

# **HIST32211 COLLECTING AND EXHIBITING THE EMPIRE IN BRITAIN, C.1750-1939**

CUD: Dr Lewis Ryder

The material legacy of British imperialism dominates contemporary British political debate. Previously ignored demands from once colonised countries for the repatriation of looted cultural treasures are increasingly difficult for museums to ignore. No longer side-lined to esoteric scholarly discussion, movies like *Black Panther* (2018) and tv series *Beef* (2023) have popularised the violent and unjust histories behind Western collections. The notion of the Western hero saving the world's cultural artefacts embodied in *Indiana Jones* no longer cuts it. This module explores the history behind this heated discussion, assessing the relationship between empire and colonial objects.



Museum Heist scene in *Black Panther* (2018)

As the British Empire expanded, vast quantities of antiquities, artworks, natural history specimens, animals and even people were transported back to metropole to be exhibited, studied and prized. This course explores *why* and *how* this took place, and what it can tell us about British society, politics, culture and imperialism more broadly. Part 1 uses case studies from across the empire to look at a range of different 'imperial agents' involved in collecting – officers as well as ordinary soldiers, diplomats, missionaries, archaeologists etc. We can consider the national story, but also use class, gender and race to assess how individuals constructed their identities through collecting, specifically looking at conceptions of imperial masculinity and femininity. Moreover, we will look at collecting as a colonial encounter, paying specific attention to the role of indigenous people in resisting but also sometimes facilitating colonial collecting. Part 2 turns attention to the display of objects, animals and people in Britain. We will move across different sites, museums, human exhibitions, world fairs and zoos to examine how empire was projected and understood by the public. In looking at how empire permeated British society in the collections and exhibitions, students will be equipped to understand and contribute to the contemporary discourse on decolonisation.

## Weekly topics

1. Introduction: Empire, Collecting, Exhibiting
2. The Spoils of War: Loot, War Trophies and Gentlemanly Officers
3. The Lost World: Explorers, Archaeology and (Neo) Imperial Manliness. Film showing: *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)
4. Collectors or Shoppers? Women, Domesticity and Imperial Souvenirs
5. Photograph Collections: Surveillance, Violence and Everyday Colonial Life
6. Resistance and Collaboration: Collecting with, and against 'the Native'
7. Reading Week
8. Science, Race and Curiosity: People on Display
9. Imperial Exhibitions and World Fairs
10. Empire at the Zoo: Geographical Knowledge and Exotic Animals. \*Archival session at Chetham's Library
11. British Museums: \*Trip to Manchester Museum

\* Trips to be confirmed

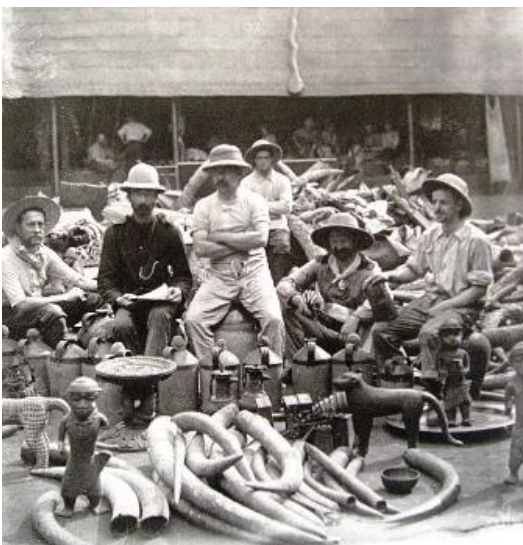
I supervise dissertations on the imperial, social, cultural and/or political history of Modern Britain (1750-2000), though offer most thorough supervision for period 1750-1939.

### Assessment methods

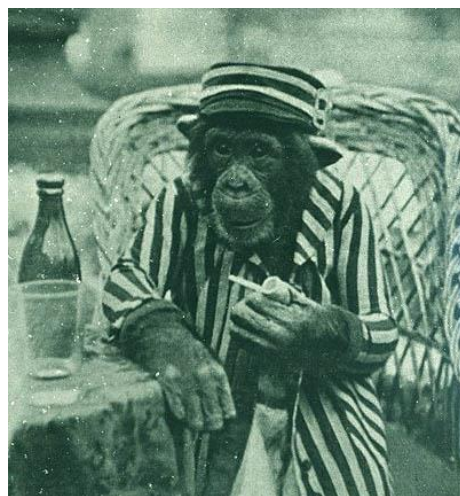
Source Analysis - 40%  
Research essay - 60%

### Teaching methods

x1 hour lecture  
x2 hour seminar (including group work)



The Loot of Benin 1897



'Consul', Belle Vue Zoo's Star Chimpanzee 1894.

**Zoom Consultation: Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June, 11am-12noon.**

<https://zoom.us/j/93089337491>

**Meeting ID: 930 8933 7491**