This seminar focuses on a critical examination of the formation of a national English identity, not via its preferred self-definitions, but as a product of Britain’s sustained interaction with its colonial “peripheries”—the Caribbean and Africa, the Indian subcontinent and the Far East. This examination will be carried out in London where there has been, until relatively recently, both a more or less consolidated vision of a homogeneous (and exclusive) English/British identity as well as the reality of increasingly variegated interactions with substantial immigrant populations from these former colonies.

Such a focus enables the exploration of a subject—national self-definition and identity—that continues to preoccupy scholars in a number of fields (history, politics, literature) despite the relentless drive towards globalization that presumably is producing a world without national boundaries. In particular, the inquiry this seminar undertakes rests on the recognition, currently central to the study of British history and cultural studies, of the seminal impact of the so-called peripheries on the making of British identity. As such, our examination also looks at the formation of what is in effect a multicultural, multiracial Britain, at odds with the much more familiar concept of “this island nation” as defined by a uniform (white, English, Protestant) identity.

Bearing in mind that national identity is a product of “organized remembering and deliberate forgetting,” this seminar will simultaneously explore the memories, myths, and histories that underwrote dominant representations of English identity as well as those invoked by marginalized populations that nonetheless worked their way into standard narratives, in the process contesting or modifying them. Thus, for example, in addition to the writings of some important historical, anthropological and cultural theorists (Linda Colley, Kathleen Wilson, Catherine Hall, David Armitage, Sidney Mintz, Stuart Hall, Uday Singh Mehta), the seminar examines the shaping of English national identity by closely reading canonical literary writers (Defoe, Conrad, and Mary Shelly, among others) and philosophers (Locke, Mill) alongside the rich literature of the African and South Asian diasporas within Britain (Equiano, Naipaul, Selvon, Rushdie, Kureishi, etc.). These writers often reworked the canonical English text to redefine Englishness in a multicultural and multiracial fashion.

Significantly, a number of these reformulations of English national identity are set in London, recognizing it as a primary site within which multicultural and multiracial identities have been and continue to be forged. Being located in London gives the
seminar participants access to, and an understanding of, the physical spaces within which these identities were mapped. Many sites in and around London will prove to be particularly valuable in complementing our discussions of the historical and literary texts in the morning sessions and will provide a significant context for an overall understanding of the seminar’s subject matter.

Readings:

All articles in the syllabus are available on Blackboard and will be copied to a CD-ROM which will be distributed to you in London. There are a few books required which can either be purchased in the US and taken with you or purchased (usually second hand) in London. Book prices are generally higher in London, certainly higher than some on-line used book services in the US (e.g. Amazon.com).

Assignments:

There are three papers/projects assigned for the course, each covering the previous section of the class. The first covers the classes between February 17 and March 5, examining materials prior to the 19th century. The second covers the classes between March 10 and 19, covering 19th century materials. And the final paper covers the course materials between March 31 and May 5 (the second half of the course), the 20th-21st centuries. They are due as follows:

First Assignment: March 10
Second Assignment: March 31 (you can turn it in before spring break if you prefer)
Third Assignment: May 7

In each of the assignments, you are to engage the materials and experiences covered during that section of the course. You can ask any questions of the materials or cover any aspect of them that is of interest to you, but you must use both literary and historical materials. Normally the assignments will be done as traditional papers using any standard method of citation (MLA, Chicago, etc.). Papers can be printed out or sent as email attachments if printing is not possible. If you are going to send them by email, send them to Steve (steven.volk@oberlin.edu).

First Assignment: 5-7 pages
Second Assignment: 5-7 pages
Third Assignment: 10-12 pages

You may also consider doing a project, dealing with the materials in a different format (as a video, oral history, etc.). In this latter case, you need clear the assignment with one of us.

NOTE: All papers and projects are due on the day specified and should be turned in at the start of class. Papers/projects turned in late without an explicit extension will be graded down one grade step for each day that they are late. It is always your best option to
discuss any issues regarding turning in work with one of us as soon as you know there may be a problem.

