WELCOME TO UCL HISTORY

YOU ARE IN... AND WE ARE EXCITED TO HAVE YOU!

Welcome, or welcome back, to UCL History, a prestigious and rewarding department at the university. After a long (and certainly a hot) summer back, we are all ready to begin the autumn term with the eagerness to explore what UCL has to offer. Here at the UCL History Society Journal, we want you to feel inspired to learn, create, and make the most of your talent as a budding historian. Each month, we explore a new concept or theme, using it as the leitmotif of our issue. It is a testament to the dedication of the students. We hope you enjoy what is hoped to be a challenging, yet immensely fruitful academic year!

CALL FOR WRITERS & CONTRIBUTORS

You have been accepted to UCL for many reasons, one of them being your talent for historical writing. To all first-years who want to explore an outlet for their new interests or existing students who feel they would love to contribute to an issue's theme, we welcome you to contribute to the journal. Our aim is to make the journal an inclusive platform for all history students, so whatever your historical interests are, we will be happy to have a place for you.

You can write pieces of all formats and lengths, from short paragraphs to full articles. You are also welcome to contribute to the journal in non-textual formats, such as illustrations, photographs, or memes! As long it is historical, we have a place for you. If you are inspired to share your ideas with us, please contact us at the UCL History Society Instagram account. We look forward to hearing from you!

PART 1 - WELCOME TO UCL HISTORY

Anouska is a third-year history student, who is interested in early modern intellectual history and the history of science, medicine and technology. Her favourite pass times include listening to podcasts and landscape painting. To de-stress from the university workload, she enjoys walks in the countryside, baking and reading English classics.

Jonas is a third-year history student mainly interested in environmental / intellectual histories that address the current climate crisis. He is often found giving rants on dead philosophers (occasionally living ones) over dinner which nobody really cares to listen to. In his free time, he enjoys reading up on cooking, music, and fashion.

A LETTER FROM OUR EDITORS

DEAR READER,

It's a pleasure to finally share the first edition of the UCL History Journal for the 2022/23 academic year.

For this month's issue, we wanted to explore 'History in London' – approaching the city as its own area of historical interest, as well as a unique academic undertaking for those of us studying here. In the first part of the issue, we have several articles from many disciplines, written by students in the department.

We hope that the first half of this September issue serves as an introduction to what you can expect in your studies as a history student in London. We have prepared a wide range of pieces including a "What I wish I'd known" section collected from our second and third-year students to an article on what it means to study history in a time of a planetary climate crisis.

The second part of this issue boasts pieces on specific historical disciplines such as environmental and colonial history. You'll also find a handful of useful pieces for first-year students as this academic year begins, including a "Humans of UCL History" interview from our esteemed president Nishtha Saraf.

We hope you find UCL history and the History Journal an inclusive space to fulfil your academic desires as much as we did. To all of the freshers starting next week, allow me to welcome you to History at UCL, and to the rest of us - welcome back!

Anouska Jha & Jonas Lim, Editorial Officers

THE POWER OF HISTORY IN A TIME OF CLIMATE CRISIS

JONAS LIM (THIRD YEAR)

It's the start of a new term, a new academic year at university. As we pack our bags for a new exciting year in London, we undoubtedly all look forward to the hopeful promises that the new academic year will bring us. However, news on the current state of climate affairs somewhat pushes us away from this naïve optimism about the future. Britain and many countries in Europe has seen one of its hottest summers yet, which amounted to heat strokes that its buildings were simply not prepared for. East Asian countries like Japan or Korea has experienced tremendous amounts of rainfall to which its cement-laden urban centres were not designed to cope with, resulting in the death of dozens of people. Scientists worldwide have gone on strike action to warn us about the dangerous closeness of an impending disaster. At this point of time, we cannot help but wonder: " Have we all chosen wrong degrees in university?" Can we do nothing but stand and watch our institutions collapse until the scientists come to save the day? In other words, what does history have to offer for the current climate crisis?

The history of environmentalism may offer an insight. From the early-twentieth century, conservationist movements started arguing against the devastating effects of human technology on nature. Thanks to this first wave of activists, the familiar narrative of human destruction of the natural environment became increasingly popular.

However, not all environmentalists were satisfied with this narrative. Aldo Leopold, a U.S. ecologist, was one of them. In his <Land Ethic>, Leopold argued that people were not thinking ' ethically' enough about the land.

Aldo Leopold: 1887-1948

For Leopold, ' ethics' is a cooperative mechanism that limits individual freedom for the sake of existence in a community. Simply put, if we slapped any random person we met, we would be exercising unlimited freedom. However, such disruptive acts are seen as intolerable to peaceful coexistence. To prevent this, we place a moral high ground on the act of ' not slapping others.' This enables any institutional penalties that may follow actions that cross this rule. Ethics is the mechanism behind this process that curtails our freedom to slap anyone to maintain our community.

Here, Leopold asks: " Do we ever restrict our freedom when taking from the land?" As humans, we are not only members of the social community but also the biotic community. However, there was no concept of ' ethics' when people imagined their relationship with nature, unlike that with humans. Particularly, Leopold was discontent with how people only thought of the land in economic terms: an exploitable resource, not a base of human life.

This ' unethical' way of thinking did not only result in environmental destruction. It also complicated the solution by shaping the language conservationists used to argue their case. As activists at the time argued only for the " economic" benefits of conservation, the non-profitable parts of nature (deserts, marshlands, etc.) were often disregarded, even though the " profitable" parts depended on these " non-profitable" parts for ecological regeneration.

Once we think of ourselves as members, not conquerors, of the ecological community, it only makes sense to limit our power to exploit the environment as its most powerful member. (Just as we wouldn't punch someone weaker than us on the street for economic gains.) For Leopold, the land was where ethics ended and where economics started.

Glasgow COP26 2021

Then, is our appreciation of the current crisis any less problematic? Are we regarding the environment as we rightfully should? A look at the final pact of the Glasgow COP26 summit should tell us something about our current state.

