

HIST-GA 2540: Modern Britain and the British Empire
Spring 2024 | T 4.55-7.35 | KJCC 717

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Office hours by appointment (KJCC 420 or Zoom)

Description

This colloquium introduces graduate students to the historiography of Britain in the twentieth century. We will begin by considering a number of competing metanarratives about the period as a whole, before turning to a selection of both classic and recent works on such subjects as liberalism, imperialism, decolonization, race and migration, urban history, social democracy, and neoliberalism. Regrettably, but inevitably, too many topics, approaches, and scholars are not included – but, nevertheless, this course should enable students to develop their understanding of the period and field. We will read approximately 1 book + 2-3 articles each week, and evaluation will be based upon participation, three written assignments, and a concluding conference. **All texts, with the exception of Edgerton, *Rise and Fall*, in Week 5, are available electronically through Bobst (or, presumably, any university library).**

Evaluation

- 20% The measure of constructive **PARTICIPATION** is not the volume of words, but their weight. Can you speak to every reading, identifying and evaluating its arguments and contributions? How does each text relate to others from the same week, and in turn to the week's theme? Can you think across multiple weeks, developing your own sense of this field? **Attendance at all meetings is expected; even if absent, you should keep up with the course; students who miss more than three meetings will not pass the class.**
- 20% Paper 1 (4 pages / 1000 words), due the **Friday after your presentation** (10-12 minutes), takes the form of a **BOOK REVIEW** for the *Journal of British Studies*. The audience for these reviews are your fellow historians: busy, behind schedule, stretched too thin, they're counting on you to efficiently and accurately explain the book's question, sources, arguments, and significance. Towards the end, after you have explained the book in such a way that the author would recognize it, you should offer your own assessment of its strengths and/or weaknesses. **Please circulate your review to the entire class.**
- 20% Paper 2 (6 pages / 1500 words), due **Friday, Feb. 23**, takes the form of a **FOREWORD** to the special anniversary edition of one of the major works from Part I (excluding Week 1). This foreword should, after the passage of time, explain the significance to the field, while also raising any questions that a new generation of readers might bring to or take from it.
- 20% Paper 3 (8 pages / 2000 words + PowerPoint slides), due **Friday, Apr. 26**, takes the form of an **UNDERGRADUATE LECTURE** on any subject from Part II. The best lectures

begin by posing an arresting problem, drawing from the readings (and, for our purposes, nothing more) to develop an argument that, 75 minutes later, resolves that opening problem. This lecture should be pitched to non-majors in an introductory survey.

20% **CONFERENCE PRESENTATION** of 15 minutes, delivered at the concluding mini-conference on Tuesday, April 30, on “Metanarrative and Modern British History.”

Papers are due on Fridays; students who take an extra weekend do so at the cost of 1/3 of a grade; papers will not be accepted after the first class meeting following that Friday deadline.

I

Week 1, January 23

Introduction

Modern British Studies at Birmingham, “Working Paper No. 1: Cultures of Democracy” (2014), <https://mbsbham.wordpress.com/working-papers/working-paper-no-1/>

Tehila Sasson, James Vernon, Miles Ogborn, Priya Satia, & Catherine Hall, “Britain and the World: A New Field?,” *Journal of British Studies* 57:4 (2018): 677-708.

Kit Kowol, “(His)Tory: Why British History Needs Conservatives,” *Political Quarterly* 94:2 (2023): 265-271.

Week 2, January 30

Metanarrative I: Decline

Perry Anderson, “Origins of the Present Crisis,” *New Left Review* 1:23 (1964): 26-53.

Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981; 2004).

E. P. Thompson, “The Peculiarities of the English,” *Socialist Register* 2 (1965): 311-362.

Jim Tomlinson, “Thrice Denied: ‘Declinism’ as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century,” *Twentieth Century British History* 20:2 (2009): 227-251.

Week 3, February 6

Metanarrative II: Society

Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (1989; 2003).

Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986), pp. 5-24, 98-124.

Lucy Delap, "Kitchen-Sink Laughter: Domestic Service Humor in Twentieth-Century Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 49:3 (2010): 623-654.

Mo Moulton, "'Both Your Sexes': A Non-Binary Approach to Gender History, Trans Studies, and the Making of the Self in Modern Britain," *History Workshop Journal* 95 (2023): 75-100.

Week 4, February 13

Metanarrative III: Empire

John Darwin, "Decolonization and the End of Empire," *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. V: Historiography* (1999), pp. 541-557.

P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688-2015*, 2nd. ed. (2002), pp. 619-659.

Susan Pedersen, "Getting out of Iraq - in 1932: The League of Nations and the Road to Normative Statehood," *American Historical Review* 115:4 (2010): 975-1000.

Wm. Roger Louis and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Decolonization," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 22:3 (1994): 462-511.

Timothy H. Parsons, "The Final Retreat from Empire, 1950 to 1970," *The Second British Empire: In the Crucible of the Twentieth Century* (2014), pp. 143-195.

Week 5, February 20

Metanarrative IV: Nation

David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation* (2018).

