Preliminary Exam in Britain/Empire 1688 to the Present

Spring 2015

Answer one question from each section. You must do a total of three (3) questions. 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 I

1. Studies of empire and law are arguably transforming our understanding of imperial history, from the 18th century down to the present. When scholars have engaged with the limits of empire, they have tended to focus on the law as the litmus test of imperial power in practice precisely because, according to John Comaroff, “it was everywhere breached and compromised.” Or, as Lauren Benton has suggested, law was “a thin jurisdictional line.” Assess the impact of major legal histories of empire in the last 15 years and evaluate the extent to which they challenge conventional certainties about imperial hegemony and domination.

2. Historiographical convictions about the long 18th century are somewhat quaint today, but histories of empire from the period might be said to have revived the appeal of a more extended chronology. To what extent could or should the 18th century be seen as a pivot, looking both backward to early modern imperial histories and foretelling much of the empire story of the Victorian period?

Section II

3. You've been asked to design a course on modern Britain at the 200 level at a Midwestern public university, but the curriculum committee is skeptical about the role of empire in an ostensibly "national" history course. Develop a syllabus rationale for your method; break the course into 3 or 4 composite parts, each with its own synopsis; and offer a briefly annotated reading list that reflects your goals for engaging students with primary sources and secondary readings. In other words, make your case for empire as an indispensable category of historical analysis.

4. Imperialism is arguably a synonym for multiple, often simultaneous, forms of violence - extractive, epistemic, bodily, psychological, structural, redistributive, political, technological, panoptical, military, global, inter-imperial, intra-colonial - across time and space. Construct a 300 level syllabus that stages this argument for the period 1750-1950 and that enables students to appreciate the history of these categorical imperatives for the British case. Be sure to address the work of imperialism "at home" as well as in colonies/possessions/territories.