As a political philosophy, liberalism is animated by basic commitments to moral universalism, political equality and the preservation of individual rights and freedoms. Yet the modern era during which it developed was also a time of unprecedented colonial and imperial expansion, from Europe to the rest of the world. What is the relationship between Western, liberal political thought and the project of imperialism? How were theories grounding universal human rights and political egalitarianism made compatible with, and even used to justify, imperial and colonial domination? How should we – contemporary liberals and non-liberals alike – think about traditions of political thought mired in historical injustice and exclusion?

This course will examine the complex and often contradictory relationship, both historical and conceptual, between liberal political theory and imperialism. We will read canonical thinkers in the history of modern political thought in order to examine not only how they defended or criticized imperialism, but also, how they perceived the non-European world. In so doing, we will pay particular attention their conceptualizations of history, human development, diversity/difference, progress, and civilization.

We will proceed (roughly) chronologically, moving from the early modern era in which liberalism’s foundations were laid, to the Enlightenment, to the 19th century’s high period of liberal imperialism, to a range of 20th century responses and reflections on the legacy and ongoing impacts of empire and domination in liberal political thought. While our focus is squarely on liberalism, we will not be restricted to it. We will examine the roots of liberalism, treating the conceptual moorings preceding any recognizably liberal doctrine (but that have been retrospectively incorporated into the “tradition”); we will engage its critics and interlocutors, past and present; and we will occasionally delve into neighbouring ideologies and political philosophies, when it helps shed light on our concerns.

This course is a research seminar. As a seminar, it will require significant student participation; regular attendance, careful preparation and active involvement will be
As a research course, students will be expected to read extensive primary and secondary texts, particularly in preparing the final paper.

Course Format and Grading

The course will meet for a three hour seminar weekly. Each session will involve some (very light) lecturing, group discussions and student presentations.

1. Attendance and participation: 20%
2. In-class presentation: 15%
3. Paper presentation: 15%
4. Research paper: 50%

Your participation grade will be gauged by consistent attendance, and by active and informed participation. You will be expected to have completed the readings and be ready to discuss them. As a graduate seminar, the course will revolve around our discussion of the salient issues, rather than lectures; the expectation will be that you’ve read and understood the materials, and that you’ve thought about what we should discuss from them.

Each student will be responsible for one 15-minute in-class presentation, for which you will sign up on the first day of the course. The presentation should aim to do several things. First, it should briefly introduce the central themes and ideas in the week’s readings. This should not be the focus of your presentation, but should rather just take a minute or two to situate the central ideas in question. Secondly, and more importantly, the presentation should raise what you think are the most interesting, controversial, and/or perplexing ideas, themes or conundrums stemming from the week’s readings. You are more than welcome (but not at all obligated) to go beyond the readings themselves; you should feel free to introduce any additional ideas, examples or materials (from the recommended readings or from outside of them) that you think will help us to sort through what’s most interesting about the week’s theme. In short, the presentation should raise the ideas or arguments that you think we need to discuss as a class, and should include a few questions to that end. Overall, then, it aims to have you critically evaluate what’s most important for us to think about and to initiate our discussions on the subject, to which I will add my own questions and comments.

The research paper will be 6000-8000 words, and will be on a topic of your own choosing. It can be based on the themes/ideas/readings from the course, or on a different subject altogether (within the constraints of the course’s subject, broadly speaking, and subject to my approval). You are required to discuss your paper topic with me ahead of time to have it approved. The paper will be due at the beginning of class on Nov. 9.

Our final class, on Nov. 30, will be dedicated to your research paper presentations – we will run something of a mini-conference on your work. Each student will prepare a 15 minute presentation based on your research paper – its subject, central ideas, and/or research question. The purpose of the presentation is threefold. First, it will provide you
with an opportunity to develop presentation skills in a friendly and collegial environment; this aims to prepare you to present papers at professional academic conferences. Second, it will allow us all to learn a bit about what everyone is working on. Third, it will enable both me and other students to ask a few questions and offer some constructive criticisms regarding your paper.

**Required Texts**


Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014)


**Online Course Pack (OCP; will be posted on Avenue); Online Resources (OL)**

**Avenue to Learn**

This course will employ McMaster’s online learning platform to distribute materials and communicate grades. Make sure your account is active, and that you check it regularly during the term.

Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster email accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with me.

