

## ***SPRING 2008***



### **Great Social Transformations: Precursors of the Present**

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#### **Course Description:**

Many of the great societal changes of the past 500 years whose repercussions still reverberate throughout today's world initially occurred, or were centered in England. Among these "Great Transformations" were the Protestant Reformation, the emergence of democratic representative government, the scientific and industrial revolutions, the development of a middle-class consumer economy, two world-wide wars and their resulting geo-political re-alignments across the globe, and increasingly diverse and multi-cultural societies. Even more pointedly, these developments are all especially relevant to America's current role in the world. This course will survey and explore these transformations through lectures, discussions, and visits to sites in or near London that provide a firsthand acquaintance with these events and a glimpse into their implications. Our overall purpose will be to relate these major shifts in society to the way we now live our lives.

#### **Why Study these Great Transformations?**

It has become commonplace to observe that America has entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the world's sole military and major economic super-power. Some observers see the U.S. as having taken on the imperial mantle of the former British Empire. It is this situation which provides the most compelling rationale for this course. In this context of American hegemony it is increasingly important to



understand the “Great Transformations” that have shaped our western consciousness and the ways in which we now see the world. Our underlying goals will be to more fully appreciate these socio-cultural developments, to comprehend their complex inter-relationships, to understand the cumulative matrix they have formed as we Americans concern themselves with our involvement on the world stage, and perhaps to better recognize the intersections of our own biographies and this larger history.

### **Basic Course Outline:**

*(the course will include both weekly class sessions and outside excursions)*

Week 1: Great Social Transformations: disruptions of continuity.

*Transforming Changes over the past 500 years & their locus in London/England.*

Week 2: The Protestant Reformation: new varieties of belief.

*The European and English Reformations*

Week 3: The Emergence of Democratic Representative Government:  
who speaks for me?

*The emergence of English Parliamentary Government.*

Week 4: The Scientific Revolution: how should we trust experience?

*Early English Philosophers and Scientists (e.g. Bacon, Newton)*

Week 5: The Industrial Revolution: making a living, making a life.

*Shaping Events: Acts of Enclosure, the Steam Engine, the Factory.*

Week 6: The Victorian Era: appropriate behaviors, both individual and societal.

*Middle Class Morals and Social Reforms; Empire and Colonialism*

Week 7: Darwin and Evolution: how did it all get this way?

*Major Paradigm Shifts – Explaining human life and the Social Sciences*

Week 8: World-Altering War - 1914-1945: diplomacy by other means?

*Technological, Political, and Social Impacts of the Great Conflagration.*

Week 9: The Making of the Middle East: shaping the conflicts to come.

*Unanticipated outcomes of the Great War and subsequent events*

Week 10: The Decline of Empire: giving birth to a new world order?

*Parallels and Differences Between the Rise and Decline of the British Empire and America's Current Place in World Affairs.*

**Course materials** will include short excerpts from a wide variety of sources which may include Jacob Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*; Michael A. Toth, “Introduction to the Four Transformations;” Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*; Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations*; Jeffrey Goldsworthy, *The Sovereignty of Parliament*; James Gleick, *Isaac Newton*; Richard Hamblyn, *The Invention of Clouds*; Gerhard E. Lenski, *Human Societies*; Leon Uris, *Trinity*; Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*; A. N. Wilson, *The Victorians*; James Morris, *Pax Britannica*; Charles Darwin, *Origin of*

*Species, The Descent of Man*; Michael Harrington, *The Politics at God's Funeral*; Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August*; Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*; David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*; J. M. Winter, *The World After Versailles*; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandemonium*; "William Pfaff, "Reflections on Nationalism." Niall Ferguson, *Empire*.

This class will utilize video materials that illuminate some of the significant events associated with these transformations. Lectures and discussions will provide context and background to the historical developments and more specific events.

Students will be expected to attend and participate in every class session, maintain a course-long journal with responses to weekly questions, prompts, and field trip excursions, and explore in greater depth a self-selected topic of personal interest that relates aspects of one or more of these transformations to contemporary events.

#### **A Note about Class Excursions:**

London offers many fascinating sites to visit: the British Museum (which has a special section devoted to the Enlightenment period), St. Paul's Cathedral (a major center of the Church of England), the Houses of Parliament (center of representative government), the Imperial War Museum (which has an excellent time-line historical display of the war years from 1914-1945), the Museum of Science and Industry, the Museum of London (which features a sequence of



historical eras), and Down House (the country home where Darwin wrote his ground-breaking works). We also hope to include an excursion to Iron Bridge Gorge and its nine museums which portray many of the changes associated with the Industrial Revolution. Reactions to and reflections on these excursions will be part of students' journaling activities.

#### **Some Recommended Advance Surfing:**

If you would like to do some advance reading here are several excellent web sites:

the English Reformation at <http://wsu.edu/~dee/reform/england.htm>

the Industrial Revolution at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution)

the Darwinian Revolution at <http://www.meta-library.net/evolution/revo-body.html>

the Victorian Era at <http://www.victorianweb.org>