

The British Empire

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History 496BE
Spring 2014
Time: TTh 9:30-10:45
Location: SH184
Class # 18038

Description: This course explores the causes, course, and consequences of British imperialism from its origins in the late-sixteenth century through the dissolution of the British Empire in the late-twentieth century. At its height, the British Empire encompassed one quarter of the earth, and was so geographically dispersed that the sun literally never set on British-controlled territory. This course will examine how and why Britain acquired such a vast empire, the nature of its rule, forms of resistance, the reasons for its disintegration, and its continuing legacy in Britain and around the world.

Objectives

- To develop a basic chronology of British imperialism
- To analyze the political, economic, social, strategic, and cultural forces that influenced the British empire
- To consider the consequences of imperialism at the individual, national, and global levels
- To reach and express in written form nuanced understandings of the British empire based on the careful reading and analysis of primary and secondary historical sources

Readings (All of the following are required and are available at the Matador Bookstore):

- Philippa Levine, *British Empire: Sunrise to Sunset*
- *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the British Empire*
- Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*
- Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles*
- Richard Toye, *Churchill's Empire* — *By it*
- Caroline Elkins, *Imperial Reckoning: The Untold Story of Britain's Gulag in Kenya*
- *Small plans → Somalia, Cambodia*

Assignments/Requirements

- Regular class attendance and informed participation in discussion (5%).
- ~~Two 3-page papers, the first analyzing *Robinson Crusoe*, due Feb. 11; the second analyzing the imperial views of Chamberlain, Clifford, and Churchill, due April 1 (15%)~~
- ~~Two reading worksheets, due Feb. 25 (on Jasanoff) and May 1 (Elkins) (10% each).~~
- A multiple-choice / fill-in-the-blank mid-term exam, scheduled for March 11 (15%).
- A 3-page Colony Brief about a region that was colonized by the British – either formally or informally – summarizing the reasons why Britain colonized that region, the nature of British rule in that region, the circumstances of Britain's departure from that region, and the present-day legacy or consequences of Britain's presence. Due April 22 (10%).
- A comprehensive final examination scheduled for Tuesday, May 13, from 8:00-10:00 am, that will include identifications, short answer, and essay questions (20%).

For each assign
write a
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- on each
short piece
- one article
short piece

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2) Nature of British rule
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Alan Malfavon
Professor Jeffrey Auerbach
History 496 BE
April 14th, 2014

Colony Brief: The Falklands/ Las Malvinas.

The British Empire has been recognized as a global force of ~~geopolitical supremacy~~ that through its superior naval and military power was able to dominate one quarter of the globe.

Although the presence of the British is well known in Southeast Asia, Africa, the South Pacific and North America, British imperialism, for the most part, took an indirect imperial approach in Latin America. Rather than establishing colonies and protectorates under direct British rule most of Latin America saw the imperial might of Britain through the significant economic presence Britons enacted in the region. Nevertheless, there is one exception to the British imperial experience in Latin America and is found in the small archipelago in the South Atlantic off the coast of Argentina known as The Falklands or Las Malvinas. It was in the Falklands where the British established a full colonial presence dating back to the early 19th century, presence that is still valid to this day. Their experience has not only affected the view of Latin Americans towards the British, but British presence in the Falklands helped determine the course of nations such as Argentina in the 20th century.

~~We can summarize the motives for Britain's colonization of the region~~ as two different reasons: Establishing a geopolitical presence in the South Atlantic and in Latin America as well as taking advantage of profitable economic opportunities. Regarding the first reason, concerning the establishment of a strong geopolitical presence, we must trace the trajectory of European and British presence in the Falklands. Both the Argentines and the British vary in their statements when acknowledging who was the first one to discover the Falklands. According to the Argentine version, the Malvinas were first sighted by Esteban Gomez, a Portuguese Sailor in

