British History Since ca. 1450

Answer two questions. You are allowed four hours to complete this examination (two hours per question). You are on your honor not to consult any other materials, including notes or papers stored on your computer. Please return your completed exam paper to the graduate office by 5 PM today. Good luck.

1. Today Britain ranks as about 14th among industrialized nations; in 1820 it had been first, the envy of its neighbors. What happened and what kind of explanation have historians offered for this visible decline?

2. 1640, 1649, 1679-81, 1688-89 – all moments of severe instability, war, regicide, or rumors of war. What was wrong with the three kingdoms as played out in the center of the polity, in court and parliament. Was this a series of accidents as some contemporary historians have argued or where there deep structural forces at work here as the Marxist once claimed?

3. Other European powers looked at the English state in 1660 and judged it a morass of factions and deeply unstable. By the 1720s a shrewd observer would have seen a remarkable transformation with ominous implications. What happened in the mean time?

4. Britain became the first modern industrial nation partly as the result of spontaneous forces working to reshape society and economy and partly because of the practical initiatives of ordinary artisans and small businessmen, yeomen and tenant farmers, who engaged in experimentation in their respective spheres of work, and also due to the growing interest in science among entrepreneurs and intellectuals ever since the triumph of Newtonian physics.

Offer your explanation of how the “Industrial Revolution” came about, and address whether the phenomenon owed itself more to the impersonal working of socio-economic forces, or to the practical and intellectual concerns of interested individuals and parties. Identify how socio-economic forces, in the demographic, agricultural and manufacturing sectors, worked in tandem to bring about macro and micro structural changes. Discuss, finally, the appropriateness of the term “Industrial Revolution,” and whether our traditional understanding of its
meaning needs to be modified. Include in your answer, where relevant, references to the appropriate scholarship.

5. British religiosity evolved from the rebellious Puritans and wild enthusiasts of the mid-seventeenth century to the staid Anglicanism of Victoria’s age, sometimes described as “the Tory party at worship.” Discuss episodes in this process that support or refute such a characterization.

6. Discuss the meaning and value of “Victorianism” as a characterization of cultural and intellectual life in Britain from the 1830s to 1900. What do you think is the best way to periodize (or subdivide) this era? Do you find the Great Exhibition of 1851 emblematic of Victorian values?

7. How did the rise and fall of British imperial power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries relate to shifting European alliances and European wars (including the world wars)?

8. Examine the emergence and triumph of the Reform Movement in England, from the early conflicts surrounding John Wilkes, and including the impact of the American Revolution to the passage of the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, 1884, and finally 1918. Explain why the final introduction of universal suffrage occurred piecemeal. How did Whigs/Liberals and Tories view the prospect of reform at the advent of the passage of each major Act? Account for the shifts that occurred in these views. Explain, too, the legal and social changes that eventually made it possible for women to obtain the suffrage.

9. Discuss and evaluate Niall Ferguson’s account of the causes of World War I, as set forth in The Pity of War, with particular reference to Great Britain’s role in the coming of the conflict. Compare, too, his sense of both the soldiers’ and the civilians’ viewpoints about the prospect of war and their actual experience of the conflict to Paul Fussell’s depictions in The Great War in Modern Memory.

10. Discuss the changing nature of the general attitude toward Empire held both by the British state and its people from the hey-day of Empire ca. 1880 until the Suez crisis of 1956. Explain how attitudes toward race and class may have informed such views, and how domestic social and political changes over the period, as well as changes in Britain’s international position brought about by two world wars, shaped the transformation of British attitudes toward Empire.