



**Course Title and Number:** British Culture and Visual Media

**Instructor:** David Edye

**Aims and Objectives:**

This course offers students an introduction to British Culture and Society by examining the history of its major social and political institutions, the cultural values of its peoples and significant contemporary socio-political issues and debates. The course encourages critical discussion about the differences between US and British society and will address the relation of Britain to Europe, past, present and future. The course aims to facilitate student orientation in the context of British society and workplace, and to offer an important socio-historical framework relevant to the other course they will take. The course requires an extended essay on a selected field of British visual media. Meetings with the faculty advisor and one with a peer group of co-students will provide exchange of information and evaluation of goals, methods and findings. Extensive field study is expected.

**Required Text:**

John Oakland, *British Civilization* (Routledge, London 2002)

O'Sullivan, Dutton and Rayner, *Studying the Media* (Arnold, London 1998)

**Some useful Websites**

Encyclopaedia Britannica online <http://search.eb.com/>

Public Record Office [www.pro.gov.uk](http://www.pro.gov.uk)

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

[www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page1.asp](http://www.royal.gov.uk/output/Page1.asp)

Guardian [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

Times [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk)

Parliament [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)

Greater London Authority [www.london.gov.uk](http://www.london.gov.uk)

No 10 Downing Street [www.number-10.gov.uk](http://www.number-10.gov.uk)

Museum of London [www.museum-london.org.uk](http://www.museum-london.org.uk)

[www.oldbaileyonline.org/history/communities/black.html](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/history/communities/black.html)

[www.movinghere.org.uk](http://www.movinghere.org.uk)

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[www.blackpresence.co.uk/](http://www.blackpresence.co.uk/)  
[www.fantompowa.net/Flame/slavery\\_in\\_london.html](http://www.fantompowa.net/Flame/slavery_in_london.html)  
[www.museumoflondon.org.uk/MOLsite/learning/features\\_facts/general\\_3.html](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/MOLsite/learning/features_facts/general_3.html)  
 Imperial War Museum [www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)  
 British Library [www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)  
[www.history.ac.uk/cmh/cmh.main.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/cmh/cmh.main.html)  
 Women's Library [www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk](http://www.thewomenslibrary.ac.uk)

**Topics covered will include:**

- Introduction to British Culture and Society
  - UK / USA cultural similarities and differences.
  - Devolution. Video: 'Englishness'
- Class and Power
  - The Party System, trends in Contemporary Politics (Chapter 3).
  - Middle and Working Classes.
  - The Monarchy and the Aristocracy.
  - A Republic in Britain? Video: The End of the Line?
- The Media
  - Press, Radio, TV: Ownership, Regulation and Influence.
- Education and Health
  - The British Education System
  - The National Health Service (NHS) – Social vs. Private Welfare Culture
- International Relations
  - The United Kingdom and the European Union (Chapter 4)
  - The 'euro' debate
  - Extended Essay - Progress Reports and Tutorials. Journal

**Co-curricular activities will include:**

- **British Film Institute**  
An important resource for courses with a film and media content. The institute took over the National Film Theatre's role and has a regular program of important films, archive and poster material
- **Greenwich**  
The focus is on Britain's maritime heritage, emphasising the importance of sea-faring to an island which developed a commercial and military dominance in the past.
- **Parliament tour**  
Tour of the building and the two Houses (Lords + Commons) when not being used for debates. Access is only permitted on certain days/times and the guides are variable in quality, being conducted by various staff

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who have worked there for years. The building is a Victorian fantasy with extraordinary decorative motifs linked to UK history and government so it has a visual dimension regardless of the commentary. Useful for reinforcing classes on British/UK identity and politics/government.

- **Tate Modern**

There is considerable resistance from some students to the type of works in Tate Modern. Showing a video as preparation is advisable, therefore, so they reflect upon the traditional way that “art” came in framed rectangles on walls and using very limited media (oils, watercolours, marble etc). Examples of works by the young British artists (yBa's) can be shown in class and followed up with more examples at the gallery. If possible, asking students to compare with the National Gallery so they can write an essay on how successfully the two types of public galleries serve their purpose – and to question what the purpose is.

