

## HIS 236: MODERN BRITAIN AND THE EMPIRE

Spring 2, 2021



For better or for worse, the history of the world is inextricably linked to the history of Britain. This class will explore how modern British politics, social and economic organization, and cultural identities developed in a global context, by looking both at how Britain exported its institutions and how it was itself “made” by contact with other states and societies. In particular, we will investigate how British citizens and subjects were impacted by larger political, economic, social, and ideological change; trace the relational formation of social categories like nation, class, gender, race, and religion; and consider how marginalized groups negotiated structures of power and pushed for rights and representation within an expanding and contracting imperial polity (with British India forming a particular focus of our study of empire). We will take a critical approach to these developments in British and colonial history by working intensively with primary sources, evaluating scholarship and films, and examining a case study of a crucial moment of transition in the British imperial world order.

***Instructor***

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Office hours: Tues & Wed, 10:00-11:00 a.m. CST (drop-in hours in my Webex room:  
<https://grinnellcollege.webex.com/meet/prevoste> ), or by appointment

***Curricular Assistant***

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## COURSE SCHEDULE

*All times refer to CST zone; texts are to be prepared for the day on which they're listed.*

*Note: Although this schedule constitutes the core framework for our class plan, I reserve the right to make changes in order to accommodate class rhythms, textual or technological access, or unforeseen circumstances.*

### Week 1: A Changing State & Society

Thurs, April 1: Making Britain, becoming British (full class on webex)

- Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, introduction – Pweb
- Philippa Levine, *The British Empire*, chapter 1

Fri, Apr 2: Industrialization (small groups)

- T.W. Heyck & M. Veldman, "The Triple Revolution," in *The Peoples of the British Isles* – Pweb
- Walter Arnstein, ed., *The Past Speaks*, chaps. 2 & 7 – Pweb

Mon, Apr 5: Class & gender in the 19<sup>th</sup> c (full class on webex)

- Heyck & Veldman, "The Emerging Class Society" – Pweb
- *The Past Speaks*, ch. 8 – Pweb

Tues, Apr 6: Slavery and abolition (Brief 1 due)

- Levine, chap 2
- Heyck & Veldman, "Intellectual & Spiritual Revolutions" – Pweb
- *The History of Mary Prince* – excerpts on Pweb; full text at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/prince/prince.html>

### Week 2: Reform & Rebellion

Thurs, Apr 8: Political reform (full class on webex)

- Heyck & Veldman, "Politics & the State" – Pweb
- T. B. Macaulay, "Parliamentary Reform" – Pweb
- Catherine Hall, "The Rule of Difference: Gender, Class, and Empire in the Making of the 1832 Reform Act," in *Gendered Nations: Nationalism and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* – Pweb

Fri, Apr 9: Imperial reform (small groups)

- Levine, chap 5
- Documents on the campaign to abolish *sati* – Pweb
- Brian Stanley, "'Commerce and Christianity': Providence Theory, the Missionary Movement, and the Imperialism of Free Trade, 1842-1860" – JSTOR link: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2638849>

Mon, Apr 12: The 1857 Uprising (full class on webex)

- Documents from *The 1857 Reader* – Pweb

Tues, Apr 13: Race, Class, Gender, & Nation: The Conjunction of 1867 (Brief #2 due)

- C. Hall, "Rethinking Imperial Histories: The Reform Act of 1867," *New Left Review* 1:208 (1994) – Pweb
- Levine, ch. 6
- Documents on the 1867 parliamentary reform debates (Taylor, Mill, Disraeli, Bright, Low) – Pweb
- 1867 Proclamation of the Irish Republic – Pweb

### Week 3: Power, Politics, and War

Thurs, Apr 15: The "new imperialism" (full class on webex)

- H. Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (entire book) – Pweb
- Levine, chaps. 7 & 8

Fri, Apr 16: Gender, sexuality, & empire (small groups)

- Levine, chap 9
- Anne McClintock, "Maidens, Maps, and Mines," in Walker ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town, 1990) – Pweb

Mon, Apr 19: Feminism (full class on webex)