Magellan's expedition in 1520. The British version on the other hand states that the Falklands were first discovered by Captain John Davies in 1592 and that in 1598 Sebald van de Weert chartered three of the Falkland Islands.² Despite seeming differences concerning which nation discovered the Falklands first, it can be agreed that the first Europeans to colonize the island were the French, specifically Antoine Louis de Bougainville, a French captain who in 1764 "established a small settlement called Port Louis on East Falklands."³ After the foundations of a French colony in the Falklands were laid, Spanish authorities soon protested this territorial claim made by the French as it violated Spanish sovereignty as they based their protests in proofs of Spanish discovery and the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, eventually forcing the French to leave permanently by 1767.⁴ In 1767 Spain took direct control of the Falklands and established a new colony unknowingly of an established British presence in the islands since 1765 when "Comodore John Byron, the poet's grandfather, arrived on the islands and claimed them for King George III."⁵ The British established the settlement of Port Edgmont on West Falkland and endured constant threats of invasion by the Spanish, eventually being forced to leave the Falklands by 1774, when the colony of Port Edgmont was shut down.⁶

As the British left the Falklands, Spanish presence thrived, and from "1774 to 1810, Spain, through its vice-royalty in Buenos Aires, was the sole administrator of the Falkland Islands."⁷ With the invasion of Spain by Napoleonic forces in 1811, and the British attack to Buenos Aires in 1806, the Spanish governor of the Malvinas fled, leaving the Falklands

¹ Daniel K. Gibran, *The Falklands War: Britain versus the Past in the South Atlantic* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 22

² *Ibid.* 23

³ *Ibid.* 25

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.* 26

⁷ *Ibid.* 27

uninhabited and without rule until 1816, when the United Provinces of Rio de La Plata declared their independence from Spain and named "Don Pablo Areguati as governor of the islands and also granted fishery and livestock concessions to Jorge Pacheco and Louis Vernet."⁸ Louis Vernet not only served as "appointed governor of the new military district of Las Malvinas"⁹ but he also created an economic monopoly where he controlled fishing and seal hunting activities in the islands. After seizing three American ships for violating the fishing and hunting restrictions, the U.S ship Lexington was sent to destroy the Argentine settlement of Puerto Soledad and the settlement was left in shambles. Argentine authorities attempted to reestablish control in 1832 by sending Juan Mestivier as a new governor, but after experiencing a mutiny he was killed and the Falklands were left without rule.¹⁰ The British again consolidated their presence in the Falklands, now in a permanent manner, when in 1832 Captain J. J. Onslow arrived in Port Edgmont on West Falkland and took possession of the island taking down the Argentine flag and hoisting the Union Jack with the pretext that "The Falklands were *res nullius*, belonging to no one, and therefore open to occupation by the British."¹¹ British authorities took advantage of the significant political, military and economic instability of the newly independent Argentine government in order to take possession of the Falklands and establish permanent control in the islands. By utilizing the plea that the islands were "up for grabs" the British established a significant geopolitical presence in the South Atlantic, required route of travel of vessels attempting to travel from the Atlantic to the Pacific, while at the same time established a base of operations by which the Empire could exert greater control of the area as Britain became increasingly active in Latin America by modes of economic enterprises.

⁸ Daniel K. Gibran, *The Falklands War: Britain versus the Past in the South Atlantic* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 27

⁹ *Ibid.* 28

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 29

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Another significant reason by which the British decided to colonize the Falklands was the promising economic opportunities the islands could provide at the time. The Falklands being situated in the South Atlantic close to Cape Horn brought about merchants from all around the world but specially Americans that motivated with the Gold Rush of 1849 decided to settle in the Pacific coast of the United States and used the islands "for supplies and repairs on their long voyage around Cape Horn."¹² Also the establishment of the Falkland Islands Company helped preserve a significant imperial presence in the Falklands. The Falkland Islands Company was a commercial enterprise society which aimed to profit from trade with passing ships which in 1852 "received a royal charter from Queen Victoria to develop the colony."¹³ The company introduced sheep to the islands and by 1860 "the company had 200 cheviot and Southdown sheep and 6,000 mixed breeds on the islands, was sending over shepherds from the British Isles to tend them, and was buying up all the land in the islands," as well as owning the warehouses where wool was stored, ships by which it exported wool and imported goods from Britain and controlled the market in which wool and sheep were sold¹⁴