Also acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity,

Recognizing the important role of indigenous peoples, local communities and civil society, including youth and children, in addressing and responding to climate change, and *highlighting* the urgent need for multilevel and cooperative action,

62.   *Also acknowledges* the important role of a broad range of stakeholders at the local, national and regional level, including indigenous peoples and local communities, in averting, minimizing and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change;

88.   *Also recognizes* the important role of non-Party stakeholders, including civil society, indigenous peoples, local communities, youth, children, local and regional governments and other stakeholders, in contributing to progress towards the goals of the Paris Agreement;

93.   *Emphasizes* the important role of indigenous peoples' and local communities' culture and knowledge in effective action on climate change, and *urges* Parties to actively involve indigenous peoples and local communities in designing and implementing climate action;

Articles mentioning 'Indigenous peoples' (COP26)

The COP26 summit addressed various issues, including the incorporation of indigenous people when consulting environmental issues. However, what is not mentioned is sometimes more important than what is. Nowhere do they mention who they mean by " indigenous peoples." How they will consider the opinions of these people remains a mystery. Most absurdly, just outside of the gates of COP26 in Glasgow, a group of indigenous activists were protesting for representation (Image below, BBC). Ironically, COP26 was blocking out the exact people they promised to listen to.

The dictionary definition of indigenous is to " originate naturally from a particular land." Under this definition, no race is indigenous to America: we all have migrated from Africa at some point in history. However, only people present in America before Columbus are considered " indigenous." (We wouldn't call a white person born in New York an " indigenous New Yorker.") This implies how " indigenous" is a term coined from a European viewpoint that swipes numerous tribal nations under the carpet.

The biggest problem with this term is that, historically, " indigeneity" was used to oppress non-white people. In the nineteenth century, U.S. officials used the fact that these people maintained a lifestyle closer to nature to suggest that they were " backwards" and " primitive." These racist assumptions were then used to appropriate their lands for U.S. benefit. Policies like the Indian Appropriations Act (1871) were justified on the basis that the " savages" of the tribal nations were not " civilised" enough to rationally use the land. The continuing tendency to view indigenous peoples as close to nature, yet not consider their voices with political weight implies a significant problem in resolving the climate crisis.
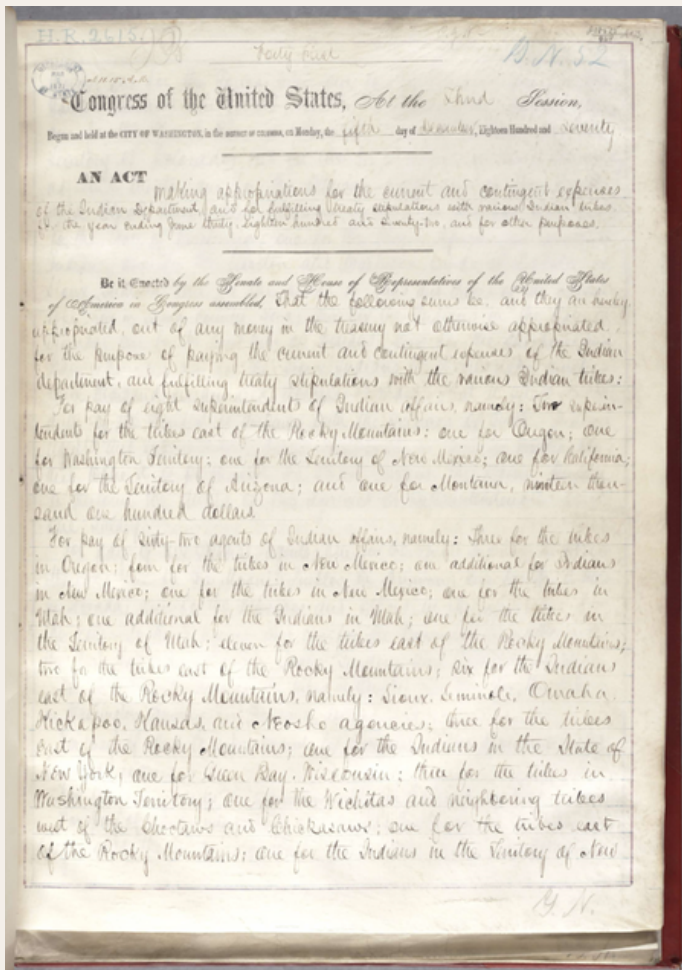
"Indian Appropriations Act"

We must think more politically when speaking of the environment. The history of environmentalism shows us that climate justice cannot be achieved by fighting within the conventional concepts made to separate nature from human life. As the conservationists of Leopold's era were not thinking ethically enough about nature, the Glasgow Climate Pact shows us that we ourselves are not thinking politically enough about the human frameworks that underline the natural, scientific aspects of climate change. The failure of COP26 to represent grassroots protesters proves that we cannot rely on " experts" and heads-of-states to do this rethinking for us.

In this, history can be of useful service. History has the power to denaturalise. By looking at the history of how ideas like ' ethics,' ' indigenous,' or ' environment' were constructed, we can challenge traditional concepts that people often tend to assume as given. As the problem of climate change is always structural than individual, it is not enough to address environmental issues without tackling the political agendas that complicate its solution. We must continue to think beyond the categories we have grown accustomed to for so long. Time is of the essence.

'WHITE GIRLS ARE NOT FIREABLE' AND OTHER PREJUDICES IN BLACK FILM.

Zoe Lewis (Alumnae)

Black representation in film has been as equally unrepresentative in film as in broader historical narratives. Highlighting Black history in film is not only resisting against this gross underrepresentation, it also situates their involvement as significant additions to the cultural landscape of film. However, there are still prejudices existent in the production of films involving Black people and in their reception.

