

## **The Civilizing Mission and its Discontents**

History 333-01, Fall 2008

M/W 2:15-4:05, Mears 202

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Fall office hours: Tues & Thurs, 2:15-4:05; Wed, 9:00-11:00

The Victorians considered “civilization” to be synonymous with modernity, progress, and perfectibility. This optimistic understanding of the course of history and society permeated virtually every aspect of British life during the nineteenth century, but it was particularly evident in the emergence of an unprecedented range of reform and improvement initiatives through various public and private institutions. Middle-class activists and philanthropists mobilized for enfranchisement and social justice, seeking to advance a modern society while correcting its political and material inequalities. However, these agents of progress had the potential to create as many problems as they solved, for while they brought previously marginalized interests to the center of public attention, their efforts often had strings attached: religious conversion, social control, and the perpetuation of self-interest, privilege, elitism, and moral superiority. Moreover, while most agreed that progress was desirable and even perhaps inevitable, competing visions of the best means to advance their causes brought many well-intentioned reformers into conflict with one another and with their supposed beneficiaries: the poor, the working class, and those not of Christian persuasion or “Anglo-Saxon” descent. This course investigates just a few aspects of a “civilizing mission” that wore many faces (religious societies and charitable organizations; conservative, liberal, and socialist ideology; parliamentary and extra-parliamentary campaigns; traditional and new professions; the women’s movement; the press; the novel) and operated in many arenas (local and national government; churches; homes; hospitals; urban slums; schools; the workplace; the natural world; the empire). Whatever their contradictions and limitations, these “civilizing missions” constituted dynamic and complex experiments to reconcile the promise and the problems of an industrializing nation and expanding empire.

### ***Course Requirements:***

#### Class preparation and discussion (40%)

A substantial portion of your grade will be based on your citizenship in class. This means preparing adequately, offering thoughtful and substantive contributions based on the reading, and respectfully listening and responding to others’ contributions.

In preparation for each discussion, you should consider the following questions about the reading(s):

- 1) What is the author’s argument? (Make note of where he/she states the thesis, when appropriate.)
- 2) How is that argument developed? What are its components, and how are they organized?
- 3) What kinds of sources does the author use, and how does he/she interpret them?
- 4) How compelling is the argument? Does the author achieve what he/she set out to do?
- 5) What kind of intervention is the author making in the field? What other interpretations is he/she adding to or arguing against?
- 6) How does the author identify the larger significance of his/her investigation? (This may overlap with #5.)

Additionally, you will all take turns posting a set of specific questions about the reading on Blackboard the night before each meeting. These should be interpretive questions which address the reading as it

stands, and/or how the reading relates to previous readings; you should not merely ask for follow-up information, unless you are making an interpretive point about what the author has left out. These questions, in conjunction with those above, will serve as the starting point for class discussion, so you will all need to come prepared with responses (whether or not it is your turn to post the questions).

### Research Paper (60%)

You will devote the second half of the semester to developing a 20- to 25-page research project. This process will involve not only the actual research and writing, but other scaffolding such as proposals, peer reviews, revisions, and informal presentations. Guidelines and expectations for these stages can be found below and on separate handouts.

In this course, late assignments are not an option. You must turn in all steps of the research paper on time, or the final result will be seriously compromised.

### Disabilities

If you have specific physical, psychiatric or learning disabilities and require accommodations, please let me know early in the semester so that your learning needs may be appropriately met. You will need to provide documentation of your disability to the Associate Dean and Director of Academic Advising, Joyce Stern, whose office is located in the Student Affairs office at the Rosenfield Center (x3702).

### ***Course texts:***

#### Required texts, available in the bookstore or on reserve in Burling:

Jean & John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, vol. 1* (Chicago, 1991)  
Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects* (Chicago, 2002)

Shorter required readings will be available on reserve, JSTOR, Blackboard, or as handouts (as noted below). Please read each set of assigned readings in the order in which they are listed.

