France and its empire evolved together, and one cannot easily be disentangled from the other. From the slave empire of the Ancien Régime to the remnants of empire that remain part of France today, the French empire has always been a unique combination of what historian Warren Hollister called “piety, pugnacity, and greed.” French imperial history is Caribbean history, West African history, the history of North Africa and the Middle East, Southeast Asian history, South Pacific islands history and more, as well as metropolitan French history.

Moreover, after the gradual demise of the sugar empire in the Caribbean in the decades following French Revolution, the French Empire never had a single organizing principle as compelling as “free trade” for the British Empire. While a handful of French capitalists assuredly benefited from empire, French capitalism arguably did not. The vastly expanded French Empire of the nineteenth century was as much making of missionaries and fantasy-oriented soldiers as of capitalists. While some parts of the French empire became independent after World War II, others were annexed to the Metropole, and remain as much “France” today as Hawaii and Alaska are part of the United States.

This course examines the vast, ungainly, and often cruel enterprise of French imperialism from the eighteenth century to the present. The class will combine lecture and discussion. Its focus is on the political history of the French empire, from the points of view of the conquered as well as the conquerors. We will also explore why the French empire proved so durable in so many forms.

Books for Purchase:


Jean de Brunhoff, *The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant* (originally published 1933)

Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (multiple editions, originally published in French in 1942)


Additional readings have been made available on Blackboard, in a file labeled “Additional Required Readings.” Where possible, both English and French versions have been posted.

I. Advance Preparation and Attendance

There is no formal prerequisite for this course. But it assumes a certain familiarity with how to study history at the college level. Consequently, some background in the history of Europe, Africa, the Middle East, or Asia would certainly be of benefit. As you will shortly observe, the readings for this course are diverse in methodology and content.

It is critical that students attend the lectures, the more so the less experienced they are in the study of college-level history. This responsibility must be internalized, however, since there is nothing to be achieved by taking attendance in a class of this size.

A reading knowledge of French is not a prerequisite for this class. However, every effort has been made to give students with appropriate proficiency the chance to read materials in French.

II. Readings

While the lectures for the course are organized mostly chronologically, the readings are organized mostly thematically. Consequently, for some of the assigned books, it is difficult to pair the readings with individual lectures. General guidelines are provided below. Students are counseled to read carefully about 100-150 pages per week.

Most of the readings beyond the assigned books are original documents. All of them have been made available on Blackboard, in both English and French when possible.

III. Written Work

A. Graded Essays

There will be three short (five-page) papers. Each piece of written work will account for approximately one-third of the final grade.
Each paper will have a specific topic, to be explained in handouts distributed one week in advance of the due dates. Alternative topics are possible, but must be approved in advance by the instructor. There will be options to expand one of the discussion papers into a more conventional academic essay. Due dates are indicated on the syllabus. The third paper will be due at the time set for the final exam in this class by the college final exam schedule. The last essay will involve a "think piece" assessing the overall historical significance of the material covered in the course.

II. Discussion Papers

A number of discussion days are noted on the syllabus. On designated days, students will be required to turn in a one-page discussion paper, in which they identify and briefly explain issues in the readings. These papers are for students' benefit. Their purpose is to facilitate discussion and to provide a foundation should the student decide to expand the essay into a more formal essay for a graded assignment. Since the primary purpose of these papers is classroom discussion, late papers will not be accepted for any reason. Discussion papers must be turned in as hard copy. Electronic submissions of discussion papers will not be accepted. Because they are not graded per se, the Honor Code need not be signed.

These papers are required, and must be word-processed. Chronic failure to turn in discussion papers will be noted, and will have an unfavorable impact on a student's final grade. Each discussion paper will receive a "mark" (as opposed to a grade) of √+, √, √-, or 0 (meaning either a derisory effort or failure to turn the paper in at all). The cumulative performance on these papers may be used to shape a student's final grade. For example, if a student's final grade hovers between an A- and a B+ and that student got a √+ on all the discussion papers, the student will receive a final grade of A-.

Discussion papers or the lack thereof may help push down a final grade in a similar manner. Comments will not be written on the papers themselves, but students are welcome to come talk to me about them if they have concerns or questions.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments:

January 31: Introduction: What Was the French Empire For?

Readings: Begin Stovall, Transnational France, Introduction

Raymond Betts, Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914, Ch. 2, “Origins and Growth of the French Doctrine of Assimilation,” (Blackboard)
February 2: Empire, Slavery, and Absolute Monarchy

Readings:

*Code Noir* (1685, English and French versions available on Blackboard)

February 7: Revolution against the Slave Empire in the Caribbean

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch.1

Toussaint l’Ouverture, *Constitution of Saint-Domingue* (1801, English and French versions available on Blackboard)

*Constitution of Haiti* (1805, English and French versions available on Blackboard)

ONE-PAGE DISCUSSION PAPER DUE

February 9: Sword and Crown: The Beginning of French Rule in Algeria

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 2

Alexis de Tocqueville, *First and Second Letters on Algeria* (1837, English and French versions available on Blackboard)