The most notorious example of racist representation of African Americans came in 1915's The Birth of a Nation. One of the most technologically advanced films of its age, the film stills feature members of the Ku Klux Klan on horseback. On the other hand, Oscar Micheaux did much for the Black film industry; his Within Our Gates (1920) followed the story of sharecroppers being cheated out of their pay. Hallelujah (1929) was the first Hollywood film to feature an all-black cast with sound, whilst the ' Blaxploiitation' genre of the 1970s came to the fore in a time of violent resistance. Sweet Sweetback (1971) got the approval from Huey Newton of the Black Panthers. Since such movies portrayed Black people as inherently violent, the NAACP applied pressure on Hollywood to abandon ' Blaxploitation.' April Reign's #OscarsSoWhite movement signalled mass disapproval for the Academy's 20 white acting nominations in 2015. Adepero Oduye in The Big Short or O'Sha Jackson Jr. in Straight Outta Compton should have been first picks for nominations that year.

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Raoul Peck's 'I am Not Your Neighbour'

The absence of Black actors in incredibly famous films such as E. T. (1982), Titanic (1998) or Jaws (1975) prove representation and invisibility has permeated the film industry from its inception. The Harry Potter franchise only shows a handful of scenes with Dean Thomas or Kingsley Shacklebolt, a shame for a series of films that are so much loved. Blood Diamond (2006) was released on Netflix recently, and the film, which centres its plot on the ' conflict diamond' crisis in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, still manages to quieten the Black voice. Supposedly one of Leonardo DiCaprio's finest performances, the very premise of a white man aiding an uneducated African man to find a diamond he can financially exploit is all too ironic in the film's purportedly ' moralising' image. Most screen time is given to Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Connelly's futile Hollywood romance whilst screen time of violent conflict is not shown as inter-racial but intra-racial: between Africans themselves. It had some truth, but was by no means representative.

Returning to the heights of more well-known franchises, such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, African American representation rests at 20%, whilst those of Caucasian origin comprise 61% of characters in the Universe. This would increase to 69% of just main characters. A large proportion of actors in the 19% of African American/Black category for major characters belong to the world of Black Panther, the latter of which dominates this group at 41%. Black Panther is thus so important for the film industry. The character debuted in Marvel Comics' Fantastic Four No. 52, a month after Stokely Carmichael's ' Black Power' declaration in 1966, where he took a stand against white oppression. Black Panther came at an opportune moment in 2018 when the film industry was under fire for how it treated its black minority. But it's still important now. The notion of Wakanda is, as the late Chadwick Boseman put it, to synthesise Black, African identity, and what it means when its threatened.

McKinsey research on Black representation in film was only done in 2019. It concluded that not only were emerging black actors receiving fewer chances and a persistent minority representation, but also that off-screen positions had to be co-supported by other Black creatives. They estimate the Hollywood industry would produce $10 billion more in revenue once it eliminated barriers that undermined equality in content development, financing, marketing, and distribution, all of which come at a substantial cost. It's not just a screen representation issue: it's an industry-wide problem.

McKinsey data on Racial mix of on and off-screen talent in films 2015-19
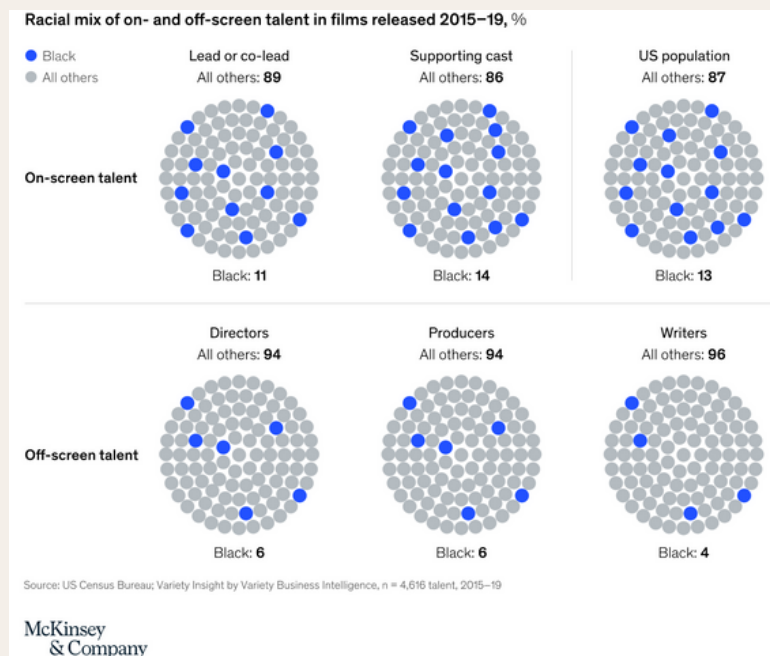
With the Covid pandemic, people have explored more of the film industry and discovered excellent work from Black filmmakers. Michaela Coel's I May Destroy You (2020) explores the specificities of gender, sexuality, and conceptions of British blackness, and received an explosion of plaudits. Others of recent times are equally, if not more, successful. Moonlight (2016) directed by Barry Jenkins is a powerful representation of blackness and queerness, whilst Raoul Peck's I Am Not Your Negro (2016) voices James Baldwin's last script on Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Medgar Evers. Stella Meghie and Taylour Paige headline the former's Jean of the Joneses (2016). A film that explores the family dynamic between Black women, the film is such an important watch for voices lost. Hollywood Shuffle (1987) by Robert Townsend came when the industry was suffering from a dearth of quality roles for Black actors. It seems poignant to end on a movie whose theme criticises the industry's racial limitations. It's really time to change.

When Amber Riley recalled a moment in her career when a producer told her actors of colour were ' a little more disposable, because that's just the way the world is' was an instance signifying the extent to which the film industry is one dominated by white prejudice. It's not the first nor last time a Black actor has frustratingly called out the industry. Will Smith suggested in 2016 ' racism is not getting worse, it's getting filmed'. 'One only has to look at Oscar nominations to see the pitiful attempt by the Academy to increase representation. Nominations and awards have increased in percolation over the years, with more Black actors and actresses chosen for Hollywood films. It's not enough, but it is enough to prove that the Academy is blind to Black talent that is not shown in box office hits. As Amber Riley's comments and McKinsey research has shown, Hollywood persists in its unwelcoming reception of Black actors.

