



BRITAIN TODAY: ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES SUMMER

Instructor: Susie Thomas
Contact Hours: 40
Language of Instruction: English
LONDON, ENGLAND

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Britain Today examines contemporary British society. We will discuss the commanding themes in British public life and look at their historical context. This will extend to consideration of key social issues - including race and diversity and aspects of popular culture.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course aims to analyze key cultural, social, economic and political developments. It will provide students with the grounding and analytical tools to compare and contrast contemporary Britain with the United States. We aim to take advantage of London's unique status not simply as Britain's political and cultural capital but also as one of the world's most diverse urban centers.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Students who undertake this course and participate fully can expect to gain a thorough knowledge of the country's political process, as well as its key cultural, social and economic challenges.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

The course introduces competing interpretations, drawing in particular on the fields of comparative politics, history and economics. Students will be able to gain from direct access to scholars of and participants in British society.

RULES AND PROCEDURES

Attendance at the sessions and excursions is obligatory. The sessions combine introductory lectures, presentations, discussions and group work. In some sessions, students will be asked to participate in debates and to prepare and deliver group presentations. You are expected to prepare actively for all classes and to contribute to all seminars.

STUDY VISITS AND EXCURSIONS:

During the semester, the course aims to integrate study visits, many of which are dependent on our class schedule and so subject to confirmation. These are likely to include:

- A guided tour around the Houses of Parliament
- At least one theatre performance
- An opportunity to visit various museums & galleries in London
- A walk through London's diverse and absorbing East End and a chance to have an accompanied tour of Brixton, an inner city area south of the river

ESSENTIAL READING:

Martin Upham (2017), *Britain Explained: Understanding British Identity*, London, John Harper Publishing - an excellent and brand new book by a former director of GEO London

METHOD OF EVALUATION (GRADING)

1. Class Participation and Attendance: 25%
3. Reflections (three): Each 15%
4. Research Project: 30%

1. Class Participation and Attendance

Students are expected actively to take part in class discussion and debates and to ask questions of visiting speakers. Failure to do so, and failure to attend regularly without appropriate reason for absence, will be reflected in your grade.

2. Reflections

500 words each on The Houses of Parliament, Kensington Palace and Brixton. I will be looking for a thoughtful, engaged response to our excursions and how they enriched your understanding of contemporary British culture.

3. Research Project

You will complete a 1,500 word research project - an opportunity for you to study in depth an aspect of London that is of particular interest to you. In putting together your project you are encouraged to draw on the materials and approaches you encounter in all your classes, walks, tours and other experiences. You are free to be as creative and contemporary as you wish in your use of media. Your research should not rely exclusively on internet sources. You will be required to make use of a range of different kind of resources only available to you because you are in London.

Choosing a topic: You will agree a topic with your instructor by the end of week two. A focused and specific topic will be best. You could choose a street, a person, a moment in time, the impact on London of war, redevelopment, immigration, fashion, music, the representation of London in film or painting ... be adventurous!

COURSE OUTLINE

Week 1: Politics

31 July, Tuesday 2-5

Introduction to the course; background to British politics. Walk to British Library.

Reading: Britain Explained, chapter 2

1 August, Wednesday 2-5

Guided tour of the Houses of Parliament

Meet at Westminster tube station ticket barrier at 2pm for tour starting at 2.40.

2 August, Thursday. Joe Robertson and Joe Murphy, *The Jungle*

Meet outside The Playhouse Theatre on Northumberland Avenue at 2pm.

Nearest Tube: Embankment

After the performance make notes on major themes, characterization, theatre space, sets, costumes and audience response in preparation for the discussion on Tuesday.

3 August, Friday. Excursion to Brighton.

Reading: Susie Thomas, 'London to Brighton: Round the Bend and Over the Edge' (handout)

DUE: PARLIAMENT REFLECTION

Week 2: History

7 August, Tuesday 2-5

The monarchy, government and constitution

Discussion of *The Jungle*

Reading: Britain Explained, chapter 3

8 August, Wednesday 2-5

Social identities

Debate: 'The British monarchy is a feudal relic which should be abolished in the cause of social justice.'

Reading: Britain Explained, chapter 12

East End Walk and curry in Brick Lane

9 August, Thursday 10am

Excursion to Kensington Palace.

Meet at High Street Kensington tube station at 10am.

Week 3: The Arts

14 August, Tuesday 2-5

Background to Shakespeare followed by a Bankside walk.

DUE: KENSINGTON PALACE REFLECTION

Othello at The Globe, 7pm

Reading: Shakespeare, *Othello*

15 August, Wednesday 2-5

Culture for all

Discussion of *Othello*

Reading: Britain Explained, chapter 15

16 August, Thursday 10-1

London short stories

Bring questions for discussion: consider the use of locality, dialect, narrator, major themes and characterization.

Reading: Jean Rhys, 'Let them call it jazz' (handout)

Zadie Smith, 'The Embassy of Cambodia' (handout)

Week 4: Diversity

21 August, Tuesday 2-5

Brixton walk with Kelly Foster

Meet at Brixton tube ticket barrier at 2pm

22 August, Wednesday 2-5

Presentations on final project

Debate: 'Racism is part of the cultural DNA of the UK.'

23 August, Thursday 10-1

Presentations on final project continued

Course review.

DUE: FINAL PROJECTS AND BRIXTON REFLECTION