



MODERN BRITAIN AND THE EMPIRE

HIS 236

Fall 2024

T/Th 8:30-9:50 a.m.

HSSC N1116

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 historical scholarship, and examining a case study of a crucial moment of transition in the British imperial world order.

Course objectives

Students in this course will:

- Develop a historical consciousness about modern Britain and the British Empire 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.

Instructor

Prof. Elizabeth Prevost (pronounced “PRAY-vo”), She/Her

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Physical office: HSSC N3134

Virtual office: <https://grinnellcollege.webex.com/meet/prevoste>

Office hour schedule & signup: [Prevost Office Hours Fall 2024.docx](#)

Course texts

The following required texts are available through the college bookstore or online vendors.

- Philippa Levine, *The British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset* (Routledge, 2019—3rd ed)
- Kenneth Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Britain: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005) (also on reserve in Burling)
- 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* (Reacting to the Past, 2016—2nd ed)

All other readings and films will be available on Pweb or online (as noted).

Course requirements and evaluationClass citizenship & contribution (25%)

History happens in dialogue, and I evaluate class participation accordingly. Let’s work intentionally as a group to generate ideas and ensure that everyone can hear and be heard. For my part, I strive to engineer a respectful, inclusive, and challenging learning environment that is “comfortable enough to risk discomfort,” as one of my faculty colleagues recently put it.

Contribution requires presence. If you need to miss class for a health issue, please let me know asap so we can both plan accordingly. Most days, it should be possible to make up for the missed class by posting a response to the readings, discussion questions, or peer discussion. If you miss more than one class in succession, I’m likely to flag it with Academic Advising just to check that all is well (and

to facilitate support if it's not). Please note, however, that I do not treat office hours as class make-up time. If you need to incur an absence, it's up to you to stay on track with the material and requirements; I am happy to meet and help you strategize what that looks like, but I will not use our meeting to "go over what you missed" in class.

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" v. "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, ideas;
- devotion of your fullest possible focus and attention to the discussion or task at hand.

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 and encourage 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 helps ensure 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 (and practice getting it right) than to gloss over it as unpronounceable.
- Historians are increasingly employing the term "enslaved persons" in place of "slaves" to refer to peoples whose labor and autonomy were forcibly taken from them under the Atlantic slave complex. This recognizes their personhood while also acknowledging their subjugation and victimization under violent and coercive regimes. I encourage use of this term in our class. Just note that many of the texts we use, especially if they were published more than about ten years ago, will still refer to "slaves" (but that this does not diminish the personhood of these actors in the historical record).
- Historians no longer use the term "natives" to refer to indigenous peoples and people of color who lived under British rule in Africa, Asia, Australasia, and the Caribbean, because of the colonial overtones of that terminology; in that respect the discourse follows a different convention than North American indigenous history. It's fine to include this term within quotations from primary sources, especially when it refers to political or administrative units; however, when referring to particular 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 identity (e.g. West Indian migrants; Bengali nationalists; Sikh soldiers; etc).
- By contrast, some of the course sources use, quote, or make reference to explicitly offensive racial slurs and racist language that have historically demeaned peoples of African and Asian descent and upheld imperialist and white supremacist systems of power. This includes (though is not limited to) the N-word, which must not be spoken aloud in class, even when referring to

or quoting from a source. (Use your best judgment in deciding whether to apply this caution by editing out other terms that denigrate the humanity and integrity of identity groups or protected categories.)

Electronic devices:

- Assigned texts must be brought to class each day. If you prefer to use an electronic device (rather than a hard copy) for course texts and notetaking, please follow these guidelines (using an honor code!):
- Phones may not be used in class (during breaks is fine).
- E-readers that lay flat may be used in class.
- Laptops may be used in class under the following conditions:
 - a) The relevant programs you are using for the course texts must allow in-text highlighting and annotation and quick reference to textual selections.
 - b) Wifi & other connectivity should be disabled or device put in airplane mode (if possible).
 - c) All windows and applications not being used to access course texts or take notes—including, but not limited to, email, social media, and internet browsing—must be fully closed (not just minimized) and notifications disabled.
 - d) When not referencing your texts or notes, please flip the laptop screen partially down, to help you engage with the other humans in the room.
- These restrictions do not apply to those with specific accommodations; they will also be waived on days we need to use electronic/virtual components in our learning space.

Writing assignments (assignment sheets posted on Pweb):

Briefs (40%):

Every other week for 10 weeks, you will submit a concise “brief” (1-2 pages, 2-3 paragraphs, max 600 words) that analyzes the texts in response to specific questions. Your final grade will include four of five possible briefs, which means you may either skip one of your choice, or drop your lowest grade.

Game position papers (10%):

During the Simla unit, you will submit two short writing assignments specific to your game role.

Final synthetic paper (6-7 pages, 25%):

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 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?

Academic honesty expectations follow college policy. Please use Chicago Style for citations.

Writing support:

I am available to offer feedback at all stages of your work! 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>

Late work:

If you think you will have trouble meeting a writing 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. Briefs are intended to form the basis of discussion on the days they are due, so normally may not be turned in late; the same applies to the game writing assignments. But your wellness is important to me, so please be in touch if you are having trouble getting the course work done on time (or at all). Per college policy, no work may receive credit if submitted after the Friday of exam week (Dec 20), unless you are taking an Incomplete for the course.

