

HIS2424

**Question: Between 1898 and the present, was the United States an empire?**

Students in this course have read numerous brief primary sources (collected in a reader edited by Jeremi Suri) covering key topics and episodes in the history of US foreign affairs between 1898 (when the US war with Spain began) and the present day. They also have read (entirely or in part) a series of secondary works by historians, with in-depth coverage of US relations with East Asia and the Western Pacific and with Latin America particularly, although they also have read about US-Europe relations, with lesser coverage of US involvement in other world regions. Class meetings have combined active-learning study of documents with instructor-led discussions of texts and lectures providing background on international history and US foreign affairs.

The question for the examination focuses on a central theme of the course, one that students have studied and discussed during the semester. Their tasks in the examination are to express an interpretation, to support it in an organized, analytical and well-supported way that draws exclusively on the assigned primary and secondary works, and that demonstrates their command of this material.

They should clarify their idea of what an empire is from their acquired knowledge. A good or excellent essay must include a clear thesis in an introduction that states the student's position. An introduction that concedes there is support for both views is no problem, and if skillfully stated and framed may even strengthen the student's argument. However, what is necessary for a good outcome is that the student indicate, even if her or his view is complex, which side of the question is the more compelling.

The body of the examination essay should be organized analytically rather than narratively. It should include both strong and clear paragraph-by-paragraph organization, with good topic sentences. It should feature a rich array of specific information and references to the required readings on the course penum. This supporting information should be comprehensive in its scope, but it need not be exhaustive. That is, the data should bear a clear relevance to the question and the student's thesis. Yet it should be abundant. For an examination to be excellent, the data also should refer to multiple geographic regions (at least two of the following: East Asia/Western Pacific, Latin America, Europe – three is better than two) and it should cover the entire sweep of the period between 1898 and the post-9/11 years. Formal citations of the kind and quality expected in a paper are not as mandatory here, but more specific references will make a stronger examination. It is essential that the examination draw on the required readings and not on outside sources. Use of outside sources should add no value to the examination or the student's score, only the student's use of required readings counts. An excellent essay will provide rich, abundant specific support for a clearly stated thesis and will be strongly analytical and highly organized. A good essay will provide substantial specific support for a clear thesis and will be largely analytical. A satisfactory essay will provide a moderately high level of support for a fairly clear view and will be partly analytical in form. An adequate essay will provide only a partly clear thesis and will offer some, but less-than-satisfactory specific support and will provide a weak analytical structure.