

“Rule Britannia” to “Cool Britannia”: Britain in the Twentieth Century

In 1901, Britain was the world’s sole great power, both literally – at that juncture, it ruled over nearly 400 million people on five continents – and figuratively, as a center of global finance and culture. One hundred years later, however, the picture appeared vastly different. Though Prime Minister Tony Blair and “New” Labour attempted to frame Britain as “Cool Britannia,” the epitome of post-modern cultural hipness, in reality, Britain’s place in the world had altered markedly -- the empire had all but evaporated, it had relinquished its place as the dominant global power to its former colony-turned-ally across the pond, and its society exhibited sharp cleavages along racial and class lines. Yet, in 2001 Britons still had much of which to be proud – a resurgent National Health Service, an increasingly influential role within the EU, and its status as one of the world’s oldest surviving democracies. In this course, students will examine how Britons managed – though not always successfully – to navigate the tumultuous twentieth century, focusing on how the social, political, gender, and racial boundaries established during the Victorian period were radically re-shaped by the events of the years 1901-2001.

The basic format of this course will consist of group discussions of assigned readings drawn from the work of historians (e.g. Chris Waters and Paul Ward), along with a variety of primary source documents written by Britons themselves (e.g. Churchill’s speeches and Sex Pistols lyrics). Students will be expected to participate *extensively* in the discussions, debates, and other in-class activities throughout the semester. Assignments will consist of three short essays (5-7 pages for undergraduates; 8-10 pages for graduate students) and weekly responses (2 pages max) to the assigned readings.

This seminar is intended for junior and senior History majors, as well as History graduate students, but individuals from other years and disciplines are very welcome to participate. While students aren’t required to have had any previous course work in British history prior to taking this class, they’ll find it useful to have a basic working knowledge (equivalent to History 223) of 20th century European history.

Required Readings

The following books are required for this course and are available for purchase at the UNCG Bookstore and at Addams Bookstore. Copies of the books will also be placed on reserve in Jackson Library. Note: The editions listed below are those in stock at the bookstores; other editions are *perfectly acceptable* substitutes and can often be purchased at substantially cheaper prices via the Internet.

Brittain, Vera. *Testament of Youth* (Penguin Classics)
Churchill, Caryl. *Serious Money* (Methuen)
Fleming, Ian. *Casino Royale* (Penguin)
Forster, E. M. *Howards End* (Dover)
Roberts, Robert. *The Classic Slum* (Penguin)

Other required reading for this class will be in the form of journal articles and short selections from other primary sources. These items will be available via electronic reserve through Jackson Library. Occasionally, Xerox copies will be distributed in class.

Grading

Grades for this course will be assigned according to the following scheme:

- 25% -- Participation
- 20% -- Paper Assignment 1
- 20% -- Paper Assignment 2
- 20% -- Paper Assignment 3
- 10% -- Written Responses
- 5% -- Attendance

Weather Information

On days when the weather looks “iffy,” please be sure to call the UNCG Adverse Weather Line (336) 334-4000 or look on the UNCG home page (www.uncg.edu) for updates. I will also be posting notices on the course Blackboard site. If there is a delayed opening that runs into our normal class time, please come to class **as soon as** the delay is over; our class meetings will run through the end of the regularly scheduled period.

Plagiarism Policy

UNCG takes the Academic Integrity Policy extremely seriously, as do I. Any work submitted that is found to contain plagiarized material will immediately receive a failing grade, and disciplinary action will be taken in accordance with the University’s policies.

Syllabus

- January 20: Introduction: From “Rule Britannia” to “Cool Britannia”
- January 22: “Land of Hope and Glory”?: Britain’s Twentieth Century

Plus Ca Change...?: Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, 1901-1914

- January 27: Death of a Queen, Death of an Era: Britain in 1901
- January 29: “The Sun Never Sets...”: The Empire at the Fin-de-Siecle

Reading: Imperialism Documents (Xerox)
Excerpts from *The London Times* and the *Illustrated London News* on the death of Queen Victoria (Xerox)
Ward, “Monarchy and Empire,” in *Britishness Since 1870* (Xerox)

