Britain, Empire and Commonwealth from 1688

Preliminary Examination

This exam has two sections. You must do the required question in Section I. Choose TWO questions from Section II. You should write a total of THREE essays.

Be sure each essay has a clear line of argument, addresses as many dimensions of the question as possible, and offers relevant, persuasive evidence from specific secondary sources wherever appropriate. Good luck!

SECTION II: Required Question

Despite rumors of its hegemony, the British empire was a fitful, partial and uneven affair. In an instructive historiographical mirroring, the new imperial history itself has been unevenly integrated into extant narratives of modern Britain. It arguably remains as resisted or ignored as it is fully engaged in many quarters. Track the main claims and contentions of this interdisciplinary field, assess its impact on histories about the period 1750-1950 and make a case for what remains to be done to make “home” and empire more fully interconnected.

SECTION II: Choose TWO Questions

A. Historians tend to rely on a periodization that starkly divides the British Empire into two distinct phases: the early modern or first empire and the modern (second) empire - a transition generally located at the turn of the nineteenth century. What are the important differences historians identify between these two periods and what aspects of empire bridge this divide? How has recent historiography disrupted this narrative? How would you portray the development of the empire from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries? (i.e. how would you periodize this narrative?)

B. Salman Rushdie is famous for his observation that most of English history happened overseas so the English don't know what it means. Yet William Gladstone also remarked that "the sentiment of empire is innate in every Briton." How would you construct an undergraduate syllabus on modern Britain that operates from
these premises, captures the "chaotic pluralism" of empire and remaps the fact of global empire(s) onto the "domestic" narrative without re-inscribing either 1) English exceptionalism or 2) the kinds of Indo-centricity on view in both Victorian and postcolonial readings of imperial culture?

C. Imperialism has been characterized by multiple forms of mobility – that of ideologies, bodies, labor regimes, governance, violence, knowledge, and resistance. But race and racial categories have also been made in and through that mobility. Write an essay that centers the themes of race and mobility within the British Empire from 1700 to the present. Your discussion should include multiple colonial locations as well as the metropole.

D. What is the proportional role of empire in a global history of modern Britain? What models of imperial history old or new best capture the mobility, connectivity and transnational political economies that have interrupted and challenged the insularity of the “Island Nation” story? Be sure to offer a clear periodization in your essay and attend to questions of local, regional, and 4 nations influence wherever possible.