#### Recommended overviews:

Those who have not taken HIS 236 would be well served by looking at a survey of the period (1790-1914). The following can be found in Burling:

- T. W. Heyck, *Peoples of the British Isles (vols. 2&3)*
- Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement*
- F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society*
- E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*
- Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit*

Those who have not taken HIS 295/British Empire may want to use one of the following texts as a resource:

- Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share*
- Denis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience*
- Andrew Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 3: Nineteenth Century*

*Class Meetings and Assignments:*

**I. LIBERALISM, HUMANITARIANISM, AND REFORM, 1790-1867**

**Week 1: “Improvement” at home and abroad**

Mon, Sept 1

Asa Briggs, “Introduction” to *The Age of Improvement, 1783-1867* (London: Longmans, 1959), pp. 1-7 – on reserve

Joseph Hamburger, “The Whig Conscience,” and David Roberts, “The Utilitarian Conscience,” in Peter Marsh, ed., *The Conscience of the Victorian State* (Syracuse, 1979), 19-72 – on reserve

Wed, Sept 3

John Cell, “The Imperial Conscience” (up to p. 205), in *Conscience of the Victorian State* – on reserve

Andrew Porter, “Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism,” in Porter, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. 3: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 198-221 – on reserve

**Week 2: Rethinking power and knowledge**

Mon, Sept 8

Michel Foucault, “Docile Bodies” (selections) and “Panopticism,” from *Discipline and Punish* – Blackboard

Thomas Laqueur, “Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative,” in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (University of California, 1989), 174-204 – Blackboard

Wed, Sept 10

No class

**Week 3: The “Colonization of Consciousness”?**

Mon, Sept 15

Jean & John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*

Wed, Sept 17

Paul Landau, “Hegemony and History in Jean and John L. Comaroff’s *Of Revelation and Revolution*,” *Africa*, Vol.70, No.3 (2000), 501-519 – JSTOR

Elizabeth Elbourne, “Word Made Flesh: Christianity, Modernity, and Cultural Colonialism in the Work of Jean and John Comaroff,” and Sally Engle Merry, “Hegemony and Culture in Historical Anthropology: A Review Essay on Jean and John L. Comaroff’s *Of Revelation and Revolution*,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 108, No. 2 (April, 2003), 435-70 – handout

**Week 4: Cultures of emancipation in metropole and colony**

Mon, Sept 22

Discussion of sources and research methods

Wed, Sept 24

Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects*

## II. ELEVATING THE HUMAN CONDITION IN THE BRITISH WORLD, 1870-1914

### Week 5: “Improvement” at home and abroad

Mon, Sept 29

Jose Harris, *Private Lives, Public Spirit: Britain, 1870-1914* (Penguin, 1993), chapter 1 – on reserve

Cell, “Imperial Conscience” (pp. 205-212), in *Conscience of the Victorian State* – on reserve

Felix Driver, “Exploring ‘Darkest England’: Mapping the Heart of Empire,” from *Geography Militant: Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Blackwell, 2001), 170-98 – on reserve

Philippa Levine, “Colonial Medicine and the Project of Modernity,” from *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (Routledge, 2003), 61-90 – on reserve

Wed, Oct 1

No class – work on your proposal. I will be available in my office during class time for individual consultation.

Fri, Oct 3

**\*Preliminary proposal due by 5:00 p.m.\***

*This should be a one-page document describing your general topic and research question, and the main primary source base through which you will address them – the proposal must demonstrate that you have actually looked at these sources!! Please refer to a separate handout for guidelines on choosing a topic.*

### Week 6: Regulating moral, physical, and social health

Mon, Oct 6:

Judith R. Walkowitz and Daniel J. Walkowitz, “‘We Are Not Beasts of the Field’: Prostitution and the Poor in Plymouth and Southampton under the Contagious Diseases Acts,” *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3/4, Special Double Issue: Women's History (Winter-Spring, 1973), 73-106 – JSTOR

Antoinette Burton, “The White Women’s Burden: British Feminists and ‘The Indian Woman,’ 1865-1914,” in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Indiana, 1992), 137-57 – on reserve (E-book also available through the library catalogue)

Philippa Levine, “What Difference Did Empire Make?: Sex, Gender and Sanitary Reform in the British Empire,” in Michael Worton and Nana Wilson-Tagoe, eds., *National Healths: Gender, Sexuality and Health in a Cross-Cultural Context* – E-reserve

Wed, Oct 8:

