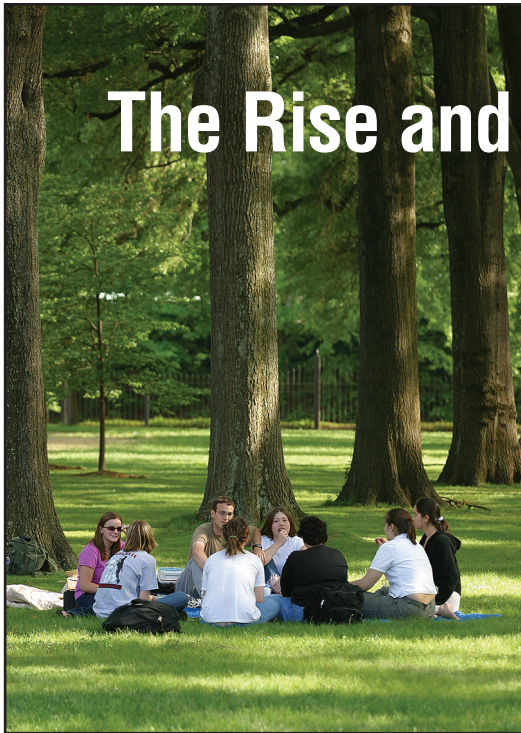


The Rise and Fall of the British Empire –

History, Literature, Ideas, and Conflicts

A Learning Community for First-Year Students



“I liked the way we plunged into serious academic work in the Learning Community and the way the courses in different disciplines overlapped and reinforced each other. The professors are passionate and bring their unique senses of humor to class each day. I always felt I could talk to them because they were open and understanding. Their support helped me to meet my ambitions as a student right from the start of my college career.”

Paul Burmenko, Class of 2008

For the last three years, selected first-year students at Rhodes have joined two professors in an interdisciplinary study of the British Empire. In the fall semester, through two closely related courses (one History, one English Literature, in which only these students can enroll) and a range of activities outside the classroom (such as movie nights and discussions over dinner with invited specialists), this group has explored the origins and ideas of the Empire, its history, and changing British attitudes through the centuries, ending with contemporary Britain and its struggles with post-imperial multiculturalism.

The British Empire Needs You!

We’re now looking for incoming students to form the fourth group to engage in this fascinating and challenging program, one that is not only historically interesting but also highly relevant to key concerns in contemporary America. You don’t have to major in either English or History – previous Learning Community students have gone on to specialize in subjects throughout the curriculum. They’ve also branched out to become campus leaders

in several areas: Honor Council, Rhodes Student Government, publications, Greek life, study abroad programs, Model U.N. and Model NATO, and a host of service and research activities in the greater Memphis area. In short, the learning community experience can be the perfect introduction to an enriched college life, one that fosters a fully integrated experience among study, social life, and the broader community.



A Scholarly Community

The liberal arts college ideal is a community of individuals – students and professors – engaged in an energetic, shared exploration of their world and the life of the mind. The British Empire Learning Community is a further distillation of that ideal. Living close to your fellow Learning Community participants means that you’re surrounded by people immersed in the same ideas, experiences, and challenges as you. In your first semester at college you will be part of a team, combining your energy with theirs, discovering the pleasures of mixing academic work with social life. It’s a great introduction to the best of college life.

Your academic adviser will be English professor and dean of Rhodes’ summer study program, *British Studies At Oxford*, Dr. Michael Leslie, one of the Learning Community professors. You’ll find yourself working closely with Dr. Leslie and Dr. Lynn Zastoupil, professor of History. This close relationship between students and faculty provides an ideal bridge between high school and college, as well as a pathway toward future work at Rhodes.

The British Empire

The imperial idea has made an astonishing comeback, with influential and powerful figures in the USA



embracing what was rejected by Jefferson and Washington and vehemently labeled “un-American” only a few years ago. The idea of empire was routinely condemned after the Second World War, but now there’s a tide of praise for the potential of a “Pax Americana” in an unruly world.

“The British Empire Learning Community was a great opportunity for me as a freshman at Rhodes. Being in two classes with the same group of students and having two supportive professors made the transition to college academic and social life much easier. Having a chance to participate in the British Studies Student Symposium gave me a chance to present my own work as well as see the work my peers are doing at other colleges in the South. The combination of challenging coursework, dinners, movies, and guest lectures made my experience in the Learning Community like no other.”

Ali Goostree, Class of 2010

This Learning Community focuses on the last great English-speaking empire, that of Britain from 1500 onward. Though the British Empire has largely disappeared, its history still shapes our world, in the global language and the global trading system, and, not least, the problems left behind – India and Pakistan, Israel and Palestine, Ireland, Cyprus, migrants in conflict with indigenous communities, invented nation-states coming apart because of ethnic and religious diversity as in Iraq, Nigeria, and Malaysia.

Members of this learning community will participate in a set of events, experiences, and discussions outside the classroom, among them common readings (for example, Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “Gunga Din”), student presentations, and movies on imperial themes (“Zulu” or “Breaker Morant”). What happens in each course is constantly influenced by discussions in the other, and the whole intellectual experience is greater than the sum of its parts. The interdisciplinary experience produces results that are active, exploratory, adventurous and exciting. Members of the Learning Community in each of its three years have traveled to an intercollegiate student research conference to present their work, the only first-year students to do so.

The Courses

English 215: The Imperial Idea in British Literature: Promoters, Doubters and Enemies (MWF 3:00-3:50 p.m.).

This course will focus on literary texts composed during the formation of both Britain and what came to be the British empire(s). Topics will include the representation of empire; different attitudes to English dominance in the British Isles; different responses to the growth of English and British commercial dominance and territorial expansion; and both positive and negative evaluations of the imperial project. We’ll consider some of the extraordinary stories that were used and reused by the British over centuries to understand the Empire and explain it to themselves. The course will end by considering some of the literature of the dissolution of Britain’s empire, a series of recent movies based on the post-imperial experience (such as “Bend it Like Beckham,” “East is East,” and “My Beautiful Laundrette”), and even *Arthur – The Decline and Fall of the British Empire*, by The Kinks.

History 105: The British Empire and Its Enemies (MWF 12:00-12:50 p.m.)

This course will introduce students to some of the main historical developments in the British Empire and Commonwealth during the period 1713-1980. During this time Britain gained, and lost, an empire unrivaled in human history. It is the objective of this course to understand some of the main reasons for British imperial expansion in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the retreat from empire in the 20th century. The impact of empire on British political, social, and economic life will be considered, as will be the influence of British culture and institutions on the colonies. Imperial ideas, the growth of racial attitudes and other intellectual issues and social problems associated with the empire will also be addressed.

The Faculty

Lynn Zastoupil, Professor of History, teaches Britain and Europe, as well as courses on modern South Asia. He has written one book, *John Stuart Mill and India*, and co-edited two others, *J. S. Mill’s Encounter with India* and *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843*. In 2001 he was named a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and, in 2002, received the Clarence Day Award for Outstanding Research and Creative Activity.

Michael Leslie is a professor of English and dean of the college’s summer study program in England, *British Studies At Oxford*. He’s a product of the empire, being born in London to parents Scottish and Irish (one of each), and he’s followed one of the most characteristic of British imperial impulses, westward emigration. A scholar of early modern English literature, with a book on Edmund Spenser, he has also published widely on the history of designed landscapes, interart relations, and the history of science.

For more information or to apply, please email Dr. Leslie at (leslie@rhodes.edu) or Dr. Zastoupil (zastoupil@rhodes.edu).