- February 3: Working Class Culture in Edwardian Britain
 February 5: “The gift of the rich to the poor”: Poverty, Charity, and Class
- Reading:** *The Classic Slum*, Chapters 1-3, 5-8
 Ross, “Hungry Children: Housewives and London Charity, 1870-1918” (E-Reserve)
- February 10: “Only Connecting”: Middle Class and Intellectual Life in the Edwardian Era
 February 12: The Strange Death of Liberal England
- Reading:** *Howards End*. Chapter breakdown to be given in class.
- February 17: “Deeds, Not Words!”: The Edwardian Suffrage Movement
 February 19: Votes for Women – Yes or No? In-Class Debate
- Reading:** Selections from Pro- and Anti-Suffrage Authors (Xerox)
- The Great War and the “Dark Valley,” 1914-1939*
- February 24: “Goodbye to all that”: Britons and the Great War
 February 26: “A corner of a foreign field that is forever England”: Voices of 1914-1918
- Reading:** Brittain, *Testament of Youth*. Chapters TBA in class.
 Poems by Rupert Brooke, Wilfrid Owen, and Rudyard Kipling (ER)
- March 2: **Paper 1 Due (Electronic Submission) by Noon!** (Note: This is a Monday!)
- March 3: “Peace for our time”?: The Road to the Second World War
 March 5: “Peace with honour”?: The Debate Over Appeasement
- Reading:** Excerpts from speeches by Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill (Xerox)
- Spring Break! No Class! :)**
- “Their Finest Hour”?: Britons and the Second World War, 1939-1945*
- March 17: “We’re in the biggest mess since the Battle of Hastings!”: 1939-1941
 March 19: “The People’s War”: Living Through the Blitz
- Reading:** Orwell, “England Your England” (1941) (ER)
 Churchill, “Their Finest Hour” (1940) (ER)
 Murrow, “Can They Take It?” (1940) (ER)
 Cockett, “Bombs, Busyness, and Hoping for Babies” (1940) (ER)

“You’ve Never Had It So Good”?: Post-War Britain, 1945-1979

March 24: “Shaken, Not Stirred”: Bond, Bombs, and Britain in the Fifties

Reading: *Casino Royale*
Priestley, “Britain and the Nuclear Bombs” (1957) (ER)

March 26: **Random Day Off! Enjoy the Unexpected Freedom!**

March 30: **Paper 2 Due (Electronic Submission) by Noon!** (Note: This is a Monday!)

March 31: Imperial Legacies: De-Colonization and the End of Empire
April 2: “Dark Strangers in Our Midst”: Post-War Immigration and Racism

Reading: Bailkin, “Leaving Home: The Politics of Deportation in Post-War Britain” (ER)
Powell, “Rivers of Blood Speech” (1968) (ER)
Excerpts from *The London Times* on the Notting Hill Riots (Xerox)
Churchill, “A Protest Against Britain’s ‘Shameful Flight’ from India” (1947) (ER)
Lahiri, “South Asians in Post-Imperial Britain: De-Colonization and Imperial Legacy” (ER)
Paul, “Communities of Britishness: Migration in the Last Gasp of Empire” (ER)
Waters, “Dark Strangers in Our Midst” (ER)

April 7: From “Swinging London” to “Anarchy in the UK”: Social Unrest in the 1970s
April 9: “Sunday Bloody Sunday”: The Intractable Problem of Northern Ireland

Reading: Conroy, *Belfast Diary: War as a Way of Life*, Chapters 1, 2, and 4 (Xerox)
Lyrics from the Kinks, the Clash, Pink Floyd, and the Sex Pistols (Xerox)
Buford, “Dusseldorf,” from *Among the Thugs* (ER)

Britain and “Britishness” in a Post-Modern World, 1979-2001

April 14: The Thatcher Revolution, “New” Labour, and “Cool Britannia”
April 16: “Greed is Good”: *Serious Money* and the Culture of the Eighties

Reading: Thatcher, “Speech to the Conservative Party Conference, 1975” (ER)
Blair, “Speech to the Labour Party Conference, 1997” (ER)
Churchill, *Serious Money*
Optional Film: “The History Boys”

April 21: Imagining the “New,” Multi-Cultural, Multi-Ethnic Britain
April 23: “Muslim or British or both?”: The Changing Nature of “British” Identity

Reading: Waldman, “Seething Unease Shaped British Bombers’ Newfound Zeal” (2005) (ER)
Kureishi, “My Son the Fanatic” (ER)
Moore, “Time for a More Liberal and ‘Racist’ Immigration Policy” (1991) (ER)
Rushdie, “The New Empire Within Britain” (1984) (ER)

Alibhai-Brown, *Imagining the New Britain*, Introduction and Chapters 1 and 4 (Xerox)

April 28: Britain and “Britishness” in the 21st Century

Reading: Lunn, “Reconsidering ‘Britishness’: The Construction and Significance of National Identity in Twentieth-Century Britain” (ER)

May 1: **Final Paper Due (Electronic Submissions) by 5 p.m.** (Note: This is a Friday!)