

HIS 511b  
R.D. Cassell

## Great Britain in the Age of Churchill

Spring 2003

Classroom: 326 McIver

Office: 209 McIver

Office Hours: M 2:30-3:30, TR 10:00-11:00 and by appointment

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### Texts and Readings :

J.H. Hexter, "The Historian and His Day," (handout)

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Historian and History," (handout)

Ian S. Wood, *Churchill*, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2000

### Purpose and Arrangements

This seminar is designed to provide advanced undergraduate History majors and first year graduate students with an opportunity to do serious historical research and writing based upon substantial use of primary sources. As such it allows the student to experience the fundamental process of creating an historical explanation, a combination of narrative and analysis, out of the fragments of the human record available to us.

This seminar is organized around the life of Sir Winston Spencer Churchill, the most prominent British politician/statesman of the twentieth century. Churchill's career was long, he was a member of parliament (MP) for nearly 64 years, and he held at one time or another each of the major cabinet offices excepting that of Foreign Secretary. He was a key figure in the shaping of early strategy in World War I and in the central direction of British strategy for all of World War II. He was a serving soldier in the 1890's, had a parallel career as a journalist and historian for most of the first half of the century, and was a surprisingly good painter. You will find a topic for your research paper somewhere amid the rich quarry of political, military, diplomatic, imperial, and even social and cultural developments he influenced or in which he participated in this period. Our reading of Wood's study of Churchill's career, class discussions, and conferences with me will help you find your way.

### Getting Started

Your major tasks early in the semester are to decide on a topic, come to understand the sources pertinent to it, and develop an increasingly firm conceptualization of it. Time will be your principle enemy. All students complain about how little of it there seems to be, but those in seminars are usually the most desperate. Oddly, at first this does not appear to be so. In January and February the whole semester seems to stretch before you. But by March it will have shrunk considerably and in April and May many of you will be very hard pressed. Know this now and plan accordingly. **I will not consider an incomplete for anyone except for the most dire personal circumstances. Mere pressure of work will not pass muster as a reason.** Consequently, it is vital that you select your topic and develop a working bibliography, especially of primary sources,

very early in the game. Many students find that this process looks easier than it often turns out to be. Finding a satisfactory topic hinges upon the availability of adequate quantities of primary materials and discovering a sufficient mother lode of the stuff frequently takes a great deal of time and work. Many topics are well covered in the secondary literature, but lack the quantity of primary sources available to you to be workable. Thus our first class sessions and individual conferences will concentrate on ways into the sources, how to use them, and getting enough of them. Secondly, conceptualizing your topic is equally important. You need to develop a working hypothesis which guides your research. Note the adjective “working.” You are not expected to have a fully developed interpretation in the first month of the semester. But you do need to learn enough about your topic to gain some preliminary sense of what you want to say about it, and enough of your sources to gauge the kinds of questions they are capable of answering. Such a hypothesis will surely be revised, indeed may be abandoned, as your research proceeds, but the research must be organized around some idea. In spite of what the cynics say, history is not merely one damn thing after another. Our readings, class discussions, and conferences will all help you to get off to a good start.

### Written Work

All written work must be typewritten, and all citations in proper professional form (historians generally use Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, latest edition). Two copies will be required: one for me to keep and another to write suggestions on for you. In addition to the seminar paper itself you will be responsible for other related formal assignments: One, a preliminary, annotated bibliography of your principle primary and secondary sources, due February 11, and, two, a 5-6 page preliminary discussion of your topic, describing it, indicating the particular angle of intellectual attack you are developing, that is the questions you are asking of your sources and the preliminary interpretation or hypothesis you are developing, due February 25. This is to be a serious piece of work demonstrating considerable knowledge of the subject and the sources pertinent to it. It is, in effect, a very short first draft. An expanded formal bibliography should be attached.

### Schedule

This is your class. I set the agenda, preside, and ask questions but you do the talking. You are expected to be fully prepared for each class both with respect to readings and written assignments and, most important, to be there. Casual cuts are out of the question. You are expected to be able to talk knowledgeably about your research and the reading assignments and to be prepared constructively to criticize the work of your classmates. The following is designed to keep us on track.

1/14 Introduction, brief discussion of the course, schedule individual conferences on topic selection, tour of documents section of the library, and a briefing on the mysteries of the British Parliamentary Papers and other useful primary source collections.

- 1/21 **Martin Luther King Day. No Class.**
- 1/28 Meet at the library with Kathy Crowe, Head Reference Librarian, for a session on sources and computer searching techniques.
- 2/4 Progress reports on topic selection and bibliographies. Discuss proper form for bibliographical and footnote citations. Discuss Hexter.
- 2/11 **Preliminary bibliographies due.** Each of you will briefly describe your project at this stage and the most important sources you have identified. We will also discuss Schlesinger.
- 2/18 Progress reports, problems, etc. Begin discussion of Wood, chap. 1-2.
- 2/25 **Topic descriptions due.** You will read your topic description to the class and we will discuss each of them in turn.
- 3/4 Finish topic descriptions (if necessary) and discuss Wood, 3-4.
- 3/11 **Spring Break—no class.**
- 3/18 Status reports, problems, etc. Wood, 5-6.
- 3/25 Same. Wood, 7-8.
- 4/1 Same. Wood, 9.
- 4/8 **First drafts due.** Schedule individual conferences on drafts.
- 4/15 No class. Week of individual conferences in which the drafts are critiqued and returned.
- 4/22 View and discuss the film, “Young Winston.”
- 4/29 View and discuss selections from “The Wilderness Years.”
- 5/6 Final class. **Final, revised version of research papers due.**