**In-Class Technology Policy**

While laptops are permitted in the course to take or consult notes, please respect your colleagues (and me!) by refraining from using the internet for non-course-related matters (Facebook comes to mind). Cell phone usage is **strictly prohibited** during the seminar.

**Grade Appeals and Extensions**
You are free to appeal the grade of your paper or presentations. However, I will only consider appeals based on substantive reasons. Appeals will consequently require you to provide a half-to-full-page explanation laying out the grounds for your case. If you provide adequate reasons for me to reconsider your grade, I will do so in light of your explanation.

Extensions for the paper will ONLY be extended to students unable to submit in time due to extraordinary circumstances. This will require official documentation (for example, an official medical certificate) explaining your circumstances.

**Academic Integrity**

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials earned are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g., the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is the students’ responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty, please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at [http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:
1. Plagiarism, e.g., the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

**Course Modification Statement**

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic
accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

**Faculty of Social Sciences E-Mail Communication Policy**

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student’s own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Email Forwarding in MUGSI:
http://www.mcmaster.ca/uts/support/email/emailforward.html
*Forwarding will take effect 24-hours after students complete the process at the above link.

**Course Schedule**

**Sept. 7: Introduction: What is Liberalism?**

**Reading:**

-Duncan Bell, “The Dream Machine: On Liberalism and Empire”. OCP

*Recommended:*

**Sept. 14: Working the Land Right: Locke and Property in America**

**Reading:**
-John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*. If you’ve read Locke’s *Treatises* way too many times for way too many courses, just read Chapter 5; if it’s been a while (or if you haven’t read it way too many times), read Chapters 1-5. OL
-David Armitage, "John Locke, Carolina, and the *Two Treatises of Government*", *Political Theory*, 32, no. 5 (2004). OL
-David Armitage, “John Locke: Theorist of Empire?”, in Sankar Muthu (ed) *Empire and Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2012), 84-111. OCP

Recommended:


**Sept. 21: Conjectural Histories and the Scottish Enlightenment**

Reading:

-Pitts, Ch. 2.

Recommended:

Sept. 28: Tocqueville: Liberalism, Republicanism and Colonialism in Algeria

Reading:

- Pitts, Ch. 7.

Recommended:

- Pitts, Ch. 6.

Oct. 5: Liberalism, Imperialism and Capitalism (or, Marx’s Sort-of Critique of Liberal Imperialism)

Reading:

- Karl Marx, “The British Rule in India,” “The Future Results of British Rule in India”, “The East India Company – Its History and Results”. OL

Recommended:

- Shlomo Avineri (ed) *Karl Marx on Colonialism and Modernization: His Despatches and Other Writings on China, India, Mexico, the Middle East and North Africa* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1968).

Oct. 12: NO CLASS – MID-TERM RECESS

Oct. 19: Indian Liberalism and its Critics

Reading:


Recommended:

- Bayly, *Recovering Liberties* (remainder).
- Shrutí Kapila (ed) *An Intellectual History for India* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Oct. 26: Liberalism, Recognition and Indigeneity in Canada

Reading:

- Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*. 
Recommended:


**Nov. 2: The Critique of Neo-Colonialism, and a Civic Alternative**

*Reading:*

- Tully, “On Global Citizenship”.

*Recommended:*


**Nov. 9: Contemporary Liberal Imperialism: Advocates and Critics**

*Reading:*

Recommended:

- Niall Ferguson, *Empire* (remainder).

**Nov. 16: Subaltern Studies and the Critique of Historicism**

**Reading:**

- Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Subaltern History as Political Thought”. *OCP*  
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Introduction, Chapter 1. *OCP*

**Recommended:**

- Exchange between Vivek Chibber and Partha Chatterjee:  
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbM8HJrxSJ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbM8HJrxSJ).

**NOTE:** This introduction to Subaltern Studies sheds light on one facet of a much wider set of critical arguments in postcolonial theory. For just a few works of/on post-colonial theory:

- Edward Said, *Orientalism*

**Nov. 23: Moving Forward? Liberalism and Progress, Past and Present**

*Reading:*

- McCarthy, Ch. 5-7, Conclusion.
- David Scott, “The Traditions of Historical Others”, *Symposia on Gender, Race and Philosophy* 8 (1) 2012. OCP

*Recommended:*


**Nov. 30: Paper presentations.**