- June Purvis, "Did Militancy Help or Hinder the Granting of Women's Suffrage in Britain?" *Women's History Review* 28 (2019), 1200-1234 – Pweb
- Documents on the women's suffrage movement – Pweb

Tues, Apr 20: The Great War (Brief #3 due)

- Kenneth O. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Britain*, chap 1
- War poetry – Pweb
- Vera Brittain & Roland Leighton letters – Pweb
- Indian soldiers' letters – Pweb

### Week 4: From the First to Second World War

Thurs, Apr 22: The Great Depression (full class on webex)

- Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Part I
- Morgan, ch. 2 and ch. 3 up to p.39 (through "The Arts" section)

Fri, Apr 23: Britain in a European Civil War (small groups)

- Road to Wigan Pier, Part II & Gollancz foreword
- Morgan, pp 39-41 (ch 3, "Foreign Affairs")

Mon, Apr 26: The interwar empire & its critics (full class on webex)

- Levine, chap 10
- Embree & Carnes, *Defining a Nation*, Appendix C

Tues, Apr 27: Appeasement and WWII (Brief #4 due)

- Morgan, last section of ch. 3 (“Change in public mood”) & ch. 4
- *The Past Speaks*, chap. 16

### Weeks 5 & 6: Ends of Empire

*During these two weeks, we will engage in a historical roleplaying game based on the 1945 Simla negotiations that ultimately led to the independence and partition of India and Pakistan. Roles and further instructions will be distributed closer to the time, but please note that we will use almost all of our allotted class time on MTWThF, and that you will be required to submit two short writing assignments (deadlines and format will vary by role).*

Thurs, April 29: Context

- Embree & Carnes, *Defining a Nation* (Game book): pp 1-35; Appendices A & B

Fri, April 30: Faction meeting & Governors General welcome

- Game book: pp 45-49; review Appendix C; read materials specific to role

Mon, May 3: Full session 1

- Presentations by Sikhs, Nizam of Hyderabad, Maharaja of Kashmir, Communists

Tues, May 4: Full session 2

- Presentations by Dr. Ambedkar, Hindu Mahasabha, Gandhi

Wed, May 5: Full session 3

- Presentations by INC & Muslim League

Thurs, May 6: Full session 4

- GG issue draft recommendations

Fri, May 7: Full Session 5

- Factions present reply to recommendations

Mon, May 10: Full session 6

- GG present revised recommendations

Tues, May 11: Post-mortem

- Levine ch. 11

### Week 7: The Postwar British World

Thurs, May 13: The welfare state and the “windrush generation” (full class on webex)

- Morgan, chap. 5
- *7-up!* (short film, Paul Almond 1964 – streaming link on Pweb)
- *Small Island* (National Theatre production—streaming link on Pweb)

Fri, May 14: The Troubles in Northern Ireland (small groups)

- Morgan ch. 6
- *Bloody Sunday* (film, Paul Greengrass, 2002—streaming link on Pweb)

Mon, May 17: Race and politics (full class on webex)

- Enoch Powell, “Rivers of Blood” speech
- Hanif Kureishi, “The Rainbow Sign” – Pweb
- *Small Axe: Mangrove* (film, Steve McQueen, 2020) – streaming link on Pweb

Tues, May 18: From EU to Brexit (full class on webex)

- Morgan ch. 7
- 1972 Parliamentary debates on EU – Pweb
- 2016 Parliamentary debates on Brexit – Pweb
- Zadie Smith, “Fences: A Brexit Diary” – Pweb

### Exam Period

Thurs, May 20:

*\*Final paper due on Pweb by 4:30 pm\**

## COURSE INFORMATION

### ***Course objectives***

Students in this course will:

- Develop a historical consciousness about modern Britain and the Empire/Commonwealth and encounter a diverse range of actors, groups, and voices within this broad framework;
- Develop competencies in reading and critically analyzing primary sources (i.e. the raw materials of the past, produced during the time under investigation);
- Develop competencies in reading and critically analyzing secondary sources (i.e. historical writing about the past, produced after the time under investigation);
- Strengthen their analytical writing skills;
- Strengthen their oral communication skills and ability to contribute to a group dialogue.

