

Course Title: *Secularism and the Enlightenment*

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I.

I am revising an existing course (one of the most long-lived within the Trinity curriculum) and converting it into two courses to be taught over a year's time. The single course is presently entitled *History 208: British politics and society, 1688-present*. Its former title was: *Britain from the Accession of George I*, indicative of its complicated historiographical past. I will extend the treatment of each time period, redress its conceptual framework to suit our seminar's results, and add new and different readings and other materials. There is a strong visual and literary culture (in prose and fiction) surrounding this course, and I seek to continue and extend those conventions. I emphasize works of the developing field of "political economy," which suffused the Scots and English enlightenment discourses. The secularization of English society I particular, in the context of the growth of a secular humanist tradition, lies at the heart of the courses.

The two courses will henceforth appear as:

I. Britain: political culture and empire, 1688-1867 (Fall) H208
(working syllabus, see below)

II. Britain: political culture and empire, 1867-Present (Spring) H209

These courses explore the history of the British Isles, and especially England, from the era of social and religious conflict known as the "English Civil War" through the present-day "post-imperial" Anglo-American foreign policy endeavor in Iraq. The course emphasizes the development of ideas and practices of "free trade" and its conflicts with the pursuit of empire and "imperial preference"; slavery and the rise of anti-slavery movements; the emergence of London as a world metropolis and seat of empire; and the religious, socio-economic and political conflict that shaped the transition from an agricultural to a manufacturing society, from a largely rural to an urban-centered culture, and from an era of imperial hegemony to "decolonization." National and regional identities, racial politics, multiculturalism, anti-colonialism, and the two wars of the 20th century are primary themes. A film program and trips to the Yale Center for British Art and the Walpole Library, accompany the course.

(These are both lecture-style courses that will be capped at 35 students.)

The revision of the course into two parts fulfills the present History Department objective of developing *tracks* of study which students will follow in the major. These new courses will be part of a track concentrating on *Britain, imperialism and the post-colonial world*, which I will develop as we launch our new curricular format. The students enrolled could come from any major, as this material draws many students who plan to study abroad in the UK or former British empire locales (Cape Town, Trinidad, Australia, India, Hong

Kong). If the primary constituencies of the present course come from history and English, its pitch at the 200 level is accessible to the student body as a whole. It increasingly draws upon INTS students as well, given the imperial emphasis already present in the unrevised and overly-truncated version.

Although “Enlightenment” did not come into use in Britain until the later 19th century, the society that finally admitted the term to its vernacular bore many fundamental signs of the influence of the previous generation upon its polity, economic life and culture. By the enactment of the Third Reform Act in 1832, a fully-developed industrial sector, an indulgence of “free trade” in the midst of stubborn cries for “imperial preference,” and a fervent commitment to free thought and civil liberties were all prevalent, not just amongst a growing intelligentsia, but in popular circles in and outside of the communities of faith. These patterns bespoke the heritage of the Scots imprint upon wider English, Welsh and Irish thought, as well as the irrepressible import of ideas from the European Continent manifest in everything from the Chartist risings of the 1830s until 1848, to the extensions of the franchise in 1832, 1867 and the 1884 3rd reform. As a modernist by training, my project unashamedly looks back from the late 19th century window and asks—where did the liberalism of the new century find its roots? How did what historian Geoffrey Best in particular, has termed “secular humanism” take hold so profoundly in a culture which still could be seen as a purveyor of (to quote Michael Bentley) “politics without democracy,” a State church that had survived bloody civil war not only in the 17th century but repeatedly in Ireland, and a still unreformed oligarchic House of Lords?

II.

The course revision brings students closer to an understanding of how commercial society was fostered by new ideas, and how market forces themselves begot revolutions in thought. The press toward an uneven and conflicted, but undeniable secularization of British society, must be understood through the lens offered by the key fathers of the new liberal orthodoxies-- Smith, Hume, and the contributors to organs like the *Edinburgh Review*, and their inheritors--- Wollstonecraft, Bentham, Mill and those who followed. Imperial policy-makers and social engineers were pioneers of the application of new ideas about trade, empire and the State. Meantime, the Continental theorists’ continual impact, so visible in the controversies surrounding the receptions of the American and French revolutions, left a trail of desire: to thwart revolution at home through reform, to ameliorate empire in order to keep it, to suppress rebellion in the colonies in order better to command them, to lessen the hold of the Established Church in order that it should prevail, to soften the hand of the monarchy to preserve it, and so on.

