



Leicester Square garbage dump during the public service workers strike, Winter 1979

HIST UN3744: The Decline of Britain

Fall 2018
Wednesdays, 2:10-4pm
301M Fayerweather Hall

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Office Hours:
Tuesdays, 2-3pm
Wednesdays, 4-5pm

Course description: This course examines the debate over Britain's decline in the twentieth century. When Britain lost its manufacturing power, its imperial holdings, and its "traditional" values, who cared, what or who did they blame, and how did these shifts affect national identity? We will explore how the narrative of decline became a catch-all term to describe issues as various as industrial discontent, postcolonial politics, and the permissive society, and how this altered Britain's relationship to Europe and to the world. There are no prerequisites for this course, but basic knowledge and/or interest in modern British and European history would be advantageous.

The scope of this course is curated, not comprehensive. The assignments, readings, and sets of topics will give students foundational knowledge in a number of debates about when and how decline happened in twentieth-century Britain. Focus will be on higher level academic skills like primary source research and historiographical analysis, all of which will be covered in five "practicums" over the course of the semester: political primary sources, online newspaper archives, analyzing and writing book reviews, ego documents, and cultural reception and criticism. Course discussions and writing assignments will lead to a research paper on a topic of the student's choice.

Learning objectives:

- Describe how British “decline” both happened and was understood by a variety of historical actors and historians in twentieth-century Britain
- Examine how declinist narratives worked across economic, imperial, and cultural boundaries and analyze how these fields intersect and diverge
- Explore and use different print and online archival sources in modern British history
- Scaffold and produce question-driven historical writing drawn from primary and secondary sources

Grading:

All written work (except notecards) must be submitted electronically on Courseworks by 11:59pm on the due date. For every day work is late, you will be penalized a third of a letter grade.

Class participation: 20%

Students are expected to come to every seminar having done the reading, and ready to participate. Participation can take many forms: offering your analysis of the course material, responding to a classmate’s comment or question, asking a clarifying question, volunteering to read, or listening actively. I will give you a participation grade halfway through the semester, and then a final grade at the end. If you have any questions about reading for and participating in a humanities class, please talk to me

Discussion leading: 10%

Working alone or in pairs, each student will lead discussion at least once during the semester. This schedule will be finalized the second week of classes

Notecards: 15%

Each week students will turn in a notecard at the beginning of class: on one side, students will write out a passage, detail, or argument from any of the readings that piqued their interest; and on the other, students will write their reaction to this passage/detail/argument (notecards take the place of any reading quizzes)

Short writing assignment (book review or primary source response, 1,000-1,500 words): 15%

After the first unit, students will complete either a book review on Hicks or write a short analytical essay responding to a primary source of their choice

Annotated bibliography (5 secondary sources, 5 primary sources): 15%

After the third unit, students will conduct a preliminary survey of the sources they will draw on for their final research paper; this survey should describe and evaluate the material in terms of the student’s larger research question

Research paper (2,800-3,000 words): 25%

At the end of the semester, students will complete a substantive paper driven by a question about the narrative and uses of Britain as a nation in “decline” in the twentieth century

Readings

The Orwell, Schofield, and Hare texts are available for purchase at Book Culture. All other weekly readings are available on Courseworks, or available online [some through the library with your UNI]

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*

Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*
David Hare, *Plenty*

Expectations Inside and Outside the Classroom

- It is imperative that you complete the readings and viewings before class, and that you bring the necessary readings to class each day.
- Because our course foregrounds discussion, close engagement with the readings, and hands-on research practice, attending seminar is crucial for your own success and for the success of the course.
- **You may miss one class session without penalty.**
- I will excuse your absence if you bring me a note from a doctor or health professional, a signed letter from a University team or program, or documentation of a family emergency.
- **Once you have reached your limit of one unexcused absence, I will lower your final participation grade by one letter for each additional absence** (i.e., an “A” grade will become a “B”).
- Please make sure to arrive on time for class. Arriving late causes you to miss important material and is disruptive to others. **I will count two late arrivals as one absence.**
- All cell phones must be put away and put on do not disturb for the duration of the class.
- I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand rather than using your laptops. Here is a selection of research articles detailing the benefits of longhand, selective note-taking versus typed, verbatim note-taking:
<http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>
<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>
Putting away our laptops not only helps us synthesize information more effectively, it also makes our seminar discussions more engaging and meaningful. There will be four classes during the semester when we will work with online databases and you will need to bring a laptop to class. These are noted in the course schedule.