### ***Course texts***

The following required texts are available through the college bookstore and/or online vendors. If you're on campus, you may also be able to borrow some from Burling or the lending library. All are available as e-books as well as hard copies.

- Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (Routledge, 2019—3<sup>rd</sup> ed)
- Kenneth Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005)
- George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (orig publ 1937; various reprints available)
- Aislie Embree & Mark Carnes, *Defining A Nation: India on the Eve of Independence* (Norton, Reacting to the Past, 2016—2<sup>nd</sup> ed)

All other readings will be available on Pweb or online (as noted on the schedule). A few assignments include films, which will be available for streaming on Pweb or through your own streaming services.

### ***Course requirements and evaluation***

Class citizenship & contribution (35%, about equally divided between full class and small group meetings):

History happens in dialogue, and I evaluate class participation accordingly. In these unusual circumstances of remote learning, “class participation” might look, sound, and/or feel different than it otherwise would; therefore, it becomes even more incumbent upon us all to work intentionally as a group to generate ideas and ensure that everyone can hear and be heard. We will use different platforms to develop that dialogue, including plenary class meetings and small-group workshops. For my part, I strive to engineer an inclusive and challenging learning environment that is “comfortable enough to risk discomfort,” as one of my faculty colleagues recently put it.

In evaluating your contributions, I will be looking for:

- evidence-based points that marshal specific examples and passages from the assigned texts;

- multi-layered responses to the questions that build on and develop your peers' comments, engaging positions rather than people ("I dis/agree with X's point" rather than "I dis/agree with X");
- "I" statements that respect differences of opinion and experience and that grapple with historical complexity while avoiding the replication of offensive language and ideas;
- self-awareness of your role within the group dynamic (Is it a time to speak up or to listen? To assert or rethink a position? How can I phrase my points in a way that invites, rather than shuts down, further conversation?);
- a willingness to keep an open mind and to learn from new encounters with texts, people, and ideas;
- devotion of your fullest possible focus and attention to the discussion or task at hand.

#### Remote classroom protocols:

- I encourage you to keep your camera turned on during the full-class and small-group sessions, but I absolutely understand there may be good reasons why you can't or won't do that. Whether you're using audio or visual stream or both, I expect active engagement in the discussions.
- You may use the chat during class, and/or the Discussion Board after class, to supplement as necessary or desired.
- I do the best I can to monitor the order of hands raised on Webex, but I also welcome help – if you notice that I've inadvertently skipped someone, please don't hesitate to point it out!
- We will be recording all full class sessions and small-group meetings. These are only for internal class use and must not be circulated outside secure college storage sites (Pweb, OneDrive, Webex, Teams). Each class recording will be posted on the respective class day sheet on Pweb; you are welcome to refer back to them however it's useful.
- If you must miss class meetings for a health or personal reason, please let me know. You may help make up for the absence by posting a response to the discussion questions on Pweb.

#### Additional notes on classroom discourse:

- Students are often eager to make connections between what they encounter in this class and what they encounter in other classes and/or outside the classroom. I welcome those connections as long as you concretely tie them to the texts and questions under consideration. My reason for this rule: adhering to a common frame of reference and a common set of sources ensures a level playing field and equitable access to knowledge among participants in any given dialogue; using outside knowledge or experience should supplement rather than replace that common frame.
- If you encounter proper names of places or people that seem unfamiliar, don't be afraid to try and pronounce them as best you can. It's better to attempt to call something by its name than to gloss over it as unpronounceable.
- Historians have started to adopt the term "enslaved persons" in place of "slaves" to refer to people whose labor and autonomy were forcibly taken from them under the Atlantic slave complex, in order to recognize their personhood while also acknowledging their subjugation under violent and coercive regimes. I encourage use of this term in our class.
- Historians no longer use the term "natives" to refer to peoples indigenous to the areas of Africa and Asia ruled by the British Empire, because of the colonial overtones of that terminology (though it's considered antiquated rather than offensive). It's fine to include this term within quotations from primary sources, especially when it refers to political or administrative units;



however, when you're referring directly to groups of historical actors, it's better to do so either as "indigenous" or "colonial subjects," or in more specific terms of affinity to place or to social and economic groups (e.g. Black South Africans; Bengali nationalists; Sikh soldiers; West African peasants; etc).

