

History 130: Introduction to World History

TTH, 9:30-10:45, Humanities 1131

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“Western Civilization?? I think it would be a good idea.”

--Gandhi

Course Objectives:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to major themes in world history from the dawn of man until the present day, with a particular focus on how we got to where we are today. The course is split into three units. The first unit—Guns, Germs, and Steel—takes its name from the book that will loosely guide our discussions. The constitution of the world that we live in—the haves and the have-nots, the “rich” and the “poor”—is not random or accidental. Human history was, and continues to be, influenced by forces that are often beyond our control—geography, climate, disease, and so on. In short, the question we will be trying to answer in the first part of the course is: Why did human development proceed at such different rates on different continents, and how does this impact us today?

The second unit—Contextualizing “The Rise of the West”—compares and contrasts the economies and societies of Ming China with those of imperial Spain, emphasizing cross-cultural contacts in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, respectively. We will examine the social and cultural influences that shaped each of these societies during their eras of “discovery.” We will also look at long-term trends in the economies of each society. Many scholars argue that China dominated the world economy until at least the middle of the eighteenth century. This argument destabilizes the idea of Western dominance since 1500 and calls into question the very notion of the untrammelled “rise of the West.” By carefully examining the Spanish conquest of the Americas and its impacts in the broader world, we will be able to better contextualize the historical significance of 1492.

The third unit—The Emergence of a “Modern” World?—deals with the influence of the Christian, capitalist West on the world stage over the past 200 or so years. While a narrative history of the world will emerge, our primary concern will be the “—isms” that were by-products of the emerging “modern” world. These include capitalism, industrialism, Marxism, racism, sexism, imperialism, nationalism, fascism, and so on. Our goal will be to understand how these concepts have informed the histories of peoples and nations in a variety of comparative settings. Finally, in the last part of the semester we will examine the resurgence of far-right populism around the world, looking back to

interwar Europe to better understand histories of “tradition” and “modernity” that have become so divisive. We will try to determine whether these concepts have any real meaning. Is Fascism resurgent? What does this mean for “liberal democracy”?

Learning Outcomes

In accordance with the goals of the UW History major, you will learn to define important questions related to world history and explain their academic and public implications. You will explore the contemporary implications of many of the historical questions we will be addressing over the course of the semester. Good history leans into the curiosity that drives us to understand ourselves and the politics of the world we inhabit. At the same time, good history highlights the wonderful, weird, offensive, and strange that make the past a “foreign country.” The uncomfortable and unpredictable can teach you just as much about yourself as what you think you already know.

In addition, you will evaluate the evidentiary and theoretical bases of various historical conversations in the making of the modern world. Drawing upon a diversity of primary- and secondary-sources, you will synthesize the most pertinent evidence to make persuasive arguments and draw innovative conclusions. History is NOT about names, dates, and places; it’s about researching tough questions, synthesizing evidence (i.e. reading), drawing novel conclusions, and communicating your findings in a clear, accessible manner.

How the Credit Hours are Met

This class meets for three 75-minute class periods each week over the course of the semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, studying) for about 3 hours out of the classroom for every class period.

Procedures and Requirements:

- 1) The course will ask you to concentrate your efforts on brief readings, class quizzes, short writing exercises, and discussion. As such, students will be expected to attend every class session/discussion section and to participate actively in section discussions.
- 2) In order to benefit from lecture and discussion sections, students must have completed assigned readings prior to the date that they will be discussed in class. On most days, there will be short quizzes at the end of class that cover the day’s reading, as well as material delivered during lecture. These materials will generate the key questions for discussion sections.
- 3) A total of 500 points are available in the course. Students can earn a potential 365 points on class assignments. These points may be earned through: quizzes (23 @ 5 points each = 115), two-page written responses (3 @ 50 points each = 150), and

a final family history project (100 points). A further 135 points can be earned in your section discussions and will be based largely on attendance and participation. Final grades will be determined strictly as a percentage of points earned: A = above 463; AB = 462-438; B = 437-413; BC = 412-388; C = 387-348; D = 347-298; F = below 298.