Seth Koven, “Borderlands: Women, Voluntary Action, and Child Welfare in Britain, 1840-1914,” in Koven and Sonya Michel, *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States* (Routledge, 1993), 94-135 – E-reserve

## **Week 7: Exhibiting and performing the civilizing mission**

### Mon, Oct 13

John Mackenzie, "The Imperial Exhibitions," from *Propaganda and Empire* (Manchester, 1984), 97-120  
– on reserve

Jonathan Schneer, "Popular Culture in the Imperial Metropolis," from *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (Yale, 1999), 93-115 – E-reserve

### Wed, Oct 15

No class – use the rest of the week to work on your research. I will be available in my office during class time for individual consultation about your projects.

*FALL BREAK*

## **III: DOING HISTORY**

### **Week 8: Taking stock**

#### Mon, Oct 27

Research group A meets in my office

#### Wed, Oct 29

Research group B meets in my office

*Your assignment for this week is to get a solid grip on the specific historical context of your topic. Be ready to give a brief progress report on your research as well.*

### **Week 9: Sources**

#### Mon, Nov 3

No meetings

#### Wed, Nov 5

Full group meeting in seminar room

*Post your full bibliography on Blackboard by 7 p.m. Tuesday night. Divide the bibliography into primary and secondary sources. Put a star next to the most important sources in each category and be ready to discuss them with the group.*

### **Week 10: Refining your plan**

#### Mon, Nov 10

Research group A meets in my office

#### Wed, Nov 12

Research group B meets in my office

Prepare a verbal proposal and outline for your group meeting. Here is what you need to convey:

- 1) What is the research question and/or historical problem?
- 2) How will your primary sources and method of using them address this question?
- 3) How is the argument shaping up? (i.e. how will you answer the research question?) What are you arguing against?
- 4) How does your investigation relate to the relevant historiography?
- 5) "Who cares?": i.e., what is the larger significance of this investigation? How will your focused study help tell a larger story?
- 6) Your paper should have 2-4 subsections. What will each section accomplish, and how will it help answer the larger question?

### **Week 11: Introduction**

Mon, Nov 17

Research group A meets in my office

Wed, Nov 19

Research group B meets in my office

*Introduction (2-4 pp) due to me and your group members by 7 p.m. the night before your group is meeting. The introduction should articulate include all of the issues you grappled with last week: research question, argument, counterargument, sources/methodology, historiography, larger significance, and road map. Although you may find you need to revise the introduction after you have finished the body of the paper, you should use these opening paragraphs to lay out the interpretive and organizational framework of the project.*

### **Week 12: Body**

Mon, Nov 24

No meetings. I will be available in my office during class time for individual consultation.

Wed, Nov 26

No meetings.

*THANKSGIVING*

### **Week 13: Body and conclusion**

Mon, Dec 1

No meetings. I will be available in my office during class time for individual consultation.

Wed, Dec 3

**\*Complete paper due by 5:00\***

## **Week 14: Peer reviews**

Mon, Dec 8

Research group A.1 meets in my office

Research group A.2 meets in my office

Wed, Dec 10

Research group B meets in my office

*Before your meeting, please prepare answers to the following questions about your partner's paper:*

- 1) *Argument: is the thesis clearly stated in one or two sentences toward the end of the introduction?*
- 2) *Framework: Does the author's introduction situate this argument by indicating the research question, the historical context, the counterargument, the relevant historiography, and a "road map" of the body of the paper?*
- 3) *Organization and prose: Does the author develop the argument clearly throughout the paper, through a logical progression of ideas and a descriptive and sharp use of language? Does each subsection have an introductory paragraph that conveys the overall point of that part of the discussion?*
- 4) *Evidence: Are the different components of the argument convincingly born out by the author's use of sources? Do any components need to be developed further?*
- 5) *Broader significance: Is it clear why the reader should care about this study?*

## **Week 15 (Exam Week): Wrapping up**

Mon, Dec 15

I will be in my office in the morning if you have any last-minute questions to discuss.

Thurs, Dec 18

***\*Revised paper due by 5:00\****

Please note that college policy dictates that all student work must be turned in by 5:00 on the Friday of exam week unless you are taking an incomplete in the course.