EXPLORING THE BRITISH ONLINE ARCHIVES AT UCL

ANOUSKA JHA (THIRD YEAR)

We are pleased to announce our partnership with British Online Archives, a leading academic publisher and resource provider. The site is available, free of charge, to all UCL students. The goal of the Archives is to provide university students and researchers with access to unique collections within the Humanities and Social Sciences department. In each issue of the UCL History Society Journal, we hope to include a collection or source within the archives that interests us, hoping to spark inspiration of archival research amongst the department.

As a history student, you can certainly make the most of the over 4 million records from renowned public and private archives, covering 1000 years of world history. Often when it comes to class preparation and essays, we feel almost drowned in the historiography and word limit. However, even just exploring the vastness of the archives, ranging from British Parliamentary records from 1100-1803, to Global Governance in the twentieth century, I think it reminds us of the essence of being a historian; we can immerse ourselves in the intellectual, political, medical currents of the far and recent past. We realise that we can interpret a source differently, or find a completely un-explored source, and make it the leitmotif of our thesis and interest.


British Communism online archives

One of the most recent new collections digitised in the Archives is titled: British Communism at Home and Abroad, 1883-1991. The collection charts the rise of this powerful economic ideology in the long twentieth century, through the documents of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Why did the CPGB form in 1920? How did different departments, such as the Industrial and International department, communicate and make links overseas? How did the feminist wave impact debates on the Left? Manuscripts, laboratory notes, and photographs are all available as valuable resources to explore this question.

A source that stands out to me is the handwritten diary entries of William Wainwright, who travelled to North Vietnam in 1973. For context, this was at the tail-end of the US-Vietnam War, a decade long war of attrition, violence and political manipulation between the United States and North Vietnam, to contain communist influences in South Vietnam.

Wainwright details his rich experience in the region, from participating in "hat dances", "bicycle rides", as well as his advice on how the US should respond, and how he "was surprised" by the launch of guerilla attacks. It is a fascinating insight into his condemnation of the US President Richard Nixon's (1969-1974) policies against the Vietcong, and his escalation of the war. " We don't want Vietnamisation. Don't want expanded war" , Wainwright writes. Why, even as a member of the CPGB, is Wainwright wary of the power of North Vietnam? What does this suggest about the international translation of communist ideologies between nations and political groups? A student of American foreign policy and the Cold War would benefit largely from such diverse sources and accounts on this event, perhaps being able to find answers to such questions.
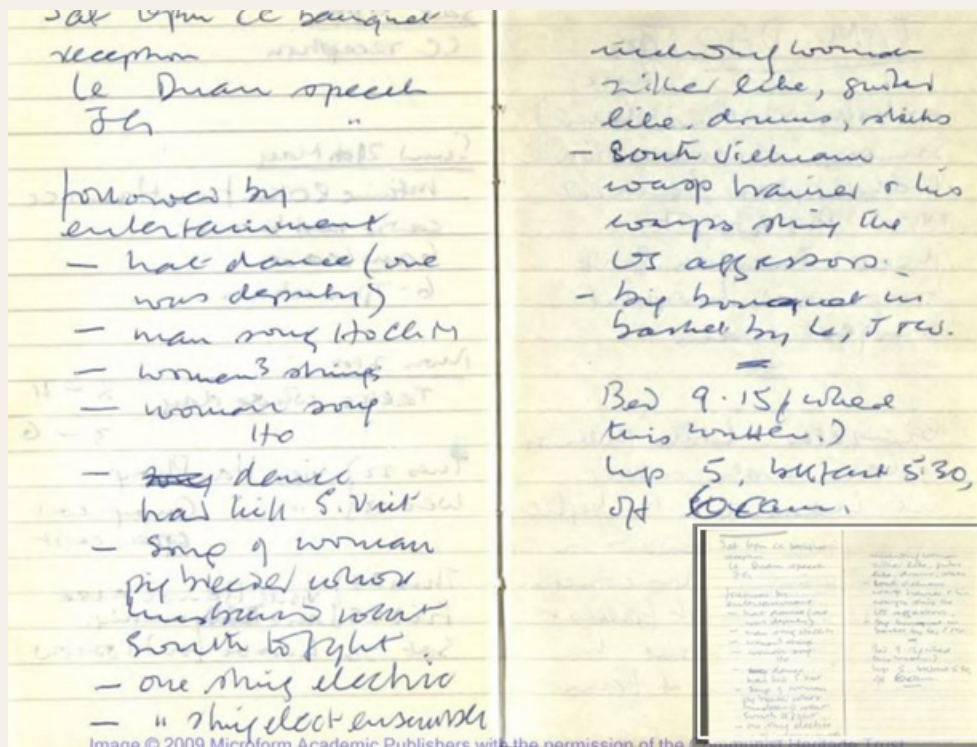
William Wainwright diary entry, 1973

Ultimately, there is something for everyone. Medieval and Early Modern historians, Economic historians, historians of science and technology, and more...search away!

Humans of UCL History #1 Nishtha Saraf

" I've always loved history. I knew, when I was fourteen, that I wanted to do history for my life."

To take you down a memory lane, I was fourteen and India and Pakistan hadn't had the best political relationship ever since partition. We had a sort of a mock 'peace conference' in our school between students from India and Pakistan, you know just for educational purposes.

My section in school was given two sources with the question: " Why did Aurangzeb reimpose the jiziya tax? For some context, Aurangzeb reimposed the jiziya tax, which was for non-Muslims. The narrative that most of the people in my class went with was that Aurangzeb did it to oppress the Hindus since he was a pious orthodox Muslim. But I was the only person who argued that he might be a product of his circumstances because he wanted to extend central control over his borders when there were foreign influences like the British, the Dutch, and the French there. So, he needed the money. And the Muslims were paying more taxes than the non-Muslims...

