This seminar examines the projection of U.S. power – political, economic, military, and cultural – into the wider Caribbean rim during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Using a variety of government records, press reports, and other primary sources, along with secondary accounts, students will study struggles for individual freedom and national sovereignty, the construction of racial stereotypes and their influence on public policy, and the politics of underdevelopment and inequality. Among other questions, the seminar will explore the rationales behind U.S. state and non-state involvement in the Caribbean, how Caribbean labor regimes and commodity chains have shaped the global economy (and vice versa), and how the agency of local actors has alternately enabled and constrained would-be empire builders in the region.

Like all sections of History 400, this course is in many ways less a traditional seminar than it is a workshop on methodology. In other words, while this seminar will familiarize students with major themes in the history of U.S.-Caribbean relations, it is primarily designed to help them develop the skills necessary for “doing” history: formulating research questions, effectively using libraries and archives, critically analyzing primary and secondary sources, keeping track of data, and crafting and revising arguments. Students will receive instruction in the resources available at Firestone Library and handle selections from Princeton’s archival holdings on U.S. foreign policy, housed at Mudd Library. During the second half of the course, students will gain experience presenting and reworking their own research, as well as giving feedback on that of their peers.

Course readings and discussions will focus on the twentieth century, including the 1915–34 U.S. occupation of Haiti and U.S. responses to the early Cuban Revolution. However, students are encouraged to write a Junior Paper on any aspect of modern Caribbean history with a connection to the United States or empire, from pro-slavery filibustering to the war on drugs. Related Junior Paper topics advised by this professor in the past include the role of the 1963 Dominican-Haitian conflict in U.S. policy towards Haiti, Mexican author Carlos Fuentes’s attitude toward “revolution” after the 1959 Cuban Revolution, and the place of the 1962 Mirabal murder trials in Dominican national identity.