

History 391 - Modern London: the imperial metropolis

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We explore the making of the world city and imperial capital, from the end of the Napoleonic wars through the onset of “Cool Britannia” in the 1990s. At the heart of our investigation are the challenges of metropolitan culture: urban poverty, demographic movement, the built environment, changing modes of economic life-- and the artistic forms in which they found expression. The West End luxury markets of the 18th century, the notorious rookeries of the Victorian East End, and struggles over civil and gender rights, were central problems for London and her inhabitants. The metropolitan 20th century witnessed the catastrophe of the Great War, interwar political activism, and the terrors of the Blitz. A rigid class hierarchy and aristocratic privilege coexisted with new multicultural and interracial patterns of living. The legacy of imperial mission and the growing challenges to empire that exploded in the postwar era, were visible in parliamentary debate, print culture, and documentary forms. Within the framework of a narrative urban history, we will consult a variety of rich primary sources. Students will use these and other materials to develop 25pp. research papers over the course of the term.