So, you know, even as a fourteen-year-old I just realised that people didn't see beyond the obvious, and as a historian, I could be someone who could change that. History wasn't something disconnected from the present; for me, it's always been an acute engagement with present biases that's sparked my interest in history.

I think that's what gives me the largest satisfaction in doing history: changing what is accepted by people just because it's there.

Q) I heard you were interested in South Asian military history. Is that part of your aspiration to engage in present issues through history?

" I think there are actually two sides to it. One reason relates to my background which influences how I see the field. In the past, the gender equation hasn't been the best in military history since men are thought to be the mainstream of the field and women are thought to be restricted to the household. And you don't usually associate military history with women – maybe more towards gender history or social history.

I wanted to change the way people thought about gender dynamics as well. Even in classes, I'm expected to remain left out in the conversation because of my gender, and I don't like having to be in the brackets of my discipline just because of the way it categorises things. Through gender, I can show people that there were outliers to the common narrative. I'm pretty much an outlier and I like it because it also means I'm unique. So I found that I can contribute a lot to the field that most people traditionally have overlooked and that's one reason I feel inclined towards military history.

The other reason is that Indian history is heavily controlled by the central government, which is currently the BGP. We promote leaders like Gandhi and Hindu intellectuals. I'm from Calcutta in West Bengal, and we had such amazing freedom fighters. But they're not highlighted.

The one I feel especially inspired by is called Subhas Chandra Bose. He was forced to retire from congress and formed an army called the Indian National Army. They came very influential to the extent that the no.1 enemy of the British army was Subhas Chandra Bose, not Gandhi or Nehru. So, I personally think I associate a lot with his characteristic traits and studying people like him joins with my personality by doing something that's not expected by most.

I personally think that we're not talking enough about our military history enough, and I want to talk about something that's not Gandhi."

Q) Any final remarks you would like to say to this year's freshers?

The one thing I would say is that " you can be who you want to be." There's no set expectation of you from other people as you might be afraid of, so don't be afraid of change. Just be open to saying yes to things and be creative. Even if it doesn't work out, first year's super chill! I personally wish I would have relaxed a bit more and reached out to people, especially since my first year was fully online. So go out, have fun in museums and in campus, because London is literally your oyster now.

Featured: Nishtha Saraf, Third Year,
President of UCL History Society
Interviewed and Edited by Jonas Lim

HISTORIES OF IMPERIALISM

A BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY OF EMPIRE: NEGATING PERSPECTIVES FROM BELOW

YI JIE TENG (SECOND YEAR)

Imperialism, as defined by American political theorist Michael W Doyle, is a system of control wherein an asymmetric balance of power exists between two political societies, one inhabiting the position of domination, whilst the other assumes the position of subjugation. The history of empires is thus littered with examples of once great powers supplanted by successive wielders of imperial influence and domination, and it is tempting to glamourize the process of grand power struggles while conferring no greater significance to other aspects of empire. This essay will argue that the history of empire must encompass the totality of lived and recorded experiences that have resulted from the political institutions of empire, both the overarching economic, political, and military aspects of empire, as well as the experiences of those who have lived under and resisted the principle of such international orders. Firstly, this essay will discuss the merits of analysing imperialism through the broader systems that historically facilitated and drove its function. Next, the histories of those subjected to imperialism and the phenomenon of imperial amnesia will be examined. Finally, the essay will broach the impact of new developments within historical scholarship upon the assertion of the question.

A broad, top-down perspective focusing on the most consequential factors which drove imperialism may be pertinent if one is to derive a greater understanding of the history of empires. In Empires, Doyle outlines the metrocentric, pericentric and systemic models on the causes of imperialism. The first view, espoused by Hobson and Lenin, argues that the drive for imperialism originates from inherent motivators which exist within the imperial core, be it wealthy financiers or the incentive structures of capitalism to seek ever greater markets to grow profits. The pericentric view attributes imperialism to circumstantial requirements of mercantile states moving to secure their interests within global peripheries where the enforcement of the international order necessitates the imposition of some form of imperial rule. Adherents to the systemic view suggest that the nature of international competition necessitates expansionist, aggressive growth, as the absence of any external mediator guaranteeing the security of states and their interests result in an order where states grow and dominate or stagnate and become dominated. The difficulty in creating a comprehensive theory behind the various forms of unequal relationships between polities which have been deemed imperialism supports the argument that history of empires is driven primarily by their rise and fall. It does so by demonstrating that the identification of key motivators for imperialism is central to understanding imperialism as a phenomenon in history, and that the complex interplay of factors occurring at the levels of interaction between states and civilizations must be understood to begin any meaningful discussion about empire.

For example, within the subdiscipline of economic history, empire is used as a category of analysis within the debate over the catalysts of the great divergence. Focusing on larger, structural developments may shed light upon patterns of shifting power dynamics between international political entities. Particularly relevant to this approach is the role of empire in facilitating Britain's ascension to a position as the preeminent industrial and imperial power during the 19th century. As economic historians seek to isolate and identify the factors which propelled Europe into a position of economic and military dominance over the rest of the globe, they must contend with the relationships between interstate conflict, mercantilism and subsequent political consolidation into empires. The conditions which gave rise to the emergence of European imperial dominance is covered by Economic historian Charles Harley in Trade: discovery, mercantilism and technology, positing that the rise of European mercantile states was fuelled by an uneven, eastward flow of mineral wealth expropriated from the new world. Similarly, the decline of Britain as the global imperial hegemon is explored in Moses Abramovitz' Catching Up, Forging Ahead, and Falling behind, in which he formulates the theoretical historical model underlying the tendency for established superpowers to be supplanted by newcomers. By comparing the factors which led up to the rise and decline of Britain's imperial dominance, a measure of the significance which Britain's empire played in leading the industrial revolution may be gained. In this light, the approach of studying empires as primarily concerning their larger developmental trajectory is indispensable when utilizing the lens of imperial history in the analysis of other branches of history.

