

DECOLONIZATION



HIS 334
Fall 2024
T/Th 2:00-3:50
HSSC S3333

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

Contrary to many official narratives, the empire of *Pax Britannica* was no more peaceful or orderly at its end than at any of its stages along the way. Indeed, the demise of empire arguably created as divided, violent, and inequitable a world as the one governed by colonial rule. In this seminar, we will examine the causes, character, and consequences of the disintegration of the British imperial world order after the Second World War. Using recent studies and debates about how empire came under fire in South Asia, East Africa, and the British Isles, we will examine how and why some theatres of imperial unraveling became conflict zones, focusing particularly on the contested decolonization of archives and history itself. In the second half of the semester, students will build on this framework and on the historical treatments of colonialism and postcolonialism they have encountered in other coursework, by developing a research project on one specific aspect of decolonization.

Course objectives

Students in this course will learn to engage with and produce original historical knowledge, by:

- Critically engaging with recent historiographical trends
- Identifying and analyzing a body of primary sources
- Synthesizing and evaluating a specific body of secondary sources
- Establishing the larger significance of an argument, whether contextual, theoretical or interpretive
- Framing and developing a sustained analytical and narrative progression through clear prose, logical organization, and sound evidence
- Workshopping and presenting their findings within a peer community

Course texts

The following books are required, and are available through the college bookstore, online sellers, or the college library:

- Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India & Pakistan* (Yale, 2017)
- Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya* (Holt, 2005)
- Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder & Memory in Northern Ireland* (Doubleday, 2019)

Shorter texts will be available on Pweb, the library catalog, or online, as noted below.

For each secondary source (i.e. scholarly treatment of history in a book, article, film, blog, or lecture), think about the following questions:

- 1) Who is the author?
- 2) What is the historical question/problem the author is grappling with?
- 3) What is the answer to that question? Where (if at all) does the author state the thesis?
- 4) What do “they say”? What previous and/or dominant views on this topic is the author adding to/revising/arguing against? What is at stake in the revised, “correct” interpretation (“I say”)?
- 5) What is the broader interpretive and historical context in which the author is working? How does the author’s particular story shed light on a larger story?
- 6) What sources & methods of reading them does the author employ as evidence? Are any key terms and concepts used to frame the analysis?
- 7) How does the author organize the discussion and develop the argument throughout the piece? Where is the “road map” of the study?
- 8) What points of overlap or conflict emerge when you hold this piece up to other course readings?

Most days, I will also post specific reading and discussion questions in advance (Pweb->Documents).

Course requirements

Class participation and citizenship:

History happens in dialogue, and I evaluate class participation accordingly. Each of you is responsible for doing your part to make our class discussions and research group meetings productive and engaging. This means engaging closely with the assignments, sharing your responses to the texts and the guiding questions (pointing to specific passages and examples), and building on your peers’ perspectives to develop a fruitful discussion. It also means being physically and mentally present in the room, and situating yourself in the group dynamic to continually assess your relative balance of engagement between listening and contributing. My goal for each of you is to cultivate your own distinctive voice, listen actively and respectfully to others’ voices (both in class and in the historical record), and help create an inclusive, respectful, and challenging intellectual climate in which participant is invested and has a say.

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 review. 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 strategize what that looks like, but I will not use our meeting to "go over what you missed" in a given class.

Research project:

You will spend a significant portion of the semester developing an original research project, during which time peer group meetings will center on the craft of historical writing through various stages of scaffolding. The final outcome of this project will be either a scholarly essay or an alternative format of a more public-facing nature; in either case, you will use primary sources to develop a historical argument and secondary sources to situate this argument in a larger historical context and field of historiographical inquiry.

Final grades will be evaluated according to the following distribution:

- Participation (class preparation & contribution; peer group feedback): 40%
- Stages of the research project, including proposals, bibliographies, partial and full drafts, & presentation: 30%
- Final draft: 30%

Deadlines

Extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis and should not be requested lightly. Although there may be occasions when an extension offers the best way to look after your mental or physical health, please be mindful that, in this particular seminar setting, extensions may also impact others' work schedule besides your own (particularly when we are meeting in research groups to review stages of the paper), and may put your own cumulative trajectory at risk. Especially during the stages of the research project, it's often better to submit a rough/partial/incomplete portion on time than to submit a polished portion late. All that said, I understand that unforeseen circumstances can throw the best-laid plans off track, and I want to work with you to maximize your capacity to do good work and produce a successful seminar outcome. So please do let me know if you're having difficulty meeting the deadlines, for any reason.

Electronic devices

Assigned texts must be brought to class each day. If you prefer to use an electronic device (rather than a hard copy) to access course texts and/or take notes, please follow these guidelines (honor code!):

- Phones may not be used in class (during breaks is fine).
- E-readers that lay flat may be used in class, provided they allow for highlighting/notetaking/annotating/searching and are put in airplane mode.
- 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 should be suspended and device should be 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 are doing research exercises and peer review, or in cases when we need to incorporate virtual components into our learning space.

Trigger warnings & classroom discourse

This class investigates violence and trauma in a number of imperial and postcolonial settings; although none of the texts are overly graphic in their descriptions, the subject matter and/or specific details may be difficult to encounter. The violence of this historical record also extends to language, and texts may make reference to racist language and racial slurs. Do not speak the N-word aloud in class, even if quoting from a primary source; you may also wish to use similar judgment for other offensive language that denigrates other groups.

The following protocols 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.

Schedule of Class Meetings and Assignments

Note: Texts and assignments are listed under the day for which they are to be prepared. Discussion questions and specific preparation guidance for each class will be posted on Pweb (under Documents).

Also note: Because of some medical and travel issues I am managing this semester, class meetings will occasionally have an adjusted start time or a virtual dimension. Sometimes we will also meet in a space outside our regular classroom to engage in particular research activities. I've indicated these variations below and will communicate any further ones that arise via email and on Pweb.

I. What, when, and why was the end of empire?

Thurs, Aug 29

Course introduction

Tues, Sept 3 (class start time at 2:30)

- Martin J. Wiener, "The Idea of 'Colonial Legacy' and the Historiography of Empire," *Journal of the Historical Society* 13:1 (2013), 1-32—Pweb

Thurs, Sept 5 (no in-person class; do discussion board instead)

Assignment: Choose one secondary source (could be either an article or a book) cited/discussed in Wiener's piece. Access it through the library site and read it against Wiener's representation and summation of that work. Post on the discussion board: 1) a quote and short paraphrase of the source's central claim 2) your thoughts on how that claim compares/contrasts with Wiener's approach to the issue of "colonial legacy."

Tues, Sept 10 (no in-person class; do discussion board instead)

Assignment: Choose a book-length overview of the 20th-c end of empire that has an imperial scope (e.g. British, French, Portuguese empires), a regional scope (e.g. Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia), or a global scope. It should be a book you can access in the college library (either from the stacks or the e-catalog). Examples and possible options are posted on Pweb, but you're welcome to go off list; you should use this as a chance to better grasp an arena of decolonization in which you're particularly (or potentially) interested. Read the book strategically to get a sense of its overall themes, debates, players, and stories, and post a quick debrief on the discussion board. Whose perspective and experience does the book emphasize? Whose does it leave out? What are the major organizing principles and causal explanations for decolonization in this study? What questions does it leave you wondering about and wanting to pursue further?

Thurs, Sept 13

Film screening & discussion (details on Pweb)

Partitioned Nationhood in South Asia

Tues, Sept 17

- Khan, *The Great Partition* (whole book)

Thurs, Sept 19

Class meets in Burling Library. We will be working with the Transfer of Power collection to test some of Khan's theses against primary sources. No reading due – work on the upcoming readings.

Tues, Sept 24 (class start time at 2:30; Prof Kapila will join our discussion starting 2:45)

- Chapter selections from Prof. Shuchi Kapila's new book, *Postmemory and the Partition of India: Learning to Remember* (Palgrave, 2024) – Pweb

Thurs, Sept 26

Research workshop, location TBA. No reading or assignment due—work on *Imperial Reckoning*.

III. Insurgency & Counterinsurgency in East AfricaTues, Oct 1

- Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning* (whole book)

Thurs, Oct 3

Assignment: Research the *initial* reception of Elkins's book within the intellectual community. Please locate and read at least two reviews of the book that appeared **before 2011**: one in a scholarly historical journal, and the other in a broader venue (such as the *New York Review of Books*, *Times Literary Supplement*, etc). The main questions you are trying to answer are: What was the main source of controversy about Elkins's study? Which criticisms do you find fair or compelling, and which strike you as unreasonable or unjustified?

Tues, Oct 8

- Stephen Howe, "Flakking the Mau Mau Catchers," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 5 (2011), 695–697; David M. Anderson, "Mau Mau in the High Court and the 'Lost' British Empire Archives: Colonial Conspiracy or Bureaucratic Bungle?," *Ibid.*, 699–716; Caroline Elkins, "Alchemy of Evidence: Mau Mau, the British Empire, and the High Court of Justice," *Ibid.*, 731–748—Pweb
- "Roundtable: Archives of Decolonization," *American Historical Review* 120, no. 3 (June 2015)—download/print from library catalog. Please focus on the Elkins article.
- Kenya High Court case in newspaper coverage – Pweb

IV. Ends of Empire in the United KingdomThurs, Oct 10

- Read one secondary source on the metropolitan impact of decolonization from the list of options and follow instructions for workshoping it (see Pweb).

Tues, Oct 15:

- Keefe, *Say Nothing*, sections 1 & 2

Thurs, Oct 17

- Keefe, *Say Nothing*, section 3

FALL BREAK**V. Research & Project Development**

Note: You will receive more specific scaffolding stages/deadlines/instructions/guidance for your particular research groups, oriented around the form of your final product.

Tues, Oct 29: Preliminary proposals due; individual research meetings (N3140)

Thurs, Oct 31: Lighting rounds; research groups assigned (S3333)

Tues, Nov 5 & Thurs, Nov 7: Research groups meet to peer review historiography section (N3140)

Tues, Nov 12 & Thurs, Nov 14: Research groups meet to peer review section 1 (N3140)

Tues, Nov 19 & Thurs, Nov 21: Research groups meet to peer review section 2 (N3140)

Tues, Nov 26: Check-ins & work time (S3333)

Thurs, Nov 28: Thanksgiving (no class)

VI. Project Execution, Sharing, & Revision

Tues, Dec 3 & Thurs, Dec 5: Research groups meet to peer review semi-complete drafts (N3140)

Tues, Dec 10 & Thurs, Dec 12: Presentations to full class (S3333)

Thurs, Dec 19: Final draft due!