

HISTORY 4424F
The Victorian Worldview: Nineteenth-Century Britain
2026-27 | Fall 2026 | Winter 2027

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This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace for a final version.

Course Description

This seminar examines the worldviews of men and women in nineteenth-century Britain: economic, political, social, and scientific, taking into account both conservative and radical perspectives. It also explores the domestic ideology commonly associated with the period, and the challenges posed to the Victorian domestic ideal.

Prerequisite(s)

Registration in third year or above, any module.

Unless you have either the prerequisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. The decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Antirequisite(s)

The former History 3414F/G, the former History 3432F/G, the former History 4420F/G, the former History 4423E.

Course Syllabus

The textbook listed below is intended to provide context for discussion of shared weekly primary source readings. We will also read and discuss one of the nineteenth century's most famous novels, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, over the course of the term. The issues raised in that novel span the themes of this course.

At the conclusion of this course successful students will have acquired a basic overview of how Victorian Britons understood the world in which they lived, and how they shaped that world. They will also be able to:

- Evaluate evidence and assess historical significance.
- Articulate and defend historical ideas, arguments, and conclusions, both orally and in written prose.

- Engage with faculty and peers in discussion of both source material and the process of writing history.
- Contribute thoughtfully to debates about historical and methodological issues.
- Present historical knowledge effectively and engagingly.

Students must submit and pass all of the written work in order to achieve a passing grade in the course.

Penalties of 2% per day, including weekends, will be levied on late submissions of both the document study and research essay for which no extension has been granted. Late papers will also be graded without comment.

Extensions **must** be applied for via Academic Counselling. Requests for extensions made after the due date will not be accepted.

The informal reading notes (4 sets) on *Middlemarch* are due via OWL Brightspace immediately prior to the seminar in which they are discussed. **Extensions are not available and late submissions of these notes will not be accepted.** The purpose of the notes is to provide a basis for class discussion.

Seminar attendance is mandatory. You are expected to be in class and prepared to discuss weekly assigned texts. I will not accept notes on those texts in lieu of attendance. You must attend a minimum of 8 seminars out of 12 to pass the course.

Methods of Evaluation

Document study (due 6 Oct.)	15% (2000 words)
General participation	20%
Reading notes on <i>Middlemarch</i> (Due: 29 Sept. 20 Oct. 10 Nov. 8 Dec.)	25% (informal; no specified format or word limit)
Research essay (due 24 Nov.)	40% (4000 words)

The research essay will be on a topic of your choosing, but that topic must be approved prior to submission of the essay. Papers received without emailed approval of the topic will not be graded.

You are expected to adhere to the specified word lengths for both the document study and research essay.

You may use generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, in this course for activities such as researching and refining your ideas or drafting an outline to organize your thoughts—but not for generating prose. All writing submitted in this course must be your own. If in doubt, please ask me for clarification and advice.

Course Materials

Required texts: Susie Steinbach, *Understanding the Victorians* (Routledge, 3rd ed., 2023)

https://www.amazon.ca/Understanding-Victorians-Politics-Culture-Nineteenth-Century/dp/036742102X/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1871-2; any edition will be fine)

Weekly source readings will be made available online.

Additional Statements

The best way to get in touch with me outside of the classroom is via email. I answer emails between 9 am and 5 pm, Monday to Friday. Please remember that office hours are not simply – or even primarily! – for dealing with problems. You are welcome to come and discuss course material in these hours. My office hours are held in-person.

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.

Seminar schedule with readings

1 (15 Sept.) Introduction

2 (22 Sept.) Religion and the Victorians
Background reading: Steinbach, chap. 15

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/religion/overview/church-and-religion/>

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/victorian/religion/>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/what-we-believe/apostles-creed>

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/articles-religion>

3 (29 Sept.) Parliamentary reform
Background reading: Steinbach, chap. 2
Middlemarch Bks I & II

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/politics/g6/>

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/struggle/chartists1/historicalsources/source2/reformact.html>

<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/houseofcommons/reformacts/overview/reformact1832/>

<https://spartacus-educational.com/PR1832.htm>

4 (6 Oct.) Party politics

<https://spartacus-educational.com/U3Ahistory22.htm>

Document study due: Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*, chap. 1

Reading Week

5 (20 Oct.) Monarchy
Background reading: Steinbach, chap. 10
Middlemarch Bks III & IV

Queen Victoria

<https://www-oxforddnb-com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-36652?rskey=VSZJt0&result=16>

6 (27 Oct.) Economics
Background reading: Steinbach, chap. 5

https://www.ibiblio.org/ml/libri/s/SmithA_WealthNations_p.pdf

<https://oll.libertyfund.org/pages/cobden-and-the-anti-corn-law-league>

<https://oll.libertyfund.org/quotes/326>

7 (3 Nov.) Empire
Background reading: Steinbach, chap. 4

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/trade_empire_01.shtml

8 (10 Nov.) Slavery
Middlemarch Bks V & VI

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/slavery/pdf/britain-and-the-trade.pdf>

<https://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/campaignforabolition/abolitionbackground/abolitionintro.html>

<https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20200205-how-britain-is-facing-up-to-its-secret-slavery-history>

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jun/19/josiah-henson-the-forgotten-story-slavery-uncle-toms-cabin>

9 (17 Nov.) Utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill)

https://www.ics.uci.edu/~djp3/classes/2012_01_INF241/papers/PANOPTICON.pdf

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bentham-project/who-was-jeremy-bentham/panopticon/panopticon-pandemonium-bringing-life-benthams-unrealised-prison>

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/utilitarianism-history/#JohStuMil>

<https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/mill1863.pdf>

10 (24 Nov.) Science (Darwin)
Background reading: Steinbach, chap. 16

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/charles-darwin-evolution-and-the-story-of-our-species/z7rvxyc>

Research essay due

11 (1 Dec.) The Women of England, Gender, and Sex
Background reading: Steinbach, chaps. 9, 13

<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/vwwp/view?docId=VAB7198>

12 (8 Dec.) Ireland
Middlemarch Bks VII & VIII

<http://www.historyhome.co.uk/peel/ireland/emancip.htm>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/famine_01.shtml

https://spartacus-educational.com/Irish_Home_Rule.htm