February 14: Revolution and Empire in 1848

Readings: Continue Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 2

Decree on the Abolition of Slavery, 27 April 1848 (English and French versions available on Blackboard)

February 16: Reinventing Empire under Napoleon III

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 3-4

Begin Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, Ch. 1-3

FIRST ESSAY QUESTIONS HANDED OUT
February 21: Reinventing Empire Again: The Third Republic

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 5-6

Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, Introduction, Ch. 1-4

Betts, *Association and Assimilation*, Ch. 4, “Assimilation and the Scientific Attitude,” and Ch. 6, “A New Policy, Association,” (Blackboard)

February 23: Free Day: Instructor out of town on Oberlin Business

FIRST ESSAY DUE BY CLASS TIME
ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

February 28: French Orientalism

Readings: Short Story by Guy de Maupassant, “Allouma,” (1889, English and French versions available on Blackboard)

ONE-PAGE DISCUSSION PAPER DUE

March 2: Republic and Empire in West Africa

Readings: Continue Stovall, Conklin, and Betts readings above.

March 7: French Rule in Indochina in the Nineteenth Century

Readings: Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, Ch. 4-6

March 9: The Geopolitics and Sociology of Empire before the Great War

DEBATE ON ASSIMILATION VS. ASSOCIATION

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 7

March 14: The French Empire and the Great War

Readings: Conklin, *Mission to Civilize*, Ch. 5

Joe Harriss Lunn, “Kande Kamara Speaks,” (1987, Blackboard)
March 16: The Mise en valeur between the Wars

Readings: Stovall, Transnational France, Ch. 8
Conklin, Mission to Civilize, Ch. 6-7

Jean de Brunhoff, *The Story of Babar the Little Elephant*
(originally published 1933, English and French versions available on Blackboard)

ONE-PAGE DISCUSSION PAPER DUE ON BABAR

**Spring Break!**

March 28: The French Mandates Under the League of Nations

Readings: Mandate for Syria and Lebanon (Blackboard, 1922)
Mandate for Togo (Blackboard, 1922)

*Note:* The French and English versions for the Togo mandates appear in the same document, with the French version printed first. The English version appears thereafter.

SECOND ESSAY QUESTIONS HANDED OUT

March 30: The Colonial Exposition of 1931

April 4: Anti-Colonialism between the Wars

Readings: Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, Ch. 7

SECOND ESSAY DUE
ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

April 6: The French Empire and World War II

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 9
Leopold Senghor, *Black Hosts* (selected poems, 1948, English and French versions available on Blackboard)

ONE-PAGE DISCUSSION PAPER DUE ON BLACK HOSTS
April 11: French Imperial Projects after World War II

Readings:
Frederick Cooper, “Alternatives to Empire: France and Africa after World War II,” (2009, available on Blackboard)

April 13: “Peaceful” Decolonization in Africa and the Middle East

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 10

April 18: The Vietnam War Fought by France

Readings: Brocheux and Hémery, *Indochina*, Ch. 7, Conclusion

Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 2 September 1945 (English and French versions available on Blackboard)

April 20: The War in Algeria

Readings:

FLN Proclamation to the Algerian People, 1 November 1954, (English and French versions available on Blackboard)

April 25: Narratives of People and Nation

Discussion: Camus, *The Stranger* (1942) and *The Battle of Algiers* (1966)

Note: French version of Camus, *L’Étranger* available on Blackboard

ONE-PAGE DISCUSSION PAPER DUE ON BOTH

April 27: The Empire moves to France

Readings: Stovall, *Transnational France*, Ch. 11-12

May 2: The Empire after the Empire: France in Africa

Note: French version of Daoud, *Mersault, contre-enquête* available on Blackboard.

ONE-PAGE DISCUSSION PAPER DUE

May 4: “The Sun Never Sets on the French Republic”: The DOM-TOM


FINAL ESSAYS DUE AT THE TIME DETERMINED BY THE COLLEGE FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE

Additional Ground Rules:

1. No electronic devices, such as laptops, tablets, or mobile phones may be used in class. Any exception will require documentation from the Office of Disability Services.

2. Due dates and page-limit requirements are to be taken most seriously. I am not in the business of persecuting students if a genuine problem exists, but in principle I strongly dislike giving extensions. Normally, I take off 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hours a paper is overdue.

3. Three excuses for requesting extensions will never be acceptable: 1) a self-defined character flaw of procrastination; 2) extracurricular activities, including performances and political activities; 3) work in other classes. Two possible exceptions exist for unacceptable excuse #3. I am prepared to exercise some indulgence concerning students completing Seniors Honors projects or, in the case of Conservatory students, students playing Senior recitals. This is because of the "once in a lifetime" character of these projects.

4. Graded papers must be double-spaced and have 1-inch margins. I reserve the right to return unread any illegible paper.

5. All written work at Oberlin College is covered by the Honor Code. No paper will be read before the Honor Code is signed: “I have adhered to the Honor Code in the writing of this exercise.”
6. All graded work for the course must be completed in order to pass it. That is to say, a student who receives an A on the first two papers and does not complete the third will fail the entire course. Discussion papers operate according to the conditions outlines above.