The following protocols of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion follow college policy:

Disabilities

Grinnell College makes reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Students need to provide documentation to the [Coordinator for Disability Resources](#), located on the ground level floor of Steiner Hall (641-269-3124) and discuss your needs with them. Students should then notify me within the first few days of classes so that we can discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course and coordinate your accommodations.

Title IX

Grinnell College is committed to compliance with Title IX and to supporting the academic success of pregnant and parenting students and students with pregnancy related conditions. If you are a pregnant student, have pregnancy related conditions, or are a parenting student (child under one-year needs documented medical care) who wishes to request reasonable related supportive measures from the College under Title IX, please email the Title IX Coordinator at titleix@grinnell.edu. The Title IX Coordinator will work with Disability Resources and your professors to provide reasonable supportive measures in support of your education while pregnant or as a parent under Title IX.

Religious observance

Grinnell College offers alternative options to complete academic work for students who observe religious holy days. Please contact me within the first few weeks of the semester if you would like to discuss a specific instance that applies to you.

CLASS & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Bulleed texts appear under the date for which they should be prepared. Specific reading guidelines and discussion questions for each day will be posted on Pweb.

This schedule constitutes the core framework for our class plan; if I need to make changes in order to accommodate unforeseen circumstances, I will communicate those via email and Pweb.

I. A changing state & society

Thurs Aug 29: Introductions

Tues Sept 3: Making Britain & Britons

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

Thurs Sept 5: Capitalism unbound? (guest instructor: Prof. Guenther)

- T.W. Heyck & M. Veldman, “The Triple Revolution,” in *The Peoples of the British Isles* – Pweb
- Levine, *British Empire*, chap 2

Tues Sept 10: Documenting industrialization (guest instructor: Prof. Guenther)

- Walter Arnstein, ed., *The Past Speaks*, chaps. 2 & 7 – Pweb

Thurs Sept 12: Conclusions

- Brief #1 due (no class meeting – post findings on Discussion Board)

II. Politics & identity

Tues Sept 17: Class & gender in industrial society

- Heyck & Veldman, “The Emerging Class Society” & “Intellectual & Spiritual Revolutions” – Pweb
- Arnstein, *The Past Speaks*, chap. 8 – Pweb

Thurs Sept 19: Slavery & abolition

- *The History of Mary Prince* – excerpts on Pweb; full text at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/prince/prince.html>

Tues Sept 24, The conjuncture of 1832

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

Thurs Sept 26: Conclusions

- Brief #2 due (we will discuss your findings in class)

III. Reform & rebellion

Tues Oct 1: Imperial liberalism

- Levine, *British Empire*, 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” – Pweb

Thurs, Oct 3: The 1857 Indian Uprising

- Documents from *The 1857 Reader* – Pweb

Tues, Oct 8: The Conjuncture of 1867

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

Thurs Oct 10: Conclusions

- Brief #3 due (we will discuss your findings in class)

IV. National & global ruptures

Tues Oct 15: The “new imperialism”

- Levine, chaps. 6-9

Thurs Oct 17: New feminisms

- 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

FALL BREAK

Tues, Oct 29: The Great War

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

Thurs, Oct 31: Conclusions

- Brief #4 due (we will discuss your findings in class)

V. Consequences & causes of total war

Tues, Nov 5: The Great Depression

- George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Part I
- Morgan, *20th-c Britain*, chaps 2 + 3 up to p.39 (through “The Arts” section)

Thurs, Nov 7: The interwar empire and its critics

- Orwell, *Road to Wigan Pier*, Part II & Gollancz foreword
- Levine, chap. 10

Tues, Nov 12: Appeasement and WWII

- Morgan, *20th-c Britain*, remainder of chap. 3 (“Foreign affairs” & “Change in public mood” sections) + chap. 4
- Arnstein, *The Past Speaks*, chap. 16

Thurs, Nov 14: Conclusions

- Brief #5 due (we will discuss your findings in class)

VI. Ends of Empire

During this unit (encompassing class meetings Nov 19, 21, 26, Dec 3, 5), we will engage in a historical game based on the 1945 Simla negotiations that ultimately led to the independence and partition of India and Pakistan. Readings, schedule, roles, and instructions will be distributed closer to the time, but note that you will be required to submit two short writing assignments (deadlines & format vary by role). Embree & Carnes, Defining A Nation, will provide the textual basis for this game unit.

VII. The postwar British world

Tues, Dec 10: The welfare state and its discontents

- Morgan, *20th-c Britain*, chaps. 5 & 6
- *7-up!* (1964, dir. Paul Almond)
- *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960, dir. Karel Reisz, screenplay by Alan Sillitoe)
- Hanif Kureishi, “The Rainbow Sign” – Pweb

Thurs, Dec 12: Britain and Europe

- Morgan, *20th-c Britain*, ch. 7
- 1972 Parliamentary debates on joining the EU – Pweb
- 2016 Parliamentary debates on Brexit – Pweb
- Zadie Smith, “Fences: A Brexit Diary” – Pweb

Tues, Dec 17

- Final paper due on Pweb by 5:00 pm