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HSTR 350.01: Modern Britain

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HSTR 350-- Britain 1815 to the Present.

John A. Eglin-- Office LA 255 MWF 1-2PM, or by appointment, or by accident
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The history of Britain in the 19th and 20th centuries is one great “riches to rags” story. Over the course of one century, Britain gained an empire that comprised one third of the land surface of the earth. It was the foremost global superpower and the world’s wealthiest nation. Before the next century was half finished, however, everything changed, with consequences that continue to shape the world we live in. This course will follow that rise and retreat up to the present day, when Britain grapples with a new identity as a multicultural society in a united Europe. **Objectives:** Students in this course will gain an understanding of these developments and their wider significance, and will develop their ability to read, write, speak and think critically and historically.

Texts:

David Cannadine, Victorious Century (VC – ISBN 0525557890)

Peter Clarke, Hope and Glory (HG – ISBN 0141011752)

Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England
(ISBN 0199555885)

Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians (ISBN 0140183507)

J.K. Rowling, The Casual Vacancy (ISBN 0316228589)

Additional readings will be distributed electronically.

Class Meetings. Mondays and Wednesdays are set aside for lecture and for your questions or comments relating to the subject matter. I may also direct questions to you, and for this reason, you should complete the assigned textbook reading before the first lecture of the week for which it is assigned. Attendance will not be monitored. *You should attend anyway.* Moreover, since you’re there, you really ought to take notes on lectures – your *own* notes. You should no more borrow someone’s else’s notes than you should borrow their toothbrush. Taking notes on lectures forces you to listen actively, and you are more likely to remember what is said.

Fridays are set aside for discussions of the readings assigned for that week. You will turn in 300-word responses to the readings, and you should be prepared to take part in discussion. Do not neglect the reading responses, as you get no points for participation if you do not turn in the response at the beginning of class. While we’re on the subject, if you’re absent from discussion, you can’t very well participate, can you?

Grades will be determined by two 1500 word essays due on 11 February and 15

April, a midterm examination on 22 March, a (non-cumulative) final examination on 3 May, and participation in and preparation for discussions (including 300-word reading responses due every week). Each of these five components (book reviews, examinations, and discussion/responses) will count for 20% of the final grade. NOTE: Since you will need 60% of the available points merely to score an abysmal D-, beware that 20% is a much larger portion of your grade than it might seem. *Most students who fail have neglected to turn in a major assignment or to take an examination; most students who neglect to turn in a major assignments or to take an examination fail.*

I use the plus/minus grading scale, modified to eliminate the silly grade of "D+," as follows: A, 93-100 points; A-, 90-92; B+, 87-89; B, 83-86; B-, 80-82; C+, 77-79; C, 73-76; C-, 70-72; D, 63-69; D-, 60-62; F, 0-59. Be advised that I will not change grades once they are assigned. Make-up examinations will not be given, and late work not accepted, except for reasons which are verifiable and allowed under university regulations. It is *the student's responsibility* to present these reasons as soon as possible, to provide documentation if asked, to arrange to make up work, and to do so in a timely fashion.

Drops require the consent of the instructor after the fifteenth instructional day (1 February). After the forty-fifth instructional day (18 March) and only through the last instructional day (26 April), drops are available only in very specific circumstances and only through petition which must be approved by the instructor, your advisor, and the Dean. Drop petitions will be considered (but not necessarily granted) *only* if accompanied with relevant documentation. I reserve the right to investigate drop petitions.

Every effort will be made to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Requests for accommodation should be made through the office of Disability Services for Students.

Academic dishonesty warning. Students are best served through the maintenance of high academic standards. Academic dishonesty undermines these standards, and threatens the integrity of the University. Fortunately, in my experience at this institution, academic dishonesty is ridiculously easy to catch. In accordance with the Student Conduct Code, any student who cheats on an examination, or who commits plagiarism in an essay or a reading response, will be assigned a failing grade in the course. Academic dishonesty may also result in more serious penalties, including suspension or even expulsion.

In closing, let me encourage all of you, in this class and out of it, to be active participants in your own education. A UM education costs about what you'll pay for a new car, and either one will go a lot further if you drive it yourself.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week I. 14-18 January. Introduction. Britain in 1815. VC 98-108, 122-149.