Conversely, the reduction of this branch of history into a purely top-down study of the policy decisions and circumstances which occurred at the macro level of states and empires which led to the rise and fall of empires serves to negate the diverse histories of those involved in the institution of imperialism. This constitutes an omission of half the narrative of imperialism, and those who have been and continue to be affected by imperialisms of the past and their legacies are thus denied a voice within the historical scholarship governing this issue. Catherine Hall writes of the issue in ' Turning a Blind Eye': Memories of Empire; the disconnect between popular narratives of empire held by the public, and the true costs exacted upon the peripheralized populations in order to fuel the achievements of the metropolitan core. To Hall, the image of Cadbury's dairy milk is an example of the forgotten histories of empire, standing as a quaint and perceptibly innocuous symbol of English entrepreneurial success, comfortably insulated from the darker side of its past. Daniel Immewahr draws similar comparisons in How to hide an Empire, arguing that there is a stark lack of common knowledge over the imperialistic history of the United States. The collective amnesia of the public at large over the legacies of imperialism and its institutions which constructed a present out of foreign exploitation and expropriation emphasizes the need for a history of empire which transcends the traditional narratives of rising and falling powers, and examines the intimate impacts of imperialism upon the most mundane of empire's products. This is compelling as it indicts the lack of focus brought upon the unearthing of narratives which do not fit seamlessly into notions of trade, mercantilism, and grand strategy, signifiers of empire but unable to contain the nuanced societal impact of imperialism. If the study of history of empire were to construct an all-encompassing body of historical knowledge covering the extensive history of imperialism and its impacts, it would find itself impeded if it remained unable to expand beyond the teleological application of reductive models to case studies of great power growth and decline.

Lastly, new perspectives on empires must be included in the repertoire of historians of empire. Amidst the new intellectual climate of the cultural turn which occurred in the 1980s, histories of empires must integrate the knowledge of other historical subdisciplines to maintain relevance. Historians Potter and Saha confront this issue in Global History, Imperial History and Connected Histories of Empire. Within it, they bring up the crisis facing imperial history as its role in the broader discipline of history threatens to be subsumed and dissolved in the ' onward march into a global future' (Potter and Saha, 2015, 2). The solution to this quandary is not to double down on historical perspectives which prescribe undue significance to metanarratives of imperial life cycles, but rather the synthesis of new ideas and perspectives from those subdisciplines whose authoritative boundaries find common ground with the study of empire. Thus, for the era of history which comes after the supposed demise of old European imperialism, structures of power and imperial domination have assumed less conventionally recognizable forms, and the methods and doctrines of studying imperial history must similarly be updated to avoid its relegation to a mere prelude to global and other forms history.

To conclude, histories of empire do relate to the rise and fall of imperial systems, but it is not fundamentally reducible to such a generalised structural overview. Rather, histories of empire must encompass a far greater analysis of concepts and knowledge which stem from the confluence of different historical branches. The study of empires in their broader historical trajectories cannot come at the expense of accounting for the underlying histories which have been shaped by the existence of empire. The experiences of those resisting imperial rule and imperialism as an institution, in addition to the evolving academic environment posed by global history and the cultural turn highlight this pressing need to shift away from such an antiquarian outlook. Empires do not simply come and go, but have left behind complex legacies, informed, and influenced the formation and policies of other empires, and created shared experiences of unresolved trauma amidst populations in both the imperialized peripheries and the metropolitan capitals of empire. To negate the what may be perceived as mundane events of societies within areas which colonized and were colonized in favour of the romanticized aspects of grand strategy, warfare and interstate politicking suggests a framework bereft of the nuance required to engage fully and meaningfully with the scholarly examination of empires and their histories.

WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY?

IS THE "ENVIRONMENT" NATURAL?

JONAS LIM (THIRD YEAR)

Before we begin, what even is the "environment"? We often think of the environment as synonymous with the natural world of animals, plants, and landscapes, where human civilisation hasn't had its reach yet. A quick search on Google image reveals pictures of green, sublime images of the natural landscape. The dictionary definition of the environment is "the circumstances, objects, or conditions by which one is surrounded." But such definitions seem a little absurd. Though we colloquially consider forests, mountains, rivers, and the biomes that inhabit it as part of the 'natural environment,' the border between what is natural and what is not becomes less clear-cut when we come closer to our own spheres of life. For instance, the pet dogs, domesticated cats, the eggs in the grocery store, roadside trees in the middle of the city... these are all by right part of 'nature,' yet we rarely think of them as part of the environment compared to their wild counterparts.

There is, however, one consistency all these vague definitions of the environment:

First, That our different depictions of the 'environment' are all devoid of humans, and
Second, That the closer natural organisms are to humans, they are considered 'social' rather than 'environmental' (for instance, leaves on a forest are considered to be part of the environment, whereas the parsley on my pasta for lunch today is not)

