



BOSTON UNIVERSITY BRITISH PROGRAMMES
CAS HI 326
Historical Roots of the British Genius
Dr Michael Thornhill
Elective A

Course objective

The course aims to explain how Britain created a unique political and cultural identity, and the way this impacted on the rest of the world. No prior knowledge of British history is required.

Course overview

The prevalent character or spirit of a nation is sometimes called its 'genius'. By examining the historical roots of the British genius, this course explores the relationship between the politics of the state (who wields power and how) and the making of a distinct cultural heritage. Britain's architecture, literature and art are all considered in the context of who pays for the specific works, from palaces, stately homes and oil portraits in the sixteenth century, via great multi-volume novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to popular music at the end of the second millennium. The rise and fall of the British empire is also examined in relation to Britain's place in the world today.

Methodology

The course is taught in eight four-hour classes, followed by a written examination lasting two hours. Each class begins with a ninety-minute presentation after which there is usually a discussion period based on an assigned reading and/or a class video. There will also be three guided field trips as part of the classes. Students are required to attend all sessions and participate in discussions. This aspect will account for 10% of the final grade. A 1500 word essay (about 6 typed pages, double-spaced in 12 point font) must be submitted to the instructor at the start of class 7 (a further 40% of the grade). In the written examination (worth 50%) students must answer two essay type questions from a selection covering all aspects of the course. No notes will be allowed in the examination room.

Grading criteria for essays

A

This exceptional grade is assigned only to work that has persistently outstanding quality in both substance and presentation. The student must demonstrate a sustained capacity for independent thought and extensive study, producing rigorous and convincing analyses in well-ordered prose.

A-

Awarded to work that is clearly focused and analytical, and based on wide reading. The student must cover all the principal points of a question and systematically develop a persuasive overall thesis, allowing for one or two venial omissions or infelicities of expression.

B+, B, B-

This range of grades indicates that the student has shown some evidence of

original thought and intellectual initiative. The student has cited sources beyond the class materials, and shown a degree of originality in perception and/or approach to the subject. The work will show thoughtful management of material, and a good grasp of the issues. The differences between a B+, a straight B and a B- may reflect poor presentation of the material, or mistakes in punctuation, spelling and syntax.

C+, C, C-

Work in this grade range is satisfactory, but uninspiring. If the work is simply a recitation of class materials or discussions, and shows no sign of genuine intellectual engagement with the issues, it cannot deserve a higher grade. Should an essay fail to provide a clear answer to the question as set, or argue a position coherently, the grade will fall within this range. Quality of presentation can lift such work into the upper levels of this grade range. Work of this quality which is poorly presented, and riddled with errors in grammar, spelling and punctuation, will fall into the lower end of the range. To earn a passing grade, the work must demonstrate that the student is familiar with the primary course material, be written well enough to be readily understood, be relevant to the assignment, and, of course, be the student's own work except where properly cited.

D A marginal pass can be given where some but not all the elements of the course have been completed satisfactorily.

F The failing grade indicates the work is seriously flawed in one or more ways:

- *Obvious lack of familiarity with the material
- *So poorly written as to defy understanding
- *So brief and insubstantial that it fails to properly address the subject
- *Material presented is not relevant to the assignment
- *Demonstrates evidence of plagiarism

Plagiarism

Simply stated, plagiarism is taking another's work and presenting it as your own. Dictionary definitions of plagiarism frequently include terms such as theft or steal. Plagiarism is, in fact, intellectual theft. It is one of the most serious forms of academic misconduct. Plagiarism committed by a student will certainly result in course failure and may result in suspension or dismissal. In the professional world it can ruin a career.

Boston University's Code of Student Responsibilities states:

All students are responsible for having read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be "expulsion from the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the dean."

The value of any grade, credit, honour or degree received by a student presupposes that all work submitted by a student is his or her own. A student

who uses or relies upon the work of others or who, except under conditions expressly permitted by the instructor, furnishes assistance to another student, violates the standards of the University. Students must insist upon academic honesty and integrity from their fellow students and must report promptly any case of alleged violation of academic conduct. Failure to do so is a violation of this code.

Plagiarism can take many forms, including the reproduction of published material without acknowledgement, or representing work done by others as your own. This includes the increasingly common practice of purchasing and downloading work from Internet "paper mills." Students should be extremely careful when submitting work for this course that all work is correctly sourced. Print-outs of web sites that have been used in research may be required by the lecturer in cases of a grade dispute and all web site based reference material should be kept by the student until after the end of the semester.

Grading System

The following Boston University table explains the grading system that is used by faculty members on Boston University's British Programmes.