- By contrast, some of the course sources use, quote, or make reference to explicitly offensive racial language that has historically demeaned peoples of African and Asian descent and upheld racist systems of power. This includes (though is not limited to) the N-word, which may not and must not be spoken aloud in this class, even if/when referring to a source. (You may exercise your best judgment in deciding whether to write out this or other offensive terms if/when including direct quotes in writing.)

Writing assignments (see above for deadlines; assignment sheets with specific prompts and instructions will be posted on Pweb):

**Briefs** (3 total, 30%):

For the first four weeks, you will submit a weekly "brief" (1-2 pages, 2-3 paragraphs, max 700 words) that analyzes the texts and responds to specific questions. Your final grade will include three of the four possible briefs, which means you may either skip one, or drop your lowest brief grade.

**Simla game position papers** (15%):

In weeks 5 and 6, you will submit two short writing assignments specific to your game role.

**Final synthetic paper** (6-7 pages, 20%)

Building on your previous work, you'll craft an argument about a specific aspect of modern British history by analyzing a body of primary and secondary sources.

**Expectations of written work:**

Although different assignments will look different, the same general questions will guide my evaluation of your writing:

- Have you followed the assignment?
- Have you framed and stated a compelling argument that goes beyond a superficial or obvious interpretation?
- Do you develop the argument through logical sequence of ideas and coherent organization?
- Do you support the argument with appropriate evidence from the relevant primary and secondary sources, properly cited?
- Do you make insightful connections between different sources and perspectives and put them in productive conversation with each other?
- Is your language clear, eloquent, concise, and grammatically sound?

**Writing support:**

I am available to offer feedback at all stages of your work (within reason!!) Additionally:

Grinnell's Writing, Reading, and Speaking Center supports students working on papers, projects, presentations, and applications. Schedule a session with one of the Center's professional instructors and get feedback as you interpret readings, talk through your ideas, analyze evidence, develop and organize arguments, craft introductions and conclusions, rewrite sentences and paragraphs, or plan presentations. Center instructors do not proofread papers, but they can show you how to edit your own work effectively. Make an appointment online: <http://mywco.com/grinnell>

Academic honesty expectations follow college policy.

**Late work:**

If you think you will have trouble meeting a deadline for any reason, please request an extension as far in advance as possible. I will use my best judgment in deciding whether and how to renegotiate the deadline.

***Access & accommodation***

Grinnell College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students need to provide documentation to the Coordinator for Disability Resources, Autumn Wilke [wilkeaut@grinnell.edu](mailto:wilkeaut@grinnell.edu), and discuss their needs with her. Students should then speak with me as early as possible in the semester so that we can discuss ways to coordinate accommodations and ensure full participation in the course.

***Religious observance***

Grinnell College acknowledges and embraces the religious diversity of its faculty, students and staff. Faculty and students share responsibility to support members of our community who observe religious holidays. Students will provide faculty members with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which they will be absent, and this notice would be expected to occur no later than the third week of the term. Faculty members will make reasonable efforts to accommodate students who need to be absent from examinations or class due to religious observance. Students are responsible for completing any part of the course work, including examinations, they have missed due to religious observance, and faculty members are responsible for giving them the opportunity to do so. (Approved by the Faculty, September 21, 2009)

***The learning environment of 2020-2021***

This class, like many others, is happening in a larger context of uncertainty, stress, frustration, and inequality. I will be as sensitive as I can about those constraints and ask that you do the same for me and your classmates, even as we hold each other to the high standards that characterize a Grinnell education. I commit to doing all I can to make this class a meaningful experience for all of its participants, and I thank you for your trust and engagement in the collective process of learning what it means to do history in the midst of an undeniably historical moment in the modern world.