

## “Society and Culture in Victorian England”



**Instructor:** Dr. Julie Taddeo

**Instructor Title:** Research Professor of History (University of Maryland)

**Meeting Days/Time:** (online) Tuesdays, 11:30 am- 1:00 pm (EST)

**Description:** Each week we will explore a different aspect of Victorian England: how Queen Victoria reinvented the monarchy for a new industrial age; the rise of the middle class and how their values of self-help and domesticity shaped Parliamentary reform and attitudes about poverty (for ex., workhouses); how the acquisition of a vast empire (1/4 of the world’s population) transformed daily life (from tea and curries, sugar and soup, museums to freakshows, to debates about who was truly “British”); and lastly how certain actors in the late Victorian period (1880s-’90s) threatened to overturn the old order (suffragists and New Women; the trial of Oscar Wilde). “Victorian” came to encompass a set of values but also as we will learn, no two Victorians were alike: from the Queen to Jack the Ripper, they show us how complex and contradictory this age truly was.

**Readings:** The links below are for additional sources to read before our lecture meetings. PDFs of other readings are provided by Instructor. All readings are OPTIONAL.

**Other notes:** No previous knowledge of British history is required for this course.

## **Course Outline:**

### **1. August 2: The Victorians: Just like us?**

This first lecture will address some popular stereotypes of the Victorians and try to distinguish a set of traits and beliefs that comprised “the Victorian frame of mind.”

We will also meet Queen Victoria who gave her name to this era and examine how she balanced marriage/motherhood/royal duties and faced intense scrutiny from the media.

**Watch:** “Prudish Victorians”-- This clip is a parody of the Victorians from the British comedy, “Horrible Histories”—while silly, there is an element of truth to this parody, as we will see. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BDVgUvkVLEg>

**For more on the Queen,** visit: <https://victorianweb.org/history/victoria/> (see how she was represented in art at the time)

For fun and some extra insight into how the Queen privately felt about motherhood, read the letters between QV and her eldest daughter, Vicky (but take the editor’s judgmental comments with a grain of salt!)

<http://www.victoriana.com/doors/queenvictoria.htm>



**Commemorating the Queen’s Jubilee**

## **2. August 9: Home Sweet Home: Ideals versus Realities for The Two Nations**

How did the Victorians create our modern notion of "home"? In this lecture we will look at the moral, literary, and artistic promotion of the ideals of domesticity, and womanhood, in particular. We will contrast these middle-class ideals with working-class realities. Who were “the Two Nations” and how diverse was each group and what were some ways in which their lives intersected? How did the government address poverty and did this solution work?

### **Read in advance:**

The best-selling 1854 poem by Coventry Patmore, “The Angel in the House” (feel free to just skim portions—it is VERY long!):

<http://www.victoriana.com/doors/queenvictoria.htm>

Visit: The Victorian Web and meet Henry Mayhew who devoted part of his career to studying the lives of London’s poor.

<https://victorianweb.org/authors/mayhew/index.html>

Visit this website to see what life was like in a workhouse (the daily schedule, diet, punishments, and testimonies from some residents).

<https://www.workhouses.org.uk/>



### **3. August 16: Cabinets of Curiosities**

This week’s lecture will explore the many ways in which Victorians “consumed” empire: in their diets and entertainments and even in their medical theories and practices. One didn’t need to leave home to enjoy the benefits of a global economy, but ruling over ¼ of the world’s population sometimes raised unsettling topics of debate.

Read in advance:

MODHUMITA ROY, “Some Like It Hot: Class, Gender and Empire in the Making of Mulligatawny Soup” (pdf provided by Instructor)



### **4. August 23: Apostles of the Apocalypse**

In this final week, we will meet rule breakers, troublemakers, and criminals who threatened the Victorian social and moral order in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. New Women, “inverts,” and a serial killer will take center stage, garnering intense media attention and revealing late Victorian anxieties about gender, class, and race.

Read: Judith Walkowitz, “Jack the Ripper and the myth of male violence” (pdf provided by Instructor).