Grade	Honour Points	Usual%	Definition
A	4.0	93-100	Excellent
A-	3.7	89-92	
B+	3.3	85-88	
B	3.0	81-84	Good
B-	2.7	77-80	
C+	2.3	73-76	
C	2.0	69-72	Satisfactory
C-	1.7	65-68	
D	1.0	60-64	Low pass
F	0.0	Unmarked	Fail

Reading

Set text:

George Orwell, *Why I Write* (Penguin Great Ideas edition, 2004) [£3.99]

+ Course reading pack

[* denotes class reading or class video; other titles as given are 'further reading']

General:

Simon Schama *A History of Britain Volume 2: 1603 – 1776* (2001) and *A History of Britain Volume 3: Fate of Empire* (2002)

Jeremy Paxman *The English* (1999)

David Cannadine *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (1996)

Kenneth O. Morgan (ed.), *The Oxford History of Britain* (2001 edn)

Roy Strong *The Story of Britain* (1996)

Week One: Politics and Philosophy

1. The rise of Parliamentary democracy (Monday)

- John Field, *The Story of Parliament* (2002)
 - <http://www.explore.parliament.uk/guide/>
2. The individual and the state from Hobbes to Keynes (Tuesday)
- George Orwell, 'England your England' in *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941)*
 - 'History of Britain: Orwell and Churchill', Simon Schama, Video: BBC1, tx. 2003*
 - *Instructions for National Servicemen in Britain*, US War Department, 1942

Week Two: Art and Architecture

3. The politics of landscapes and portraits / **visit one** to National Portrait Gallery (Monday)
- John Brewer, 'Changing places: the court and the city' in *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997)*
 - Andrew Wilton, *Five Centuries of British Painting: from Holbein to Hodgkin* (2002)
 - Roy Strong, *The Spirit of Britain* (1998)
4. Who pays for the buildings? Power and status as reflected in British architecture / **visit two** to St Paul's Cathedral (Tuesda)
- David Watkin, *English Architecture* (2001)
 - John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830* (1993)

Week Three: Popular Culture

5. Britain through the lens of literature (Monday)
- Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (2000 edn)
 - Student presentations on previous week's field trips
6. Class and popular culture (Tuesday)
- Denis Judd, 'The Bodyline Tour of Australia, 1932' in *Empire* (1996)*
 - 'The Filth and the Fury', dir. Julian Temple, Video: Channel 4 Films 2003*
 - Richard Holt, *Sport and the British* (1990)
 - Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock and Beyond* (2002)

Week Four: Britain and the Wider World

7. Exporting 'Britishness' to the Empire (Monday)
- George Orwell, 'Shooting an Elephant'*
 - 'British Empire in Colour: Legacy', Video: ITV tx. 2002*
 - David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (2001)

8. Britain's retreat from power / **visit three** to Imperial War Museum (Tuesday)
- David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled* (2000)
 - George L. Bernstein 'The Character of Decline' in *The Myth of Decline* (2004)
 - <http://www.iwm.org.uk/>

Week Five: Stocktaking

9. The legacy of past greatness (Monday)
- Geoff Mulgan, 'Culture: The problem with bring public' (1996)*
 - K. Baker (ed). 'The Cause of our Glorious Institutions' in *The Faber Book of Conservatism* (1993)*

Terms and conditions

Failure to produce essays at the allotted time may result in the lowering of the grade. Punctuality for class is essential. No work can be left outstanding to be finished after the semester has ended; incompletes are only permitted in exceptional circumstances such as serious illness.

Terms and Conditions

**Attendance at all classes and field trips is mandatory. Students missing lectures without a doctor's letter or authorisation from the Director will automatically be docked a – or a + from their final grade. Persistent lateness will also be penalised in the final grade, conversely, excellent attendance will result in an upgrade of the classification where the final examination standard is borderline. A register of attendance will be taken at the beginning of each session, and marks will be awarded for attendance. Absence can be conveyed either by advising a senior member of staff in the Academic Affairs Office with a request that the information be passed on to me; or by email prior to class. Leaving it to another class member to convey messages will not be acceptable. Appointments for interviews for internships should not conflict with attendance at classes. **

Any student who is unable to attend a class, or take part in an assignment because of religious reasons, must give notice of the fact in advance. He/she will be required to make up for time lost. In this situation arrangements must be made with another student for class notes to be shared. Written papers must be delivered before agreed deadline, failure to hand in the paper will result in deducted marks.

I will make some time available in each session for students to raise questions etc. Should students wish to discuss matters with me in person I will also be available during the break mid-lecture and at the end of class. Alternatively, please feel free to e-mail me with questions. If you have problems with the availability of reading materials (all of which should be in the library) please contact me either through the Academic Affairs Office or via e-mail.

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