Quizzes (5 points each): will be administered at the end of every class session. These quizzes will consist of five questions: multiple choice, true/false, fill in the blank. They will cover material in the day's readings, as well as material delivered during lecture. The instructor will open the quiz in class, and students will have five minutes to complete it in Canvas. No makeups. No exceptions.

Assignments (50 points each): There are five short writing assignments over the course of the semester. Most of these assignments are responses to current political debates informed by history. Your challenge in each of these assignments is to measure change over time. How are conditions today similar to those of the past? How are they different? Your responses are limited to 500 words (roughly two pages of typed text). Only your top three scores on these papers will count toward your final grade.

Final Paper (100 points): Who are you in world history? For this assignment, you must go back at least three generations in your family (i.e. at least to your great-grandparents), choose one person, and write a short research paper on that person and their relationship to world history. What were the primary forces that shaped this person's life? Were they impacted by any of the "-isms" we discussed in the second half of the course? In light of your findings, how does your sense of your own role in history change, or not?

I encourage you to get started on the research for this paper early. We will devote one class period in early November to methods and techniques for tracing family history online. In addition, you should feel free to use private family documents, oral history, or interviews with parents, grandparents. The easiest starting point is the online database: <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/>. To receive the fullest, free access, you should sign in through UW libraries and access the database there.

****NOTE****

If you have an issue with tracing your family history due to adoption, etc. please consult with the professor or TA early in the semester to discuss options. You might be able to write a strong research paper focused on the historical context of your adoption (if you know the context). We also encourage creativity in defining "family," so adopted family, kin, or even friends are potential sources for tracing historical connections.

Course Outline:

9/7—Introduction—Syllabus—What is world history? Space and orientation. Why is the world the way it is—socially, economically? What explains the inequities and differences that we see in the world? Why is the status of New Guinea fundamentally different from say, the United States, on the world stage? Yali's question.

GUNS, GERMS, AND STEEL

9/12—**What does it mean to be human?** Where do we come from? Bible, Popol Vuh, etc. How did humans come to populate the earth? Patterns of migration? Modern v. archaic? Relationship between science and history. READ OR LISTEN: "Exploring the World's Creation Myths," NPR:
<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5010951> READ: Jude Coleman, "Human-evolution story rewritten by fresh data and more computing power," *Nature* (18 May 2023).

9/14—**Evolutionary Science v. Religion: A Short History.** Scopes Monkey Trial. Evolution versus creationism? Intelligent design? READ:
<https://www.theguardian.com/science/2007/feb/15/schoolsworldwide.religion>

9/19—**Place, Space, and Climate.** How does our physical setting impact our life chances? How can geological/climatic phenomena transform our economic and social circumstances? READING: Diamond, "A Natural Experiment of History," 53-66

9/21—**Eat...or go hungry.** How does agricultural potential affect one's life chances, especially in the era prior to global trade? What are the implications of crop domestication for human populations? What are the implications of animal domestication on human populations? Utility of animals? How do crops and animals spread to various parts of the world? READING: Diamond, "To farm or not to farm," 104-113.

9/26—**Animals, People, and Plagues.** How are diseases born and transmitted? What happens during a pandemic? What impacts have diseases had on history? How have humans responded to pandemics? Smallpox? Yellow Fever? Bubonic plague? READING: Benjamin Rush, "An Account of the bilious remitting yellow fever," 8-26. WATCH: <https://www.pbs.org/video/malaria-in-the-u-s-1688419659/>

9/28—**Technology and the Talking Book.** What is the definition of "civilization"? Literacy and modern language diffusion. Is literacy a prerequisite for civilization? Technology and its diffusion. READING: Diamond, "Collision at Cajamarca," 67-81; "Yali's People," 295-321. Is science useful for understanding history? WATCH: "Atahualping Challenge": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tv4znTkcpdA> What is the primary critique of the participants in the Atahualping challenge? Do they interpret Atahualpa's behavior and motives accurately? How or how not?

