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**HIST 4910: Topics in Public History: Britain, Ireland, and the British Empire (Fall 2017)**

**Amy Woodson-Boulton**

## HIST 4910 PUBLIC HISTORY WEBSITE AND RELATED ASSIGNMENTS

### Tragedy or Triumph?

### Contested Representations of the British Empire in the Post-Colonial Era

#### DESCRIPTION

##### Suggested Themes:

1. Ireland and the Empire: Colony/Union
2. The British Empire and the World Wars
3. Ireland and the Empire: Independence
4. Decolonization, Nostalgia, and Amnesia

For the purposes of this project, you are going to take on the role of a *public historian*. As you will be learning over the course of this semester, **a public historian is anyone who helps explain history to a broad public audience**. Most public historians have at least some academic training as historians, but many are employed as journalists, novelists, or curators rather than as academics.

As you will also be learning over the course of the semester, **the British Empire and its legacies are very hotly debated topics right now**, for a variety of reasons. Imperial legacies are divisive in part because many Britons perceive British identity itself to be changing (or under threat) and because, as we gain greater historical perspective on the colonial and post-colonial eras, **many people are increasingly articulating the idea that the British and other modern European empires shaped the world we live in**. Much of the debate now centers on whether this is a tragedy (ushering in global inequality, entrenched institutional racism, and environmental catastrophe) or a triumph (ushering in globalization, liberal democracy, and technological progress). We will be exploring how modern representations of British imperial history engage with these questions.

Because this is a collaborative project, I am giving you parameters and ideas, but **we will develop the website over the course of the semester based on students' individual interests and how these work together**. I have therefore tried to write each assignment for all possibilities, but please note that it is possible that not all of the questions or examples will relate to your specific project; that's fine, and we will work out together how to approach your topic. In fact, **the themes above that I am imagining for now may change as you decide on your projects and we figure out the best arrangement of these into a coherent online presentation**. (For instance, we may decide that themes based on types of public history representation, chronology, or nature of the public debate may make more sense as organizing principles.)

**That said, we aim to create a site that will do the following:**

- A. Introduce a wide, lay public (i.e., non-historians) to why there is so much debate over how to tell the collective histories and individual stories of the British Empire, and why this is important;
- B. Provide the public with examples of how the British Empire and its myriad imperial legacies appears in the public sphere;
- C. Craft a site that is accessible and understandable to non-specialists while preserving the complexity of historians' ideas about the Empire and its legacies.

<b>Public History Website</b>		
Research Abstract	4	5%
Research Paper	8	15%
Public History Presentation		
Group page	9 to 14	3%
Individual page	9 to 14	5%
Draft Public History Website		
Group page	12	5%
Individual page	12	8%
Final Public History Presentation	Finals	8%
Reflection Essay	Finals	8%
Final Public History Website		
Group page	Finals	8%
Individual page	Finals	15%
		100%

**TIMELINE**

**Research Abstract, due Fri, Sept 22 (Week 4), 350 words, 5%**

This is a first stab at your project: that is, you will be seeking out an example of the public representation of British imperial history to study. You will need to find an example that:

- A. Was created, built, or established *before* 1945, but has come under criticism, revision, or scrutiny since; OR
- B. Was created, built, or established *after* 1945.

You will begin by conducting historical research that will probably be familiar to you: you will seek out examples of public representations of British imperial and colonial history, look up scholarly articles about the topic, and relate your chosen example to what public history scholars have written about issues of representation.

**Your 350-word abstract should include the following:**

1. One or more examples of public representations of British imperial history, with its/their dates of creation, and its relation to one of the four themes listed above.
2. The issues raised by this representation:
  - a. Historiographical: What fields of historical scholarship will you consider in your research?
  - b. Methodological: What questions of public representation will you consider in your research?
3. Your proposed process and sources:
  - a. How you will examine the representation itself (i.e., what form does this example of public history take? What is its content?). If this is a monument or museum, is there a way for you to access images or plans? If this was an event, can you find descriptions of it?
  - b. How you will analyze debates about your example, either at its creation/inception or since (e.g., from Parliamentary debates, articles in the periodical press, websites, etc.).

### **Research Paper with Bibliography, due Fri, Oct 20 (Week 8), 10-12 pages, 15%**

Although you should certainly write in accessible, clear, and elegant prose, this paper is designed as the *research background* for your webpage, rather than its actual text. The goal here is to understand your topic/example thoroughly, in light of existing scholarship.

- A. ***Contextualize and analyze your example(s) of public representations of the history of the British Empire.*** What is this public representation of the British Empire (i.e., what is its form and content)? When was this made/created/established? What was/is at stake? How has it come under scrutiny or criticism in the post-colonial era?
- B. ***Relate your public representation to historical scholarship.*** How do you see your public representation relating to historical scholarship? What have scholars and the public debated on this topic?
- C. ***Relate your public representation to public history scholarship.*** What form does your public representation take? What is erased or forgotten? Who is included, who is excluded? What kind of access does the public have? What issues does the form or content raise?

### **Student Presentations (Weeks 9-14), 5-8 minutes**

During weeks 9-14, we will investigate your research topics in relation to the four themes listed above. For the first class meeting each week, we will read about how a particular issue relating to each theme has been contested in scholarly and public debates. At the next class meeting, we hear from the relevant student group about their theme/landing page, and from individual students about their topics.

- A. Group project (landing page): introduce the class to your group's general topic (5 minutes); include images, audio, and/or video for your landing page (must have at least 3 non-textual objects), 3% of final grade

- B. Individual project (individual page): present your example in 5-8 minutes; include images, audio, and/or video for your site (must have at least 3 non-textual objects), 5% of final grade

### **Draft Webpages, due Fri, Nov 17 (Week 12)**

Regardless of when you complete your group and individual presentation, in Week 12 you will turn in a draft of your webpages, including both texts and images/clips for your group landing page and for your individual page. The more polished this is, the better your final project will be! *Your draft must be on the LMU Build Word Press site (the site will not be public at this time).*

Group page: 5% of final grade *You will have a designated area of responsibility for this.*  
Individual page: 8% of final grade

### **Website, Presentation, and Reflection Essay, due Weds, Dec 13 (Finals Week)**

- A. Final Public History Website (submitted on WordPress):
  - a. Group/landing page, with bibliography, 8% of final grade
  - b. Individual page, with bibliography, 15% of final grade
- B. Final Public History Presentation (in class, at time of scheduled final), 5 minutes (individuals only), 8% of final grade, on the topic of your individual page and how this relates to the landing page.
- C. Reflection Essay (submitted via Brightspace) (3-5 pages), 8% of final grade, on what you have learned, the process you completed, what worked well, what worked less well (or not at all!), what you would do next time, and what you have learned about public history.

### **Potential examples of public history representations:**

Monuments, plaques, historical designations

Cemeteries

Museums

Historical novels, narrative films, narrative television programs

Documentaries

Popular histories

Children's literature

Works of art

Decorative art/memorabilia/reproductions (e.g., "Keep Calm and Carry On")

Oral history projects

Online resources

Archives/libraries

Events/ceremonies/dramatic recreations (esp. around centenaries and notable dates)