

Britain in the Twentieth Century

Instructor: Daniel Loss

Course description

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain seemed to be on top of the world: an imperial and industrial power whose place in the global hierarchy seemed secure. A hundred years later, its empire was gone and its economy seemed a shell of its former greatness. Yet the century also witnessed Britain avoiding the political extremism experienced in much of continental Europe and a general improvement in standards of living across all classes. This course explores questions of decline and improvement and grapples with the paradox of a modern country that seems to retain the trappings of a traditional hierarchical society: (a monarchy, an aristocracy with formalized political power, and an established church). Through two world wars, the birth of the welfare state, the emergence of a multicultural Britain, and the turn towards Thatcherism, Britain's twentieth century was a lively one that offers rich opportunities to explore questions of class, race, political ideology, and the relationship between state and society.

Course objectives

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- Identify major events, trends, and developments in twentieth-century Britain.
- Analyze primary sources to develop a richer understanding of the past.
- Evaluate and critique the interpretations of previous historians of twentieth-century Britain.

Course format, policies and requirements

The format of the course will be two lectures and one discussion each week. The lectures and readings will provide a foundation for each week's discussion in which students are expected to take an active role in generating their own analyses and interpretations of the material presented. Primary sources, audio and visual in addition to textual, will be a regular part of the class to help students develop their skills in analyzing the remnants of past and improve their ability to think historically.

Attendance

Regular attendance at lectures and discussions is expected. I recognize that things come up throughout the semester, so you are allowed to miss one class session without any penalty. Repeated unexcused absence will have a negative effect on your grade.

Class participation

History is, at its heart, an interpretive endeavor. While the lectures in the course offer one interpretation on the events and developments we'll be studying, I'm also interested in seeing you develop your own analyses and understandings of twentieth-century Britain. Regular, high-quality

participation in discussions is therefore essential, both for you to try out your own ideas in a friendly environment and for me to evaluate your progress. Please consult the rubric on how I evaluate participation in discussion to get a sense of my expectations. I encourage everyone to come to each discussion with at least one or two points that they'd like to raise. Class participation will make up 10% of your grade.

Written work

Throughout the semester, you will write three papers. The first (4-6 pages) will be an analysis of one or two primary sources in which you interpret them in the context of the themes of the course and discuss what they reveal (and cannot reveal) about the period we're studying. The first paper is due at the end of the third week of the semester.

The second (5-7 pages) will be a review of a book chosen in consultation with me in which you will summarize the key points of the book, connect it to the questions explored in the course, and offer your assessment of the book's success in advancing its argument and improving our historical understanding of the period. The second paper is due at the end of the seventh week of the semester.

The final paper (12-15 pages) is research paper on a topic of 20th-century British history of your choosing. Your paper will draw on primary sources, engage with existing scholarship on the topic, and advance an analytical, historical argument. Students are expected consult with me throughout the semester with questions about developing a topic and finding primary sources. There will be a series of intermediate assignments designed to help you along in the process and to make sure that you're not left writing the entire paper in a rush at the end of the semester. The final paper will be due on the first day of the final exam period.

I am happy to read drafts of your written work. Please submit drafts no later than ten days before the due date for the assignment to give me time to look it over and for us to schedule a meeting to discuss ways to improve your paper.

I will be providing further details on each paper as the semester progresses.

Academic honesty and plagiarism

I expect that all work you submit will be your own. Plagiarism, the presentation of other people's work as your own, is a serious offense. You must give credit to those whose work you draw on through citations. I recommend that you consult a style guide (the *Chicago Manual of Style* is favored by historians; the shorter *Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* includes most of the relevant citation information). I encourage you to review the university's academic honesty policy [[link to policy here](#)]. If you have any questions about citations or bibliographies, please do not hesitate to ask.

Grades

The breakdown of your final grade is as follows:

- 10% - Class Participation
- 25% - Primary source analysis (due by the end of week 3)
- 25% - Book review (due by the end of week 7)
- 40% - Research paper (due by the first day of reading period)

Disabilities

I am happy to make accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you haven't already done so, get in touch with the Office of Disability Services to help arrange for accommodations.

Required texts

Peter Clarke's *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000* is an excellent narrative survey of Britain in the twentieth century. It serves as a complement, rather than a replacement, to the course lectures. It also has an excellent bibliography. It will be available for purchase in the bookstore (as well as from the usual online suspects: Amazon, AbeBooks.com, etc.).

The remaining readings for the course will be available from the course website

Each week you will read primary sources as well as a selection of scholarship on that week's topics.

Course calendar

Week 1: Britain and the World in 1900

Primary sources:

- Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty, a Study of Town Life* (selections)
- Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 7-45
- David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (selections)

Week 2: The Edwardian Summer and its Discontents

Primary sources:

- Newspaper clippings on suffrage movement
- Parliamentary debates on Irish Home Rule

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 45-70
- George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (selections)

Week 3: The Slide to War

Primary sources:

- Newspaper clippings from July 1914

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 70-76
- James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War* (selections)

First paper (primary source analysis) due at the end of the week

Week 4: The Experience of War at Home and on the Front

Primary sources:

- War poems

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 77-97
- Nicoletta F. Gullace, “*The Blood of our Sons*”
- J.M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*

Week 5: Interwar Instability Abroad

Primary sources:

- Parliamentary debates on General Dyer and Amritsar massacre

Other reading:

- Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share*, pp. 227-289
- Mo Moulton, “‘You Have Votes and Power’: Women’s Political Engagement with the Irish Question in Britain, 1919-21”

Week 6: Interwar Stability at Home

Primary sources:

- Stanley Baldwin, “On England and the West”
- George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (selections)

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 144-181
- Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures* (selections)
- Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods* (selections)

Week 7: The Second World War

Primary sources:

- J.B. Priestley, wartime broadcasts
- Winston Churchill, wartime speeches

Other reading:

- Angus Calder, *The People's War* (selections)
- Sonya O. Rose, *Which People's War?*² (selections)

Second paper (book review) due at the end of the week

Week 8: Losing an Empire, Constructing a Welfare State

Primary sources:

- The Beveridge Report
- Harold Macmillan, "Winds of change" speech

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 216-247
- Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (selections)
- Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain* (selections)

Week 9: The Postwar Consensus

Primary sources:

- Harold Macmillan, "Never had it so good" speech
- John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger*

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 248-282
- David Kynaston, *Family Britain* (selections)

Week 10: The 1960s - Sex, Drugs, and Rock 'n' Roll?

Primary sources:

- Philip Larkin, "Annus Mirabilis"
- John Lennon, "more popular than Jesus" interview
- John Robinson, "Honest to God" (selections)

Other reading:

- Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties* (selections)
- Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (selections)

Week 11: Multicultural Britain

Primary sources:

- Enoch Powell, “Rivers of blood” speech
- “Religious Education and the Multicultural Society” (selections)

Other reading:

- Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain* (selections)
- Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (selections)
- David Feldman, “Why the English like Turbans”

Week 12: The 1970s - A Decade of Crisis?

Primary sources:

- Newspaper clippings on “Winter of Discontent”

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 319-357
- Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis?* (selections)

Week 13: Margaret Thatcher and the Turn to Neoliberalism

Primary sources:

- 1979 Conservative Party manifesto
- Margaret Thatcher speech on Christianity and wealth

Other reading:

- Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp. 358-400
- Raphael Samuel, “Mrs. Thatcher and Victorian Values”

Week 14: New Labour and Beyond

Primary sources:

- 1997 Labour Party manifesto

Other reading:

- James Cronin, “New Labour’s Escape from Class Politics”

Final paper due on first day of final exam period