10/3—**Civilization and the Law.** Mesopotamia: invention, urbanization, development of legal culture. How does Hammurabi's Code reflect the ethics, philosophy, and history of Babylon? What elements of the code survive as legal principles through time? How does the law evolve and change? Why? READING: "The Code of Hammurabi"; Alissa J. Rubin, "A Climate Warning from the Cradle of Civilization," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2023. **ASSIGNMENT: (due before sections on Thursday and Friday).** At the end of lecture, you will be assigned one law, or set of laws, from Hammurabi's Code for which you must answer the following questions: 1) What does your law tell us about everyday life in Babylon? Family, social hierarchy, trade, religion, etc. 2) What elements of your law survive in modern-day jurisprudence or ethical thinking? 3) Is there any part of your law that today would be widely viewed as unacceptable? Specific to your law, how have our views of justice evolved or changed? Your response should not exceed 500 words. Your cover sheet should include the text of your law, as well as your name.

CONTEXTUALIZING "THE RISE OF THE WEST"

10/5—**Confucianism and Patriarchy.** Is Confucianism a philosophy or a religion? What is the relationship between family and political governance in Confucian thought? What role do women play in Confucianism? READING: "Confucius on Good Government."

10/10—Film: Raise the Red Lantern

10/12—Finish movie.

10/17—**The Ming Dynasty: Growth and Expansion.** How did China emerge as the world's greatest power by 1400? What are the legacies of Chinese dominance in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean? Zheng He's Travels. READING: Dolors Folch, "China's greatest naval explorer sailed his treasure fleets as far as East Africa," National Geographic (7 May 2020): <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/history-and-civilisation/2020/05/chinas-greatest-naval-explorer-sailed-his-treasure-fleets-as-far-as-east-africa>

10/19— **Who discovered America (and why does it matter)?** Olmec heads. 1421? Why didn't Chinese become "discoverers" of the world beyond the Indian Ocean? How did Confucian thought contribute to China's attitudes in its explorations? READING: "Journal retracts paper claiming that group of Indigenous Americans were Black Africans," <https://retractionwatch.com/2020/10/12/journal-retracts-paper-claiming-that-group-of-indigenous-americans-were-black-africans/>; Robert Finlay, "How not to (Re)Write World History: Gavin Menzies and the Chinese Discovery of America," *Journal of World History* 15 (2004): 229-242. Website: "The 1421 Myth Exposed" **ASSIGNMENT (due before discussion section):** Should Gavin Menzies have been invited to take part in the symposium at the US Library of Congress on the topic of "The Significance of Zheng He's Voyages, 1405-1433"? Why or why not? Limit: 500 words.

10/24— **The Aztecs Before the Spanish.** What were the driving principles of the Aztec empire? How did the Aztec tributary system compare to that of the Chinese? How do

historians explain Aztec “human sacrifice”? Cannibalism? Were the Aztec distinctively cruel or barbaric? READING: Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, “Victims,” 87-110.

10/26—Discovery, Conquest, or Encounter?: Europeans in Africa and the Americas.

What was the nature of European exploration in Africa and the Americas? Was Columbus’ arrival in the Americas an exceptional historical event? Was the Spanish conquest of Mexico distinctively cruel or barbaric? Aztec empire v. Spanish empire? READING: Clendinnen, “Fierce and Unnatural Cruelty: Cortes and the Conquest of Mexico,” *Representations* 33 (1991), 65-100.

10/31—Globalization, 1400-1800. China After 1430, Continued Dominance?