Rather than having a stable definition in itself, we seem to think of the environment in terms of what it is not. In essence, we seem to think of the environment as anything "not human."
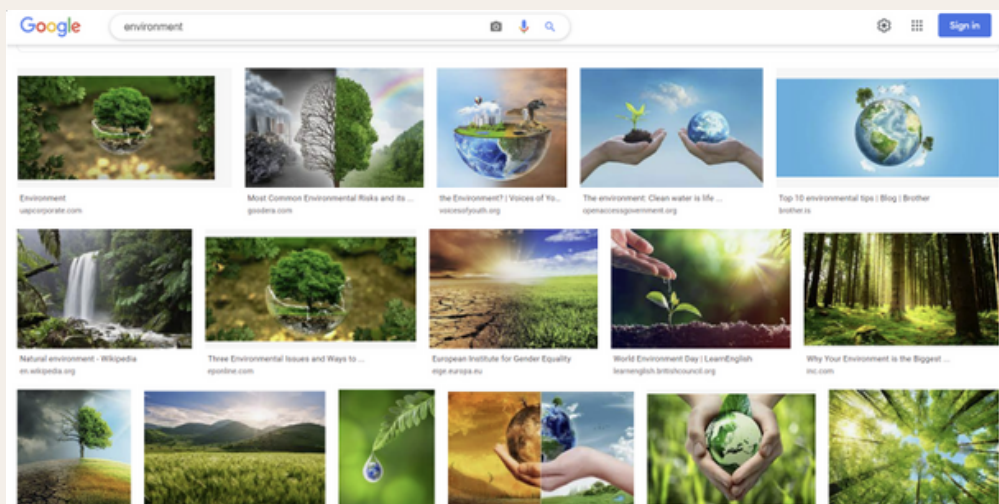
Google image search on 'Environment'

In this piece, I wish to complicate this dichotomy a bit further. Studying the history of ideas tells us that there is a history to every abstract category. By looking at how categories such as gender, race, class, or ethnicity have been constructed by the ideas that people attribute to them, we can see how the categories we use colloquially today are not natural at all, but artificial and human-made.

But what about the 'environment'? Some might consider it heretical even to question this categorisation. After all, the (natural) environment should be a pretty natural one, shouldn't it? Even in the light of the current climate crisis and the wave of environmentalist movement following it, many would probably object to the act of trying to bring in any ' human' elements to the untouched, sublime environment. Still, since when did we start thinking of the environment as something separate from humans? Do we necessarily think about our surroundings the same way that people in medieval Europe did? Since when did we start distinguishing ourselves from our plant and animal counterparts to think of ourselves as part of a greater, super-human "society"? In other words, what is the history of the ' environment' as an idea?

CONSTRUCTING THE "WILDERNESS"

History reveals that there is nothing ' natural' about the environment. Our definition of the environment as something separate from human society is, as it turns out, an extremely Western one. Looking at the history of non-European lands, of non-White oppressed races and nations, we see that the environmental space was constructed with concretely political aims.

John Gast's American Progress (1872) embodies the narrative of ' Manifest Destiny'
as a destined expansion of U.S. civilisation upon the American wilderness.

The history of U.S. expansion in North America is a representative example of one such environmental space was constructed. From the 19th century onwards, the ' wilderness' beyond the U.S. Western border was seen as a sublime land untouched by human civilisation. As religious ideals of ' God within nature' grew stronger in transcendentalist movements of the 19th century, the North American wilderness became a glorified project for U.S. expansionist politicians. At the heart of this conceptualisation was the idea of an environmental space of the American ' wilderness' – a land thought to be untouched, untainted, and thus had yet to be developed by U.S. civilisation.

The problem of ' wilderness' is that the lands west of the U.S. were not untouched at all. In reality, the Western part of North America was densely populated by sophisticated societies of non-white tribes and rural farmers. Still, conquering an untouched ' wilderness' was easier than acquiring control over a land densely populated by diverse local peoples. As the wilderness was thought to be separate from human society, people in the U.S. did not oblige U.S. expansionist politics regarding the area as a matter of politics. Thus, depicting the western lands as an untouched wilderness enabled a depoliticization of a process that was, in fact, highly political and oppressive.

Brief footage of European " discoverers" conquering the American "environment."
(The Battle of Little Bighorn/credit: Buyenlarge/Getty Images)

The history of ' indigenous' land appropriation shows how this ' environment' was not natural but in fact had very political repercussions (be mindful that the term ' indigenous' is an umbrella term that imposes a Western viewpoint that masks the variety of local tribal nations in the Americas). In 1871, the Indian Appropriations Act declared that ' no Indian nation or tribe within the United States shall be acknowledged or recognized as an independent nation.' The 1871 act mandated the forced relocation of these tribes to Indian reserves where they would be segregated and culturally ' preserved' from the influence of U.S. civilisation. In the solidification of U.S. nationhood, the existence of ' savage' tribal peoples in a ' civilised' nation like the U.S. was unacceptable. The frontier between the environmental ' wilderness' and society was actually one between diverse local non-whites and the U.S. empire.

WHY WE MUST THINK 'INTERSECTIONALLY' ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

Defining the ' environment' in European terms is problematic as it precisely leaves out the very people who are most severely impacted by climate change. For instance, Mexican workers deployed in the U.S. under the Bracero program were sprayed with DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane, a chemical compound used as insecticide famously introduced in Rachel Carson's Silent Spring for its hazardous effects on the environment and human health) before they were sent to their contractors. Even today, dump fields and industrial sewages are located in places populated predominantly by Black and Brown communities who were chosen, in the words of a North Carolinian environmental protester Almena Myles, ' because we were rural and poor and they thought we couldn't fight' (Bergman, BBC, 2019). Ironically, Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and Asian migrant communities were being exploited to accelerate environmental destruction, from which they themselves would suffer the consequences. The glorious narrative of ' progress' and ' rationality' we often associate with capitalist development often silences the histories of these people, upon whose labour and sacrifice of living conditions Western industrial development fundamentally relied.

This is the danger of shifting the burden of solving the climate crisis only to the domain of science. The current climate crisis is a distinctly human-made one and solving the crisis will require distinctly human approaches to the historical and political issues that complicate its solution. We cannot just wait for scientists to save the day. History has revealed that certain individuals or groups hold more responsibility than others in this crisis; ironically, those groups are also the ones that hold more power to bring about change for the better. Merely directing the majority of the solutions to climate change to individualistic consumerism-based lifestyle reforms cannot address the bigger structural forces responsible for creating the climate crisis, while alienating people who are not affluent or privileged enough to maintain a consumerist " sustainable" lifestyle. Apocalyptic prognoses not based on sufficient scientific evidence that ' we're all doomed to die no matter what we do' are unhelpful, as such statements disregard the fact that climate change will first impact the peoples and societies least responsible for it. Environmentalism and the struggle for environmental justice can only be sustainable when people of all races, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, classes, and nationalities have an equal voice in the solution. This is why we must think historically and intersectionally when thinking about the environment.