**Honor Code:** Students are required to sign an honor code on all their work. For further information on plagiarism at Oberlin, see the student [Honor Code](https://oncampus.oberlin.edu/courses/1/SL-dean/content/_187961_1/honorcode.pdf)

**Grading:**

- Participation: 15%
- First Assignment: 20%
- Second Assignment: 25%
- Third Assignment: 40%

**Students with Disabilities:**
Appropriate accommodations will always be granted to students with documented disabilities. Any questions about the necessary process of documenting disabilities should be addressed to Jane Boomer, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Peters G27-28; x5-5588).

Syllabus

Friday, Feb. 6: Orientation, 10:00 AM
Saturday, Feb. 7: Orientation activities, 9:30-1:30
Sunday, Feb. 8: London markets walk, 9:30 AM


Readings:


Feb. 17, 19: Britain Invented – British Identity in the late 17th and 18th Centuries

Readings:


Feb. 24, 26: British Colonialism and the Mapping of an English (National) Identity

Readings:

Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (any edition, although the Norton Critical edition is quite valuable). [1719]


[NOTE: During this week we will arrange a to visit the exhibit at the British Library on “Taking Liberties: The Struggle for Britain’s Freedoms and Rights.” The exhibition closes on March 1, 2009]

March 3, 5: Slavery, Liberty, and British Identity in the 18th Century

Readings:


John Locke, Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina [1669]: [http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/states/nc05.htm].

Selections from John Locke's Two Treatises of Government:

From the First Treatise of Government
Book 1, Chapter 1: Paragraphs 1,2,3; [http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/locke/loc-101a.htm]

From the Second Treatise of Government
Chapter 4 [http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/locke/loc-204.htm]
Chapter 6 [http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/locke/loc-206.htm]
Chapter 7 (paragraphs 77-86) [http://www.lonang.com/exlibris/locke/loc-207.htm]

Olaudah Equiano, Life of Olaudah Equiano, of Gustavus Vassa, the African (Dover Thrift Editions, 1999)[1790]. Other editions also acceptable.
Optional:


FIRST PAPER DUE ON MARCH 10: 5-7 PAGES ON ANY MATERIALS PRIOR TO THE 19TH CENTURY

March 10, 12: Liberalism and Empire

Readings:

Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), Introduction, Prologue and Mapping Jamaica (pp.1-83) and Part II (Metropolis, Colony and Empire), pp. 265-433. [Note: Book readily available in used edition via amazon.co.uk or at many bookstores in London.]


Optional:


March 17, 19: British Romanticism and Empire in the 19th Century

Readings:


Selections from Thomas DeQuincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*.

Selections from Wordsworth’s *Guide to the Lakes*.

Selections from P.B. Macaulay’s “Southey’s Colloquies on Society.”


March 24, 26: Spring Break

SECOND ASSIGNMENT DUE ON MARCH 31 COVERING MATERIALS DEALING WITH THE 19TH CENTURY

March 31, April 2 and April 7, 9: Inhabiting Englishness

Readings:


Optional background reading:


E.M. Forster, *Passage to India* (any edition; the Harvest 1984 reprint edition is relatively inexpensive).

For this unit, we will also view a film, *Lagaan* (Dir: Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001). You might want to read two essays that relate cricket to (English) national identity:


April 14, 16: The End of Empire, Re-Racializing England, Clinging to the Empire

[NOTE: Visit “War to Windrush” exhibition at the Imperial War Museum sometime this week – open until November 2009]

Readings:


**April 21, 23: A New Kind of English[ness]**

**Readings:**


**April 28, 30, May 5: Domestication by Cappuccino, or “Eating the Other”. England, the Empire’s Others, and Consumption in the 21st Century**


**Readings:**


THIRD ASSIGNMENT DUE ON MAY 7, DEALING WITH ANY MATERIALS AFTER THE 19TH CENTURY

May 7: Conclusions

Readings: