

HISTORY 410  
VICTORIAN BRITAIN  
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This course is designed to familiarize students with the social, cultural, economic, and political history of Britain between 1832 and 1901. For all but the first five years of this period, Queen Victoria was the ruler and international symbol of Britain and its empire. We will start with 1832, however, because the passage of the Reform Act in that year was the beginning of the gradual but substantial democratization of Britain that culminated during Victoria's reign with the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884.

To understand what made this small island nation such a dominant global force, we must analyze the extraordinary changes wrought by the industrial revolution. British industries such as textiles, iron, coalmining, and shipbuilding not only transformed the modern world, but laid the foundation for a century of British economic and military power. This course will devote considerable lecture time to how the great Victorian industries actually worked—from how products were created to the division of labor within the manufacturing processes.

One of the most persistent stereotypes about the British is that they are obsessed with class. The industrial revolution transformed the balance of power in British society. What had once been a society overwhelmingly dominated by the aristocracy was transformed into a society dominated by the diverse middle classes. A topic we will explore extensively is how the British aristocracy adapted to the new society that evolved with industrialization.

The middle classes included everyone from millionaire textile manufacturers in Manchester to lowly clerks at the Foreign Office in London. As they exerted increasing influence over British culture and society, their values became the dominant values even as many of them eagerly entered into the aristocracy, whether through marriage or professional accomplishment.

If the industrial revolution displaced the aristocracy in Britain, it also created an entirely new stratum in society: the industrial working class. The terrible poverty and human squalor of the working class slum, and the often horrific conditions in which the workers labored, were the unfortunate by-products of the same industrial dominance that made Britain so powerful for so long. We will explore many aspects of daily life in a representative Victorian slum.

Along the way, we will also touch on various other aspects of Britain in the nineteenth century, including gender, education, music, sports, crime, and religion, which was one of the most contentious social issues during the period.

## READINGS

Every week I will assign two digital articles for the class to read. These articles will consist of both primary and secondary sources. We will discuss these readings in class weekly.

## ASSIGNMENTS

Four quizzes (150 points each)

Attendance and participation (150 points)

Final paper (250 points)

The final paper will be a 10-to-12-page synthesis of both primary and secondary sources, due on the last day of class.