

SOC 4000-003, PJ _____; HON _____ *War, Imperialism and Terrorism*
Fall, 2003
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Course Overview*back by popular demand*.....

Prussian militarist von Clausewitz once said that war is politics by other means. Some observers, sociologists included, have suggested that war is also economics by other means. Imperialism refers to the systematic economic and political (and sometimes military) domination by powerful entities (often nation-states) over not-so-powerful entities. Updating von Clausewitz, I like to think of terrorism as war, imperialism, politics, and economics by other means. In this class we will explore war, imperialism, and terrorism as reflections of national and international social inequality. As the U.S. wages its seemingly endless "war against terrorism," and its episodic wars on other nation-states, it is increasingly important that we look beyond slogans and good/evil dichotomies to understand why so many people are dying (and will continue dying) in the name of peace and freedom.

I think of this course as an antidote to our cultural emphasis of reducing complex social phenomena (such as war, imperialism, and terrorism) to moral dichotomies and/or personalities. There is a lot more to these social phenomena than "good vs. evil" and crazy people. However, you should be warned that these more complex explanations often indict **us** as co-conspirators in the institutionalized violence so prevalent in our world.

Reading

I have eased up on last year's reading list but there is still plenty of material; and all but one of the books were NOT used before. This reading is not optional and there are no Cliff Notes to steer you through Lenin's classic on imperialism. If senioritis has struck, even if you are not a senior, it would be best to drop now since several people are waiting to pounce on your spot. Just let me know so I can let them know. No hard feelings. Anyway, here are the books:

Lenin, *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*

Hiro, *Iraq: in the Eye of the Storm*

Silverstein..., *Private Warriors*

Chomsky, *Media Control*

Vidal, *Dreaming of War*

I don't care where or how you buy these. Lenin is probably available at a good used book store if such a thing exists. Start reading Lenin right away. Also begin and continue reading Vidal. Other than that, I'm really not sure what order we will read these books. Like much of the class, it will unfold as we go along.

Assignments

There will be a short writing assignment after each book where you will have to make some kind of connection between the text and what we do in class. These will count 10-15% each, depending on the specific assignment. Another 20% of your grade will come from a research paper/project which explores some historical episode of imperialism or terrorism that we did NOT discuss in class. This paper/project will not just be an accumulation of information. Instead it should be framed by the sociological model we develop in class. The final 20% of your grade reflects your thoughtful and voluntary class participation. This is not extra credit. Please complete the readings on time and think about the things I ask you to think about at the end of each class. I doubt you will be uninterested by the topics at hand.

Course Outline

Since current events are largely responsible for the existence of this course, they will play a continuous role all semester long. When something important happens, we will talk about it and see if our prior discussions can help us make more sense out of things, even if it means putting something else on hold. For instance, if the U.S. decides to invade Iran or Syria, we will talk about it right away. At this point, I have a rough idea about what general topics we will cover and in what order. But that could change at any time given the volatile nature of the world these days. In addition, I want YOU to suggest certain topics for our collective consideration. For example, I know at least two of you took trips last year that raised a lot of questions about the United States' imperialistic actions with other countries. Therefore, I am going to leave the course outline vague at this time except for the first topic. During the next several weeks, we will explore the nature of capitalism and how the internal logic of this political economic system makes war, imperialism, and terrorism seem perfectly normal; kind of like economics and politics by other means!