BRITAIN BETWEEN THE OLD REGIME AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR, 1830-1914  
(509:481; Fall, 2012)  
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Perspectives and Procedures

Themes: We focus in this course on a fascinating period in the history of the British people. Between the early part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, Great Britain reached its pinnacle as both an industrial and an imperial power. At the same time, it became an increasingly urban and an increasingly democratic nation, in which movements for social reform gained great strength and achieved significant victories. The decades that led up to 1914 appear in retrospect to have constituted a period of notable progress. But they were also marked by discontent and violence, both within the United Kingdom and overseas: in Ireland as a result of protests by Irish nationalists and on the streets of London in connection with agitation by the suffragettes; and in the Russian Crimea and in South Africa, where British troops fought bloody wars. Such disruptions, however, pale in comparison with the impact of the First World War, with whose origins the course comes to an end. Because of these developments and tensions, there is a great wealth of topics for students in this seminar to explore in depth, whether their interests tend toward social and cultural issues, economic history, politics, military history, or international relations.

Requirements: reading of all assigned materials before the classes for which they are assigned, regular attendance at our weekly meetings, a brief paper, an open-book examination, a medium-length paper, a longer paper, and three oral reports.

Most of the assigned reading appears in Walter Arnstein, Britain Yesterday and Today, 1830 to the Present and Walter Arnstein, ed., The Past Speaks: Sources and Problems in British History, Volume 2. These volumes will be available for purchase at the local bookstore. Naturally, students are free to buy them elsewhere if they choose to. Whether students purchase the latest editions of Arnstein’s text is unimportant. Students should use the second edition of Arnstein’s collection of sources. All other assigned readings are available via electronic reserve at the Robeson Library.

The first paper should be a two- to three-page summary and analysis of the information presented and the views expressed in the readings that are assigned for Sept. 5, 12, or 19. It is due on September 19.

The second paper, due on October 17, should focus on a book by a historian. It should deal with a subject that a student thinks she or he would like to investigate in greater depth in her or his final paper. This paper should be three to four pages in length. It should begin with a brief discussion (no more than half a page) of what is said about the topic at hand by Walter Arnstein. Against this backdrop, the rest of the paper should demonstrate how the author has gone beyond the relative brevity that is inevitable in a textbook. (If an author not only supplements Arnstein but also diverges from or contradicts him, the fact of this difference needs to be made clear too.) This paper should include a bibliography of three items: one of them being the book that is being analyzed, two others being additional items that could have been discussed in an essay on three books dealing with a common theme. The bibliographical listings of books that have not been discussed in the main body of the paper should indicate in two or three sentences what the books are about and how they relate to the ones that have been discussed at greater length.
Books discussed in these essays should show signs of serious scholarship. Books written for high school students, textbooks, and books written for history “buffs” are not suitable works for this assignment. If there is any doubt in your mind whether a particular book meets my standards, please show it to me so that I can point you in the right direction.

The final paper, which is due on the day when the final examination would be given if there were a final, should continue the investigation of a theme dealt with in the second paper by means of analysis of primary sources. No more than half of the source material may consist of items that have been assigned. Each student must discuss at least three sources, and the total length of these sources must amount to at least fifty pages. Someone who chooses to write about three books (such as three books about urban poverty) will far exceed the fifty-page minimum. Someone who draws heavily on assigned material or analyzes an assortment of selections from one or more analogies of edited materials will probably have to deal with at least a dozen sources. Although it is perfectly acceptable to limit one’s research to looking at materials listed in my bibliography (to be distributed early in the term), students are also permitted (indeed encouraged) to poke around more independently and to look for items that I have not listed. Bibliographies for these papers, with brief descriptions of each item (a sentence should suffice in each case), are due on October 31. First drafts of these papers, amounting to at least twelve pages (not counting bibliographies) are due on November 28, December 5, and December 12, on which days students will be expected to speak about their findings for about ten minutes. Final drafts should amount to fifteen to twenty pages, not counting notes and bibliographies.

Grades: first paper=5%; exam=10%; second paper=10%; progress report=5%; first draft of final paper=5%; attendance=5%; final paper=60%. Lateness in submission of papers will be subject to penalties.) Students will receive 5 points for each of the first eight classes for which they show up and ten points for each class after that. For the purpose of calculating the grade for attendance, there is no such thing as an excused absence. If students show up, they get full credit. If they are absent, for whatever reason, they do not. A student who fails to submit the final paper when it is due should not assume that he or she will receive a grade of “Incomplete” for the course. Any such grade must be negotiated. Otherwise, a grade of “F” will be entered on a student’s transcript.

Conduct in Class: Computers should remain off (or at least closed) during our time together. Nor do I want students to engage in texting. Cell phones should remain off or at least be put into the vibrate mode. All of us deserve one another’s undivided attention during our meeting times.
Schedule of Classes

Sept. 5: Introduction; The Age of Improvement, 1830 to 1851. Reading: Arnstein, Chs. 1-4; “Speeches on the Reform Bill of 1832; The Past Speaks, pp. 154-163, 180-185;

Sept. 12: The Mid-Victorian Years, 1851 to 1873. Reading: Arnstein, Chs. 5-7; The Past Speaks, pp. 164-195, 197-221, 130-236.


Oct. 10: Individual Conferences.

Oct. 17: Second paper due. Brief oral reports are to be given on books read for these papers, as are indications of interest in topics to be explored in research papers.


Oct. 31: Progress Reports.

Nov. 7: Film: Hard Times (based on a novel by Charles Dickens). Reading: selections from Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (= “The Veneerings).

Nov. 14: Film: Mrs. Warren’s Profession (a play by George Bernard Shaw).

Nov. 28: Oral Reports on Research Topics. First drafts of final papers due.

Dec. 5: Oral Reports on Research Topics. First drafts of final papers due.


Dec. ?: Final drafts of research papers due.