

Fall 2015

HIST 585-001: Special Topics in History:

Topic: Comparative Empires

Instructor	Day(s)	Time(s)	Maximum Enrollment
Crais & Ravina	M	1:00 – 4:00 pm	12

Semester Description:

At the turn of the last century, most people lived within an empire, either under colonial rule, or within a colonizing power. Today, that history seems strikingly relevant. With the end of the Cold War, great power rivalries are based increasingly on national interest and perceived cultural difference rather than opposing ideologies. The current struggle over Crimea, for example, recalls the great powers struggles of the mid-1800s more than the Cold War. Such tensions can make WWI seem closer are more relevant that WWII.

This course is an introduction to the historiography of empires: what they were, what they are and how they work. We will examine a range of explanations for empire: institutional, geopolitical, economic, and cultural. Many of our readings will focus on the modern world, but we will also examine ancient and early modern empires. At the core of this seminar is the conviction that the problem of empire—the problem of the global organization of power—is a central part of the modern world, including the present. Empire, then, is an ineluctable part of the world we inhabit.