Britain/Empire Commonwealth from 1688

Spring 2016

Answer one question in 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 1.

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. What are the best methods for narrating the period 1750-1950 that enables students to appreciate the history of these categorical imperatives and capture empire “from below” for the British case? Be sure to address the work of imperialism "at home" as well as in colonies/possessions/territories wherever possible.

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, and one of the main vehicles of its transformation — feminist accounts of the entangle histories of race and gender and sexuality — are still quite marginal to “master” narratives regardless of scale. 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 2.

Write a genealogy of labor history in eighteenth-century Britain beginning with its revolution as marked by E.P. Thompson’s work in the 1960s. How can the making of the English working class be understood not merely as a national event, but as a history that intersects with the history of slavery, indenture, and imperial trade and expansion. How has labor come to engage (or not) with newer historiographical trends and categories of analysis such as gender, race, slavery, and empire?

Develop a syllabus for a 200-level undergraduate survey course for British History 1688-Present. What themes would shape the course? How would you periodize it? What books would you assign and why? Divide the term into three units. Include a rationale for the course; 3 sections that organize thematic readings and provide briefs for each; and 2 pages which serve as the basis for your introductory lecture for the course (i.e., that outline what the stakes are for viewing the field this way).
Section 3.

Scholarship on the Indian Ocean World (IOW) has developed significantly since its inception as a field of study nearly half a century ago. More than one scholar has extrapolated from this object of inquiry to insisting on IOW “as method.” What is the analytical and methodological landscape of the twenty first century IOW scholarship that considers empire and what are its sites of intervention? (How) does the spaces it encompass map on to imperial ones, and (how) does it escape the methodological traps of national, imperial and global histories?

Your dissertation will grapple with both questions of scale and the emerging field of environmental history. Elaborate on the specifics that frame your work. If scale is to be as much about proportionality and optics (who sees what, what counts, etc.) as about size (the local versus the global) per se, how does one avoid both the whiggishness and violence inherent in linear narratives that are arguably the legacies of empire writing at any scale? Use two case studies, your own and a distinct one, to make the case for an anti-imperial history of scale.