

BRITISH POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

SV369 (SPRING 2012)

EXAM #1 STUDY GUIDE



DIRECTIONS: The first exam will be held on Friday, March 30th and covers all material (reading and lectures) since the start of the term. The exam will consist of two essay questions, chosen from the questions listed below. They will appear on the exam exactly as they will be worded here. However, you will not have any choice as to which questions you are asked to answer. All of the questions below require critical thinking, asking you to make an assessment of the underlying causes and implications of events. Yet as much of our focus has been on history, you should also make sure to review and explain the major historical events relevant to the question. In short, you need to both demonstrate your historical knowledge and show your analytical skills.

QUESTIONS:

1. Clement Attlee's Labour Party won a landslide victory in 1945, ousting a popular wartime leader on the promise to build a 'New Jerusalem'. What was Labour's vision for the postwar world – the policies that would come to be known collectively as the 'postwar consensus' – and why were they so popular? Despite sweeping in on a wave of optimism, the Attlee Government ended in disappointment. Why was this? Decades later the Thatcherites would argue that it was the policies of the postwar consensus that were destroying Britain. Was this a valid critique? If so, then were the leaders of the 1940s foolish or were there faults in this system that could not have been foreseen?
2. Britain emerged victorious from the Second World War, yet rather quickly declined in status as a Great Power, a reality punctuated by the Suez debacle. Was Britain's decline as a world power inevitable or were there viable avenues of policy open to them that could have altered their course? Was Britain being realistic in (largely) walking away from its colonies or deluding themselves that this would not produce decline? What can or should Britain have done differently in order to play a more significant world role? Does it even really matter that they are no longer a Great Power?
3. Britain in the Seventies was seen as a disaster – the economic 'sick man of Europe' and a political system described as 'ungovernable'. What went so horribly wrong? Review the major events of the decade. Why was their economic position so dire? What made Britain such a difficult place to govern? Why were the political leaders of the time so seemingly incapable of doing anything about all of these problems? What should have been done instead? Where these politically viable policies at the time?

4. Margaret Thatcher entered office in 1979 determined to transform Britain, to reverse the 'British disease' of relative economic decline and restore the authority of government. Did it work? What were the major policies of 'Thatcherism'? How did they seek to alter Britain? What were the costs of these policies? Was the 'cure' worse than the 'disease'? Overall, was Britain a better place when she left office (make sure to define what you mean by 'better')?

5. Tony Blair swept into office in a landslide in 1997, leading the Labour Party out of nearly two decades in the political wilderness. He would go on to win two more elections, a feat unmatched by any Labour leader. He presided over one of the longest and strongest periods of economic growth in the nation's history and he oversaw a massive increase in spending in Britain's dilapidated public services. And yet...despite a favorable image in the US and elsewhere, when he left office in 2007, he was reviled by Labour Party activists and his approval ratings with the British public were very low. Why was this? Review the major events of the Blair years. What happened that led Britons to take such a negative view of such an otherwise successful leader?

6. Britain lacks of a single document labeled 'The Constitution'. So what is the British constitution? What are its core principles and sources? Would Britain be better off with a written constitution? That is, would a clearly elaborated document serve better to protect individual freedoms and maintain the successful operation of democratic government? If you advocate a written constitution make sure that you examine both the benefits and the costs of abandoning the current system.