

## DECOLONIZATION



HIS 334  
Fall 2021  
T/Th 2:30-3:50  
HSSC N3111

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Fall office hours: Mon & Wed, 2:00-4:00 pm, & by appointment

Contrary to 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 a number of 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 and logical organization
- 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 libraries:

- 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 or online, as noted below.

For each secondary source (i.e. scholarly treatment of history in a book, article, film, blog, or lecture), you should 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 his/her thesis?
- 4) 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?
- 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 article or book? What 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 circulate specific discussion questions in advance.

### **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 provocative. This means engaging closely with the assignments, sharing your responses to the texts and guiding questions in class (pointing to specific passages and examples), and building on your peers' perspectives to develop an interesting discussion. 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 yet challenging intellectual climate in which everyone is invested and has a say.

If you need to miss class for a serious health or personal issue, please let me know in advance 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 and/or discussion.

### Research project:

You will spend a significant portion of the semester developing a paper of original research, during which time group meetings will center on the craft of historical writing through various stages of scaffolding. The outcome of this project will normally be a critical, article-length essay (6000 words, 20-25 pages), which uses primary sources to develop a historical argument and secondary sources to situate this argument in a larger historical context and field of scholarly inquiry.

Final grades will be evaluated according to the following distribution:

- Participation (class preparation & contribution; peer group feedback): 40%
- Stages of the research paper, 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 bear in mind 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).

### ***Policy on electronic devices***

For the past year or so, many of us have been living on screens; let's use this return to in-person learning as an opportunity to unplug from non-essential technology wherever possible, and to tune into one another and ourselves.

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

- Phones may not be used in class.
- 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) The device must be put in airplane mode.
  - 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).
  - d) When not directly referencing your texts or notes, please flip the laptop screen partially down.

These restrictions do not apply to those with specific accommodations; they may also be waived on days we are doing research exercises and peer review, or in cases when we need to adopt some kind of hybrid learning arrangement to accommodate distance learners.

### ***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.

### ***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.

### ***Trigger warning***

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 upsetting.

### **Schedule of Class Meetings and Assignments**

*Note: Texts are listed under the day for which they are to be prepared.  
Also note: I reserve the right to make changes as circumstances necessitate.*

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#### **When was the end of empire?**

Thurs, Aug 26

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

Tues, Aug 31

Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition* (all)

Thurs, Sept 2

- Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 37-44—Pweb
- Urvashi Butalia, "Legacies of Departure: Decolonization, Nation-Making, and Gender," in Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and Empire* (Oxford, 2004), 203-219—Pweb

Tues, Sept 7

Class meets in Burling. We will be working with the *Transfer of Power* collection to test various theses against primary sources.

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#### **Insurgency & counter-insurgency in East Africa**

Thurs, Sept 9

Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning* (all)

Tues, Sept 14

Assignment: Research the initial reception of Elkins's book within the intellectual community. Please locate and critique 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; if the review includes a subsequent discussion thread, so much the better). 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?

Thurs, Sept 16

- 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.

Class meets in Burling. We will be working with the *British Documents on the End of Empire* series and considering whether the Hanslope archive revelations and the high court case vindicated Elkins of her critics’ charges.

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**Decolonizing the metropole**Tues, Sept 21

For this class you will need to read critically one of the following articles (to be assigned):

- Marc Matera, “Colonial Subjects: Black Intellectuals and the Development of Colonial Studies in Britain.” *Journal of British Studies* 49:2 (2010), 388-418—print/download from library catalog
- Chris Waters, “Dark Strangers in our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1965.” *Journal of British Studies*, 35:2 (1997), 207-238—print/download from library catalog
- Wendy Webster, “‘There’ll Always Be an England’: Representations of Colonial Wars and Immigration, 1948-68.” *Journal of British Studies* 40:4 (2001), 557-584—print/download from library catalog
- Elizabeth Buettner, “‘Going for an Indian’: South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain.” *Journal of Modern History* 80:4 (Special Issue on Metropole and Colony, 2008), 865-901—print/download from library catalog

Thurs, Sept 23

Research workshop

Tues, Sept 28

Patrick Radden Keefe, *Say Nothing* (all)

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**Research & source analysis**Thurs, Sept 30

Individual research meetings

*Assignment:* Please write a (roughly) one-page **preliminary proposal** identifying your topic and research question, and the main primary source base you will use to answer the question. The proposal must demonstrate your access to the chosen primary sources. Email your proposal as a Word document to the rest of the class by 5:00 on Mon Oct 4. Then read and reflect on all the other proposals in preparation for class on Tuesday, and be prepared to offer constructive comments and questions.

Tues, Oct 5

Lightning round discussions of preliminary proposals; research groups assigned.

Thurs Oct 7

Film viewing, TBA

*Assignment: Email your **bibliography of secondary sources** to me and your group members by 5:00 the day before your group is meeting. Put a star next to the most important sources. At the start of your bibliography, please include a 1-2 paragraph introduction that addresses the following: What have the secondary sources already shown about your topic, what kind of pattern/debate/discrepancy do they reveal, and what questions, problems, gaps, or angles do they offer for further investigation and analysis? How will you test out certain premises against your primary source base? Please bring a copy of each bibliography in the group, including your own, to the meeting.*

Tues, Oct 12 & Thurs, Oct 14

Research groups meet to discuss secondary sources (see separate schedule)

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**FALL BREAK**

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### Conceptualizing & framing

*Assignment: Your **expanded proposal** (3-4 pp) should address the following questions:*

- 1) *What is the research question and historical problem?*
- 2) *How do your primary sources and method of reading them address this question?*
- 3) *How is the argument shaping up? (i.e. how will you answer the research question and resolve the problem?)*
- 4) *How is your investigation situated within the relevant historiography? Who/what are you responding to, adding to, or arguing against? What is the complicating factor or counterargument?*
- 5) *“Who cares?”: i.e., what is the larger significance of this investigation? How will your focused study help tell a larger story?*
- 6) *Your paper should have 2-4 subsections. What will each section accomplish, and how will it help answer the larger question?*

*Note: this proposal will serve as the basis for writing your introduction.*

Tues, Oct 26 & Thurs, Oct 28:

Individual meetings (appointment times TBA).

Expanded proposal is due at your meeting – please bring copies for both of us (or email it to me beforehand).

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## Drafting (I)

### Assignment:

- I. Email your **introduction** (2-4 pp) to me and your group members by 5 pm the day before your group is meeting. The introduction should articulate all of the issues you included in your revised proposal: research question, argument, historiography/counterargument, sources/methodology, larger significance, and road map. Although you may find you need to revise the introduction as you write the rest of the paper, you should use these opening paragraphs to lay out the interpretive and organizational framework of the project. Citations should be in footnotes or endnotes using Chicago Style.
- II. Group members are responsible for giving feedback to each person during our meeting. In preparation: For each paper in your group, underline and label where the author articulates the research question, thesis, historiography/counterargument, sources/methodology, larger significance, and road map. Then, evaluate the effectiveness of each component and the effectiveness of the larger progression. Please bring a copy of each introduction in the group, including your own, to the meeting.

Tues, Nov 2 & Thurs, Nov 4

Research groups meet to discuss intros

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## Drafting (II)

### Assignment:

- I. Email **one complete section of the body of your paper** to me and your group members by 5 pm the day before your group is meeting. Make sure it has an introductory paragraph to frame the section and a concluding one that sums it up and transitions to the next section. Citations should be in footnotes or endnotes using Chicago style.
- II. Group members are then responsible for giving feedback to each person during our meeting. How effectively does the section develop a piece of the paper's central argument? Please bring a copy of each paper in the group, including your own, to the meeting.

Tues, Nov 9 & Thurs, Nov 11

Research groups meet to discuss body section

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## Drafting (III)

### Assignment:

- I. Email the **next complete section of the body of your paper** to me and your group members by noon the day before your group is meeting. Make sure it has an introductory paragraph to frame the section and a concluding one that sums it up and transitions to the next section. Citations should be in footnotes or endnotes using Chicago style.
- II. Group members are then responsible for giving feedback to each person during our meeting. How effectively does the section develop a piece of the paper's central argument? Please bring a copy of each paper in the group, including your own, to the meeting.



Tues, Nov 16 & Thurs, 18

Research groups meet to discuss body section

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### Drafting (IV)

Tues, Nov 23. No group meetings. I will be available for consultation in my office during class time.

Nov 25: THANKSGIVING

Tues, Nov 30. No group meetings. I will be available for consultation in my office during class time.

Thurs, Dec 2 **\*Complete draft due to me via email by 5 pm.\***

*I will be evaluating your draft on the following criteria:*

- 1) *Argument: Is the thesis stated clearly and persuasively?*
  - 2) *Framework: Does your introduction situate this argument in a compelling research question, historical context, historiographical dialogue, primary source base, and "road map" of the body of the paper?*
  - 3) *Organization and prose: Do you develop the argument clearly and cohesively throughout the paper, through a logical progression of ideas and evidence, effective transitions, and a clear and error-free use of language?*
  - 4) *Evidence: Are the different components of the argument convincingly borne out by your use of sources, properly cited in footnotes using Chicago style? Do any components need to be developed further?*
  - 5) *Broader significance: Is it clear why the reader should care about your study? What does your individual angle reveal about some broader aspect of decolonization?*
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### Revising & presenting

Tues, Dec 7: Presentations (Schedule TBA)

Thurs, Dec 9: Presentations (Schedule TBA)

Thurs, Dec 16: **\*Final paper due via email by 5:00 pm.\***

Remember that your final draft document must include tracked changes!!