Resources and Support

Mental Health Resources:

- As a student, you may experience challenges that negatively affect your learning, such as anxiety, depression, interpersonal or sexual violence, difficulty with eating or sleeping, grief/loss, and alcohol or drug problems. Columbia University and Barnard College offers several confidential services that you might find helpful for addressing such challenges, including
 - Counseling and Psychological Services: <http://health.columbia.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services>
 - Mental Health Services (CUMC) <http://cumc.columbia.edu/student-health/mental-health-services>
 - Furman Counseling Center (Barnard) www.barnard.edu/mentalhealth
- If you have a diagnosed mental health condition, you may also be able to register with Services for Students with Disabilities: see www.health.columbia.edu/ods

The Writing Center:

- The Writing Center—located at **310 Philosophy Hall**—is an amazing, free resource. If you would like additional feedback or assistance as you're planning, drafting, or revising your writing assignments, you can schedule an individual appointment with a Writing Center consultant, here: <https://columbia.mywconline.net/index.php?msgLOG=YES>
- Barnard students can use a similar resource, The Writing Center at **223 and 224 Barnard Hall**. To make an appointment, visit <https://barnard.mywconline.com/>
- For more information, please visit: <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center> or <https://writing.barnard.edu/>

Faculty Statement on Academic Integrity

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

The Columbia Center for New Media, Teaching, and Learning defines plagiarism and its consequences at Columbia University:
ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/compass/discipline_humanities/documenting.html#plagiarism

Disability-Related Accommodations

In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations, students must first be registered with Disability Services (DS). More information on the DS registration process is available online at www.health.columbia.edu/ods. Faculty must be notified of registered students' accommodations before exam or other accommodations will be provided. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability are invited to contact Disability Services for a confidential discussion at (212) 854-2388 (Voice/TTY) or by email at disability@columbia.edu.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

All readings must be completed by the beginning of class and brought to seminar in physical form.

I. Introduction/Framings

Sept 5: Introduction/Syllabus

Sept 12: Framing the Debate

Adelman, "Why the idea that the world is in terminal decline is so dangerous"

Tomlinson, "Thrice Denied: 'Declinism' as a Recurrent Theme in British History in the Long Twentieth Century," *Twentieth Century British History* 20, no. 2 (2009), pp. 227-251

Morgan, "Britain in the Seventies – Our Unfinest Hour?" *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* XXII (2017), pp. 1-17

II. Economic decline

Sept 19: Politics and Economic Decline [**Bring laptop**]

Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, pp. xiii-xviii, 3-10, 157-166

Joseph Chamberlain, "The Question of Employment" in *Mr. Chamberlain's speeches, Volume II* edited by Charles W. Boyd, pp. 218-226

Keith Joseph, "This is not the Time to be Mealy-Mouthed," *Reversing the Trend*, pp. 5-10

Margaret Thatcher, "The Ideals of an Open Society"

Practicum: political primary sources

Sept 26: Representing Economic Decline [**Bring laptop**]

Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, pp. 5-118

Seabrook, "Return to Wigan Pier," *New Society* 6 January 1977 pp. 6-8

Hay, "Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the 'Winter of Discontent,'" *Sociology* 30, no. 2 (1996), pp. 253-277

Practicum: online newspaper archives

Oct 3: Revising Economic Decline [**Bring laptop**]

Edgerton, *Warfare State*, pp. 1-14 & 191-229

Thane, "Review: *Warfare State*," *History Today* (March 2006), 65

Tomlinson, "Review Article: After Decline?," *Contemporary British History* 23, no. 3 (2009), pp. 395-406

Practicum: book reviews

Oct 10: New Directions in Economic Decline

Martin, "The Beginning of Labor's End? Britain's 'Winter of Discontent' and Working-Class Women's Activism" *International Labor and Working-Class History* 75 (2009), pp. 49-67

Hicks, *Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing* pp. 1-17 & 149-224 [Full book online]

III. Imperial decline

Oct 17: What is imperial decline?

Hall, "Interview with Richard English and Michael Kenny," in *Rethinking British*

Decline pp. 104-116
Schwarz, *The White Man's World*, pp. 1-32 & 341-393
Webster, "Elsbeth Huxley: gender, empire and narratives of nation, 1935-1964,"
Women's History Review 8, no. 3 (1999), pp. 527-545

Short assignment due, 10/19

Oct 24: Powellism
Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain*
Oct 31: Declinism as Culture
This is England [film, on reserve at Butler Library]

IV. Moral Decline

Nov 7: What is moral decline?
Sked, "Moral Decline," in *Britain's Decline*, pp. 40-81
Moran, "'Stand Up and Be Counted': Hughie Green, the 1970s and Popular Memory,"
History Workshop 70, no. 1 (2010), pp. 172-198
Excerpted letters from *Ban this Filth! Letters from the Mary Whitehouse Archive*,
pp. 1-15, 226-227, 397-400
Practicum: ego documents
Nov 14: Gender and the Family [**Bring laptop**]
Hare, *Plenty*
Hare, "A Lecture Given at King's College, Cambridge, March 5, 1978"
Collins, "The Fall of the English Gentleman," *Historical Research* 75, no. 187 (2002),
pp. 90-111
Practicum: reception and criticism
Nov 21: NO CLASS
Nov 28: Religion and Secularization
Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, pp. 170-233
Chapman, "The International Context of Secularization in England: The End of Empire,
Immigration, and the Decline of Christian National Identity, 1945-1970," *Journal
of British Studies* 54 (2015), pp. 163-189

Annotated bibliography due, 11/30

V. Contemporary Resonances

Dec 5: Brexit Britain
Tombs, "The myth of Britain's decline"
Discussion of final research papers in class

Final research paper due, 12/21