Week II. 23-25 January. Reform. VC 150-183. Discussion: Cobbett, Advice to a Citizen. Focus Question: How does this essay of 1830 reflect the controversy over parliamentary reform?

Week III. 28 January -1 February. Industry. VC 200-222. Discussion: Engels, Condition of the Working Class in England, 15-86, 106-143. Focus Question: "It costs money to be poor." How does Engels reflect this notion?

Week IV. 4-8 February. Social and Economic Thought. VC 318-335. Discussion: Engels, Condition of the Working Class in England, 87-100, 220-247, 281-302.

Essay on Engels due Monday 11 February.

Week V. 11-15 February. The Victorian Age. Discussion: "Dr. Arnold," from Eminent Victorians. Focus Question: What does this essay suggest about attitudes toward education in Victorian Britain?

Week VI. 20-22 February. Victorian Politics. VC 336-369. Discussion: Walter Bagehot, The English Constitution, selections. Focus Question: What, for Bagehot, is the practical function of the British monarchy?

Week VII. 25 February - 1 March. Women and the Family. Discussion: "Florence Nightingale," from Eminent Victorians. Focus Question: What does this essay suggest about attitudes toward women in Victorian Britain?

Week VIII. 4-8 March. Religion and Doubt. Discussion, "Cardinal Manning," from Eminent Victorians. Focus Question: What does this essay suggest about attitudes toward religion in Victorian Britain?

Week IX. 11-15 March. The Empire. VC 384-425, HG 7-33. Discussion: "The End of General Gordon," from Eminent Victorians. Focus Question: What does this essay suggest about attitudes toward the British Empire in the Victorian era?

Week X. 18-22 March. The First World War. HG 62-98.

Midterm Examination Friday 22 March.

Week XI. 1-5 April. From Warfare State to Welfare State. HG 98-110, 118-159.

Discussion: Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own. Focus Question: What does Woolf mean by "a room of one's own"?

Week XII. 8-12 April. The Empire Strikes Out: The Second World War and After. HG 182-215. Discussion: Rowling, The Casual Vacancy.

Essay on The Casual Vacancy due Monday 15 April.

Week XIII. 15-19 April. Postwar Britain. HG 216-231, 272-282, 319-329.
Discussion: *Brief Encounter*, film of 1946, directed by David Lean from a screenplay by Noel Coward. Focus Question: In what ways does this film question the rigid moral code that it presents? In what ways does it reinforce that code?

Week XIV. 22-26 April. Thatcher to Blair to Brexit. HG 358-388, 409-418, 428-439.

Final Examination 10 AM Friday 3 May

Essay Options: Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*

Your first essay, to be 1500 words in length (five full typed pages with double spacing, one inch margins, and twelve point type), is due in class on Monday 11 February 2016. Your essay should be turned in under a cover sheet bearing your name, which should not appear on any of the subsequent pages. The cover sheet should also indicate which of the five options below you have chosen.

A. "Society in England daily and hourly commits... social murder.... I have further to prove that society.... *knows* the consequences of its deeds; that its act is... murder, [and] I shall have proved [it], when I cite official documents, reports of Parliament and of the Government, in substantiation of my charge."

Assuming that Engels is the prosecutor, act as the defense attorney, and refute Engels' case.

B. Friedrich Engels is best known as a radical socialist who co-authored *The Communist Manifesto* with his close friend Karl Marx. Revolutionaries have to eat, however, and for twenty years Engels made his living (and, incidentally, Marx's) managing his father's factory in Manchester. In this capacity he was a model of Victorian ideals of moral propriety. How does this straitlaced and upright aspect of Engels surface in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and how are Engels' arguments affected by it?

C. Between the lines of Engels' treatment of the English working class we can often read his assessment of the condition of the property-holding class in England, which he also calls the "bourgeoisie." How are they affected by the problems he describes? What dangers do they face?

D. How does Engels handle environmental issues? How do these concerns relate to his overall argument? How much of an "environmentalist" would you say he is?

E. Engels' book appeared the same year (1844) as an entirely different and much more beloved work, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Considering that both are "set" in the same time and place, how does Dickens' fictional story read against Engels' non-fictional account? (As this option entails additional reading, students who elect it will receive a bonus point).