARY: *Life and Debt* (Stephanie Black, 2001)