The nature of British rule in the Falklands ~~is contrastive to~~ ^{contrasts with} the nature of British influence in the rest of Latin America. Whereas in most of Latin America the British ensured economic and political dominance over Latin America through indirect but significant economic involvement, it was in the Falklands where the British established colonial presence through self-rule. The first British Governor of the Falklands was Lieutenant Henry Smith who arrived to the islands in 1834, being replaced four years after by Lieutenant W. Robinson who relegated his post

¹² Fritz L. Hoffman and Olga Mingo Hoffman, *Sovereignty in Dispute: The Falklands/Malvinas, 1493-1982* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984), 90

¹³ *Ibid* 91.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

to John Tyssen.¹⁵ As the settlement did not showed considerable improvement Queen Victoria commissioned Captain Richard C. Moody to transfer the settlement to Port William and on June 23rd 1843, Queen Victoria “issued a letter patent incorporating the islands into the dominions of the crown, an act that in theory would permit them to have their own legislative council and issue their own ordinances.”¹⁶ Not only did British authorities ^{take} took direct control of the islands but Queen Victoria herself proved to be rather involved in the consolidation of British power in the islands. By incorporating the islands into the dominions of the empire, the territory not only became an official possession of the British Empire but now enjoyed significant amount of liberty in political matters by establishing modes of government that resembled the white settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, differing with the autocratic and centralized governments that were being experienced in other parts of the Empire such as India.

Britain to this day holds control of the Falkland Islands and ensures a constant presence in ^{if} ~~the said territory~~ as one of the last British imperial possessions. The British had only left on two occasions, the first being in 1774 and the second during the brief period of time by which the Argentine army took control of the islands in the Falklands War of 1982. In the first instance, the British were forced to abandon the Falklands in 1774 due to mounting Spanish military pressure on the British settlers to abandon the islands while in the second instance the British governor of the Falklands was forced to leave as the Argentine military took control of the islands in the surprising invasion that sparked the war in April 2nd 1982.¹⁷ From the period of 1833, when the British regained control of the islands, up to 1982, the Empire was the absolute authority in the

¹⁵ Fritz L. Hoffman and Olga Mingo Hoffman, *Sovereignty in Dispute: The Falklands/Malvinas, 1493-1982* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1984),90

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Daniel K. Gibran, *The Falklands War: Britain versus the Past in the South Atlantic* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 69

Falklands. Their uninterrupted control was altered by surprise during the Argentinean invasion on April 2nd 1982, but after two months of hostilities and great casualties for the Argentinean army, the British regained their territorial possessions and hold control in the area to this day.

The most important present day consequence of British presence in the Falklands is without doubt the fall of the military dictatorship in Argentina that since the 1970s terrorized its population through tactics of internal terrorism and political repression. After the war ended Argentina plunged into economic and political chaos as the last of the generals of the military junta, "Reynaldo Bigone, called for elections in October of 1983 and handed over government to the elected president Raul Ricardo Alfonsin."¹⁸ The Falklands War not only demoralized Argentineans and served to establish a clear reminder in the Argentinean mindset of British imperial power well in force in the late 20th century, but it also helped to galvanize repudiation and public support against the tyranny of the Military Junta that had ruled over Argentina despotically since 1976. British imperialism once more helped to define the course of a Latin American nation, as it had done in many instances during the 19th century while at the same time asserting power over the region.

Superior!

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¹⁸ Andrew Graham-Yooll, *Imperial Skirmishes: War and Gunboat Diplomacy in Latin America* (Canada: Olive Branch Press, 2002), 174