IMAGINING THE SELF AND HUMAN NATURE

ANOUSKA JHA (THIRD YEAR)

Intellectual history can take several methods. One, the typical scholarly approach, is the deconstruction of texts. How does language reflect political and moral states of mind? Simply, what does it mean ? The other approach, emphasised by the historian Quentin Skinner, is by analysing language and archives as ' species of social activism'; How is discourse reflected in social practices? Can texts themselves act as interventions in discourse? What about images-can they too resemble shifts of moral and political systems?

A strand in intellectual history, which brings together disciplines such as cultural, scientific, philosophical and political history, is the study of ideas of the ' self. The historical study of the ' self emerged alongside similar parameters to those of early individualism. Following Max Weber, individualism, which was underscored in Protestant ethics of the ' inner self and inner sin, was linked to notions of capitalism, liberalism, and the industrial revolution. Scholars such as Michael Masuch and Patricia Spacks have explored how the ' self emerged from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries through fictional and autobiographical forms. Scholars such as Paul Oppenheimer even look to thirteenth century individuals such as Giocomo de Lentino, who introduced the sonnet in Fredrick II's court.

The age of faith in Ancient Greece and Rome directed understandings to the sovereignty of the inner self. As depicted in St Augustine's Confessions in the fourth century, the Christian doctrine inspired matyrdom and realisations of inner sins and suffering. According to Jacob Burkhardt, the seventeenth century was a turning point, where secular rationality was the mark of the self-determined individual. Whilst Weber calls the rise of Protestantism during the English Reformation as resulting in a new ' selfhood' through the personal pilgrimage of the soul, it was Rene Descartes in his 1637 Discourse on Method, who emphasised the function of human nature as borne from reason. Only man, for Descartes, can know himself, as He has a conscious mind. Everything else in nature is a mechanical extension (res extensa) of this consciousness. By Platonising reason above the senses, Descartes stripped himself of the orthodox view of the body as a divine vessel. Even earlier than this, the English aristocrat Francis Bacon, claimed in 1605 that knowledge could be gained through sensory experience, though must be ' bounded by religion, or else it will be subject to deciet'.

I argue that there are more intricate ways of understanding the philosophy of human nature throughout history. Sources such as biographies, autobiographies and portraits from the early medieval to early modern era show that even fourteenth century thinkers such as Fraceso Petrarch, grappled with the ' I'. Contrary to the Burkhardtian view that the self was an exclusive Italian seventeenth century phenomenon, surveying these sources reveal a more deep-rooted endeavour to discover the practical meaning of human nature and the ' self.

TEXTUALISING SELFHOOD

One of the most widely read Latin works of the medieval European era is that of Petrarch's Secretum, composed between 1347-53. The text consists of three books, each introduced using an allegorical framework. The author is confronted by Veritas (truth), and is self-described as a ' conversation' or dialogue between Petrarch and Augustinius. In it he hopes that, even amidst worldly preoccupations and error, even while absorbed in himself and his own affairs, a man might still find a way to God. This example shows how even as early as the fourteenth century, thinkers were struggling to reconcile aspects of Renaissance humanism, Christianity and temporality, revealing a fragmented pursuit of selfhood. Other examples of memorandums include that of Thomas More, and Bocacio in the fifteenth century.

Women, such Queen Johanna of Naples and Isotta Nogurola in 1497 by Jacopo Foresti, were also subjects of biographies, suggesting an inter-societal probing of lives beyond the male understanding of the self. The rise of autobiographies and ' ego-documennts' such as memorandums, diaries and letters, emerged in the 1500s, due to factors suchas urbanisation, print and travel. Thus, documenting the ' self through texts was an attempt to impose order on chaos and turn events into structured stories.

Albrecht Durer 'Self Portrait', 1500

IMAGES OF SELFHOOD

However, as Jonathan Sawday illustrates, the Cartesian cognito was only one intellectual dimension of selfhood. Images and medical narratives/illustrations also provide a glimpse into the new philosophy of human agency. Images allow historians to engage and challenge the foucalitian view of the primacy of cognitive structures and texts. Michel Foucault argued that the ' self was not an individual liberal pursuit at all, but an affirmation of one's place in society. Yet looking at self portraits from the medieval and early modern era such as that of Albrecht Dürer (below) in the sixteenth century, and narratives of autopsia (looking inward through dissection) are powerful.

Through self-portraiture, anatomical observation and visual references to mirrors and ancient prose, the ' self has been reconstructed through a person and society's relation to religion, materiality and the cosmos.

Overall, selfhood meant various things throughout the discussed period. It went beyond defining oneself in a religious and economic community, to theorising on one's own origins, multiple ' selves', consciousness, and freedom. It involved using mediums such as autobiographies, portraits and dissections, to practice ' interiority', the looking inward of the physical self. Historians such as G.Baldwin explore this concept further through the lens of sixteenth to eighteenth century political selfhood. Baldwin argues that humanist thinkers such as William Cornwallis and Michele Montagnie went beyond describing a political/public persona, to linking the role of state leaders to moral virtue and discussions of the soul. Ultimately, I believe uncovering fluctuating definitions of the ' self through time allows historians to place modern politcal and moral ideologies into context, whilst also using interdisciplinary methods of science and philosophy to uncover how understanding of corporeality and our place in the world has been justified.

Petrarch, Secretum, Frontispiece, c1347-53

Coming up in History Soc.

29th September

Pub Crawl
Try out some of the best boozers in Bloomsbury

2nd October

Catch Up Social
For all the second and third years

4th October

Pizza Social
Chill afternoon to get to know other history students