

**HISTORY 434**  
**BRITAIN SINCE 1815**  
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This course is designed to familiarize students with the social, cultural, economic, and political history of Britain between 1815 and the early 2000s.

In 1815, the Duke of Wellington defeated Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo, ending more than two decades of near-continuous warfare between Britain and France. This victory abroad, however, was the catalyst for nearly 20 years of domestic strife at home, culminating in the passage of the Reform Act in 1832. This was the beginning of the gradual but substantial democratization of Britain during Victoria's reign that continued with the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1884.

By the time of Victoria's death in 1901, Britain was the greatest military, imperial, cultural, and economic power in the world. 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.

The industrial revolution transformed the balance of power in British society. What had once been a society overwhelmingly dominated by the aristocracy gradually transformed into a society dominated by the diverse middle classes. One topic we will explore 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 in the nineteenth century.

Many historians tell the story of Britain in the twentieth century in terms of "decline." But this is far too facile a generalization, given the extraordinary social, economic, political, and cultural forces that have transformed Britain, not to mention the enormous sacrifices that the British people made in two world wars. Though their place in the world was certainly more humble at the end of the century than it had been at the beginning, Britain and its peoples have amassed a record of accomplishment in terms of social equality and welfare, multiculturalism, and international relations (particularly in the dismantling of the British empire) that belies any charge of "decline."

Along the way, we will also touch on various other aspects of Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These include the following, with varying degrees of importance: the decline of old industries such as coal mining and textiles, the collapse of the Liberal Party and the emergence of the Labor Party, politics and society during the Slump, class relations, unions and industrial relations, unemployment, economic and monetary policy, socialism and the welfare state, Christianity and secularism, immigration, foreign policy, Thatcherism, and popular culture.

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

Five quizzes (100 pts. each)

Attendance and participation (150 pts.)

Final paper (350 pts.)

### **READINGS:**

*Eminent Victorians* by Lytton Strachey

*The Man of Property* by John Galsworthy

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe

### **WEEKLY SCHEDULE:**

#### **Week One**

Reform and Industrialization, 1815-1851 [**Begin reading *Eminent Victorians***]

#### **Week Two**

Britain, 1851-1867: From Whigs and Tories to Liberals and Conservatives [**QUIZ #1 on Thursday**]

#### **Week Three**

Gladstonian Britain, 1867-1884 [**Finish reading *Eminent Victorians***]

#### **Week Four**

Ireland, Empire, and Aristocratic Reaction, 1884-1901 [**QUIZ #2 on Thursday**]

#### **Week Five**

Asquithian Britain, 1901-1918 [**Read *The Man of Property* before Quiz #3**]

#### **Week Six**

The Interwar Period, 1918-1939 [**QUIZ #3 on Thursday**]

### **Week Seven**

World War II and the Creation of Socialist Britain, 1939-1959 **[Begin reading *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*]**

### **Week Eight**

The Decline and Fall of the Post-War Consensus, 1959-1979 **[QUIZ #4 on Thursday]**

### **Week Nine**

Thatcherite Britain, 1979-1997 **[Finish reading *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*]**

### **Week Ten**

Cool Britannia?, 1997-2010 **[QUIZ #5 on Thursday]**