Edgerton and Kojo Koram, "Empire, Nation, and the British State" (2023), <https://culturepowerpolitics.org/2023/06/26/empire-nation-and-the-british-state/>.

II

Week 6, February 27

The Fate of Liberalism

Peter Clarke, "Reading History: Liberalism," *History Today*, 1 March 1983, pp. 42-45.

Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation* (2008).

Ren Pepitone, "Gentlemanliness, Etiquette, and Discipline," *Brotherhood of Barristers: A Cultural History of the British Legal Profession, 1840-1940* (2024), available via Brightspace.

Week 7, March 5

Interwar Politics

Ross McKibbin, *Parties and People* (2010).

Laura Beers, "Punting on the Thames: Electoral Betting in Interwar Britain," *Journal of Contemporary History* 45:2 (2010): 282-314.

Alison Light, "Agatha Christie and Conservative Modernity," *Forever England* (1991), available via Brightspace.

Lucy Delap, "Conservative Values, Anglicans, and the Gender Order in Interwar Britain," *Brave New World: Imperial and Democratic Nation-Building in Britain between the Wars*, eds. Laura Beers and Geraint Thomas (2011), pp. 149-168.

Week 8, March 12

Cultures of Empire

Deborah Cohen, "Love and Money in the Informal Empire: The British in Argentina, 1830-1930," *Past and Present* 245 (2019): 79-115.

Hilary Buxton, "Imperial Amnesia: Race, Trauma, and Indian Troops in the First World War," *Past & Present* 241 (2018): 221-258.

Priya Satia, "The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia," *American Historical Review* 111:1 (2006): 16-51.

Ellen Boucher, "From Imperial Child Welfare to National Childhoods," *Empire's Children: Child Emigration, Welfare, and the Decline of the British World, 1869-1967* (2014), pp. 155-195.

Elizabeth Buettner, "From Somebodies to Nobodies: Returning Home to Britain and Perpetuating Overseas Connections," *Empire Families: Britons and Late Imperial India* (2004), pp. 188-251.

Week 9, March 26

Afterlives of Empire

Jordanna Bailkin, "Where Did the Empire Go? Archives and Decolonization in Britain," *American Historical Review* 120:3 (2015): 884-899.

Erik Linstrum, *Age of Emergency: Living with Violence at the End of the British Empire* (2023).

Peter Mandler, "Margaret Mead amongst the Natives of Great Britain," *Past and Present* 204 (2009): 195-233.

Freddy Foks, "From Development Economics to the 'Moral Economy'," *Participant Observers: Anthropology, Colonial Development, and the Reinvention of Society in Britain* (2023), pp. 152-174.

Week 10, April 2

Individuals & Communities

Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Natalie Thomlinson, "Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s," *Twentieth Century British History* 28:2 (2017): 268-304.

Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me? The Search for Community in Post-war England* (2019).

Simeon Koole, "How We Came to Mind the Gap: Time, Tactility, and the Tube," *Twentieth Century British History* 27:4 (2016): 524-554.

Week 11, April 9

Race & Migration

Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London Is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race* (2015).

Marc Matera, Radhika Natarajan, Kennetta Hammond Perry, Camilla Schofield, and Rob Waters, "Marking Race: Empire, Social Democracy, Deindustrialization," *Twentieth Century British History* 34:3 (2023): 552-579.

David Holland, "The Social Networks of South Asian Migrants in the Sheffield Area during the Early Twentieth Century," *Past and Present* 236 (2017): 243-279.

Week 12, April 16

Urban History

William Whyte, review of *Foundations* by Sam Wetherell and *Boom Cities* by Otto Saumarez Smith, *Journal of Modern History* 95:2 (2023): 447-450.

Sam Wetherell, *Foundations: How the Built Environment Made Twentieth-Century Britain* (2020), 1-17, 107-136.

James Greenhalgh, "The Threshold of the State: Civil Defence, the Blackout, and the Home in Second World War Britain," *Twentieth Century British History* 28:2 (2017): 186-208.

Holly Smith, "The Ronan Point Scandal: Architecture, Crisis, and Possibility in British Social Democracy, 1968-93," *Twentieth Century British History* 34:4 (2023): 805-834.

Otto Saumarez Smith, "The Lost World of the British Leisure Centre," *History Workshop Journal* 88 (2019): 180-203.

Week 13, April 23

Neoliberalism

James Vernon, "Heathrow and the Making of Neoliberal Britain," *Past and Present* 252 (2021): 213-247.

David Edgerton, "What Came between New Liberalism and Neoliberalism? Rethinking Keynesianism, the Welfare State, and Social Democracy," *The Neoliberal Age? Britain since the 1970s*, eds. Aled Davies, Ben Jackson, and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (2021), <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/126996>

Ben Jackson, "Intellectual Histories of Neoliberalism and their Limits," *The Neoliberal Age?*, <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/126996>

Helen McCarthy, "Flexible Workers: The Politics of Homework in Postindustrial Britain," *Journal of British Studies* 61:1 (2022): 1-25.

Andrew Seaton, *Our NHS: A History of Britain's Best-Loved Institution* (2023), pp. 1-18, 185-305.

III

Week 14, April 30

Metanarratives & Modern British History

Concluding conference.