I will address both the rebellious spirit of diverse challengers to this new *status quo* and familiarize myself (and others) with the most recent historical literature in the operative categories (see working bibliography below). My most pressing concern is to integrate the study of the empire and “race” with that of the domestic history of political thought. The issues raised here arise in lectures, but they also arise with students through discreet readings of works of prose: *Selections from the Wealth of Nations*, Burke and Paine, the slave narrative *The History of Mary Prince*, the case studies afforded by the Irish

rebellion of the 1790s, and episodes in English radicalism from Levellers to Luddites to radical Republicans engaged with the Chartist movement. I seek to expand the new selections of primary source documents, visual and art historical materials, and works of political thought and fiction from the era, in order to make *new use of the extended time frame* of each part of the two course sequence.

III.

Working bibliography of recent works (for use by scholars):

David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2000); *Greater Britain, 1516–1776: Essays in Atlantic History* (2004); *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (2006)

Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (2006).

Henry C. Clark, ed., *Commerce, Culture and Liberty* (2003).

John Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (2006).

Albert Hirschman, *Rival Views of Market Society and other Recent Essays* (1992)

Istvan Hont, *Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (2005).

Gordon Johnson, ed., et al, *The New Cambridge History of India* (1995)

Bruce L. Kinzer, *England's Disgrace? J.S. Mill and the Irish Question* (2001)

Roger Louis, ed., et al, *Oxford History of the British Empire, passim* (1999)

Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in 19th century British Liberal Thought* (1999)

Anthony Pagden, ed., *The Idea of Europe from Antiquity to the European Union (2002), and Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c 1500-c 1800* (1995)

Steven Pincus, *The First Modern Revolution* (2007)

John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples, 1680-1760* (2005).

Sartori, Andrew “The British Empire and its Liberal Mission” *Journal of Modern History*, Volume 78, Issue 3, September, 2006, 623-642.

Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender* (London, 2003),
and, ed.,
New Imperial History: culture and modernity in Britain and the empire, 1660-1840
(2004)

IV.

Revised Syllabus, History 208 (draft)
Britain: political culture and empire, 1688-1848 (Fall)

Books for purchase:

George Stigler, ed., Adam Smith, *Selections from the Wealth of Nations*
Moira Ferguson, ed., *The History of Mary Prince* (1998 edition)
James Walvin, *Atlas of Slavery*
T.W. Heyck, *The Peoples of the British Isles, Vol. II* (2002 edition)
Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History*
Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*
Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital*
Kathleen Wilson, ed., *New Imperial History: culture and modernity in Britain and the
empire, 1660-1840*

Films (on reserve): Simon Schama, *A History of Britain, Amistad*

Week One: Introduction
Heyck, *Preface*, Chapters 1-2
Wilson, ed. (selection)

Week Two: Steve Pincus, *England's Glorious Revolution: a brief history with
documents*
(selections)

Week Three: Heyck, Chaps. 3-5
Screening: Schama

Week Four: Read: Smith, *Selections from the Wealth of Nations*;
Heyck, Chaps. 6-7

Week Five: Heyck, Chaps. 8-10
Wollstonecraft (selections)

VISIT to the Walpole Library (Yale U., Farmington, CT)

Week Six: Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*; Edmund Burke, *Relections* (selections)
Hyeck, Chaps. 11-12

Week Seven: Hyeck, 13-15
Walvin, *Atlas of Slavery*, Preface, Introduction, Chapters 7-12, 14, 17-18,20
Screening: Schama, *History of Britain*
Wilson, ed., (selections)

Week Eight: *The History of Mary Prince*
Brown, *Moral Capital*, selections

Screening: *Amistad*
Visit: Old State House, Connecticut Historical Society, *Amistad*
exhibition

Week Nine: Hyeck, 16-17
3 pp. Paper due on Prince/Walvin
Wilson, ed., selections

Week Ten: Chase, *Chartism: a new history*

Week Eleven: Stephen Roberts and Dorothy Thompson, *Images of Chartism*
(selections)
Visit: Yale Center for British Art