### **Instructional Methods:**

Classroom format - lectures, videos, discussions and set fieldwork

### **Evaluation Plan:**

Students are required to keep abreast of British current affairs by reading any of the daily broadsheet newspapers (Guardian, Independent, Financial Times, Times or Daily Telegraph) and watching Channel 4's evening news (7.00pm daily) or BBC2's 'Newsnight' (10.30pm daily). Students will be split into working groups who will visit and research a selected area of London. Each group will give a 15 - 20 minute presentation of their findings in session 12. Students will be required to research an aspect of British Culture and produce an extended essay on that topic (2,500 words). Students will be required also to write a weekly journal in the form of a letter outlining their experiences.

### **Grade Scale:**

Attendance, Presentations and Participation	15%
Mid-Term Exam	20%
Extended Essay (2,500 words)	30% March 19 <sup>th</sup>
Final Written Exam	35% March 19 <sup>th</sup>

**Short Presentation** –Choose one of the following topics and present your findings in a 10 minute oral presentation to the class.

#### **1. Mythical Britain** – Legends, Folklore, and Tourism in Britain

To what extent do British people identify with the island's ancient histories? How do heritage and tourist industries exploit the mythology of ancient Britain?

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## **2. Hollywood-UK – The Image of Britain in American Movies**

How have Britain and the British people been represented in Hollywood movies? What characteristics have been highlighted? Are there differences in terms of nationality? From your experiences and class discussions how 'realistic' a picture is given? Consider issues concerning stereotyping.

## **3. The Parliamentary System**

Discuss the major differences and similarities between the US and UK governments. How different are the electoral and election processes? How similar are the major political parties?

## **4. Class and Society**

It is often said that Britain is a class society. What do you understand by this? To what extent does the notion of class in the UK differ from that in the US?

## **5. Place and Environment**

What cultural differences are likely to characterise people from rural and urban environments? Why is the image of Traditional Britain more closely associated with the rural environment?

## **6. Ecological Activism**

Discuss the rise of non-violent and direct action movements in the UK. What are the beliefs and aims of the following groups: Greenpeace, Reclaim the Streets, The Animal Liberation Front, Critical Mass and Earth First.

## **7. Nationalism in the UK**

Outline the policies of the nationalist parties of the UK. Plaid Cymru, Scottish National Party, Sinn Fein

## **ASSIGNMENT 1**

Each group will be assigned one of the areas listed below. In your own time visit the area and examine:

- The ethnic and national character of the local population.
- The kinds of retail activity and housing in the area.
- Current local political issues.
- Buildings or sites of historical interest.

Wherever possible you should use local websites (.gov.uk), and local research resources such as Public Libraries and Local Newspapers.

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On March 19<sup>th</sup> you will present your findings in a 10 - 15 minute group presentation to the class.

**Portobello Road :**

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea,  
Kensington Town Hall, Horton Street, W8 7NX Tel: 0207 937 5464  
(Information offices : 0207 361 2827/8)  
Central Library, Phillimore Walk, W8 7RX

**Brick Lane:**

London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Information: 0207 512 4200  
Library: Whitechapel, 77 Whitechapel Street E1

**Brixton :**

London Borough of Lambeth, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton Hill, SW2 1RW  
Tel : 0207 926 1000 Library: 0207 926 9325

**Camden Town:**

London Borough of Camden, Camden Town Hall, Judd St, London WC1H 9JE  
Swiss Cottage Central Library: 0207 413 6522  
[www.camdentown.co.uk](http://www.camdentown.co.uk)

**Soho (Old Compton Street) and Chinatown (Gerrard Street, Wardour Street):**

London Borough of Westminster, [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk)

**ASSIGNMENT 2**

Extended Essay on Culture

General Guidelines:

Choose an aspect of Contemporary British Culture as your research topic. Topics should be from the following areas:

news media  
advertising  
magazines  
cinema  
television  
popular music and video  
contemporary art

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fashion

In your own time gather information about your topic using a variety of information sources. Wherever possible liaise with other students regarding the sharing of information sources. Students must demonstrate an understanding of different theoretical approaches to visual culture and mass media.

Your extended essay (2,500 words) must demonstrate your ability to contextualise your topic within the social and political framework of contemporary UK society and issues discussed in class.

Your essay should make use of at least **FOUR** textual sources.

Previous essay topics have included:

Organic Food in the UK  
Retailing in the UK and USA  
US - UK Television  
Rave Culture in the UK  
Differences in UK and US advertising  
British Pub Etiquette  
Hip Hop – Punk  
Soap Operas – UK and USA  
Fashion – London and New York

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