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Voices of Change from Great Britain

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Arriving at Heathrow after long night flights to Europe, our 21 undergraduate and graduate students accompanied by our teaching assistant and my wife and I were immediately greeted by the voices of change in the United Kingdom.

Comprised of a mix of SPEA Indianapolis and Bloomington students, all of us found that we were no longer in the European Union. With the June 23 referendum entitled Brexit (British Exit) taking place and votes still being counted as we landed, the “street papers” of London anticipated the outcome with splendidly unappetizing banners as, “We’re Out,” “See EU later” and “Take a Bow Britain.” More civilized headlines read, “Birth of a New Britain,” “Brexit Earthquake,” “Britain Divided,” and “Brexit MP Pledge Loyalty to PM.”

Preceded by a host of T-shirts reading “IN” or “OUT” all adorned with the Union Jack, this was an undisguised conflict between two unforgiving sides, often resulting in fights and even the inopportune and violent death of MP Jo Cox on June 16. Immediately, Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron resigned effective October 1, or until Parliament could agree upon a new successor. Before the students could catch a breath over these two events, on July 6 Sir John Chilcot at Westminster released to a dismayed nation a lengthy report that former and living Prime Minister Tony Blair (Labour Party) had

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Protests broke out along the Thames with many wearing Tony Blair masks smeared with “bloody” red paint, and with Blair now being threatened with lawsuits from the relatives of the dead U.K. soldiers. His then-secret comments to President George Bush in July 2002 that, “I will be with you...Whatever...” now became the headlines from prestigious newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* down to *The Daily Mirror*. Shortly thereafter, historically on July 13, Theresa May became just the second female Prime Minister of the U.K. of 76 PMs since Sir Robert Walpole was first appointed in 1721. In just three weeks our students, borrowing from a Dean Acheson title, were “present at the creation” of four sweeping changes. Regrettably, they were also here later for “the slaughter of the innocents” in nearby Nice, France, and distant Turkey.

In our SPEA-V 482/582 U.S. and U.K. National Security class at King’s College London, these events prompted excellent discussion. We also immersed ourselves in U.K. government with speakers, including the former Director of the Government Communications Headquarters — the U.K.’s National Security Agency; a former Director of the U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office; the former U.K. Director of Civil Contingencies-Home Secretary; plus two distinguished senior faculty from U.K. universities who lectured about Russian President Vladimir Putin, NATO and Terrorism; and a former U.S. senior foreign service officer. Our students were also able to try on the robes of the judges of the past in the Victorian Gothic style building opened by Queen Victoria in 1882 after a splendid briefing and tour on how the Royal High Courts of Justice operate.

Additionally, on July 7 at Hyde Park on a splendid morning but in a solemn ceremony, we all sadly laid flowers against the tall, silver markers that honor the 52 people who were killed by terrorist bombings in the city on July 7, 2005. Regrettably, without seeing either Holmes or Watson, high-ranking officials of the New Scotland Yard briefed our class in the London Metropolitan Police’s National Counter Terrorism and Policing Center on major trends in terrorism. Our American colleagues were very kind to host our class as well at “The Embassy to the Court of St. James” — the American Embassy at Grosvenor’s Square London — discussing U.S. national security issues. We concluded our class excursions with a private tour and briefing at Westminster Abbey, built in 960, and visited the site of the coronation of all kings and queens of the U.K. since 1066. We ended there with lunch on the Terrace adjoining Parliament.

Participating in other tours and briefings as well, our students and all Indiana University London students traveled to Bath, to see the Roman Ruins originally constructed there by Julius Caesar in 55 B.C.; to Stonehenge amazingly erected in 3,000 B.C.; energetically “hopped on and hopped off” a full bus tour of London; took a boat trip down the Thames in the early evening; viewed London from the London Eye — the world’s largest “Ferris Wheel” built for the 2000 Millennium World’s Fair; and had a personal tour of the stoic but immense Tower of London hosting the Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom, including those of the current Queen Elizabeth II.

Our **London class of the summer of 2016** in this diverse and vibrant European capitol of 10.2 million, with additionally 16.1 million tourists christening it the world’s No. 1 in tourism, will long remember many things. High on that list will be the fact they were present in an unprecedented time in British history — when an entire government and nation turned direction, through the voices of change, and they saw all of it firsthand.

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