Population growth, trade, science and technology, etc. Galleon Trade. Los Tres Mulatos de Esmeraldas. How was European exploration different than that of the Chinese 150 years earlier? Forging of new peoples? Flows of capital? Opium Wars as watershed? READING: “The First Opium War,” in Richard Lim and David Kammerling Smith, eds., *The West in the Wider World: Sources and Perspectives*, vol. 2 (Bedford/St. Martins, 2003), 207-233 (skim, use for assignment, not on quiz); David Pierson, Edward Wong, Olivia Wang, “US Raises Pressure on China to Combat Global Fentanyl Crisis,” *New York Times*, July 7, 2023; Asawin Suebsaeng and Adam Rawnsley, “Trump Asks Advisers for “Battle Plans” to “Attack” Mexico if Reelected,” *Rolling Stone*, 29 March 2023. **ASSIGNMENT (due before discussion section):** Briefly compare and contrast Britain and India’s 19th century Chinese trade in opium with China and Mexico’s contemporary US trade in fentanyl (and its ingredients). How are the ethical and economic issues similar/different? Should the US invade Mexico? Limit: 500 words

THE EMERGENCE OF A “MODERN” WORLD??

11/2— Who are you in world history? A Research Seminar. How do you conduct research on your family’s history? What sources are most easily accessible? How do you build on sources to construct meaningful stories? Professor Sweet will use the class to guide you through the research process, using an example from his own family.

11/7—The Construction of the Atlantic World: Capitalism and Slavery in the Development of the “Modern” World. Economic impacts of European conquests? African slavery: Numbers? Where? Forms of labor? Impacts of African diaspora? How do Africans fit into American history? 1619? READ: Transatlantic Slave Trade Database; James H. Sweet, “An African-Atlantic Perspective on 1619’s “Origins” Project,” *American Historical Review* 127 (2022): 1827-1830.

11/9—The Age of Revolutions. Case Study: The Haitian Revolution. Should the Haitian Revolution be studied along the same historical trajectory as the American Revolution and the French Revolution? What were Haiti’s impacts on broader anti-colonial movements in the Americas? Why has Haiti’s role in world history been forgotten? READ: Laurent Dubois, “Atlantic Freedoms,” *Aeon* (2016).

11/14—**The Birth and Spread of Industrialization.** Putting-out system. Factory system. Small artisan v. industrialists? Time, discipline, family, etc. Rise of cities, public transport, ghettos? What is a child? Age as a construct? “Child laborer,” “child bride,” “child prostitute,” “child soldier.” Historically fixed chronological age for adulthood? READ: Life of Industrial Worker in 19th Century England: Parliamentary Evidence; Nicole Goodkind, “Illegal Child Labor on the Rise,” CNN, 30 July 2023; Martha Mendoza, “Advocates sue federal government for failing to ban imports of cocoa harvested by children.” WATCH: 60 Minutes: Slaughterhouse cleaning company employed children; SkyNews: “Cobalt Mining for phones.” **ASSIGNMENT (due before discussion section):** A recent 60 Minutes report described child labor in the US as an “ancient atrocity.” Compare and contrast child labor in 2023 with child labor in the US in 1900. What has changed and what has remained the same? Should 21st century American definitions of “childhood” be applied to places like Congo or Ivory Coast? Why or why not? Limit: 500 words.

11/16—**The Responses to Capital: Organized Labor and Marxism.** Marx on “family” and “children”? Government reforms. How did Marxism go wrong? Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Castroism. READ: Communist Manifesto excerpts

11/21—**Imperialism: India and Africa.** Race and pseudo-scientific thought in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The “white man’s burden”? READING: Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden” (1899); Dylan Sullivan and Jason Hickel, Al Jazeera, 2 December 2022; “How British colonialism killed 100 million Indians in 40 years”; Tirthankar Roy, “The Raj revision: why historians are thinking again about British rule in India,” *The Spectator*, 27 December 2022

11/23—THANKSGIVING

11/28—**Fascism, World War II, and the Holocaust.** Treaty of Versailles and end of WWI. Defining fascism. READING: Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism” (1932). Video: “One Survivor Remembers.”

11/30—**Nationalism: India and Pakistan.** What is nationalism? Patriotism? Race? Religion? Sexual orientation? Holocaust deniers? White supremacists? Is nationalism healthy or dangerous? Are “national” boundaries “real” or “imagined”? How did anti-colonialism contribute to emerging forms of nationalism in the 20th century? Case Study: India/Pakistan. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs. READ: Joshua Holzer, “What is the difference between nationalism and patriotism,” *The Conversation*, 28 June 2023; Sunaina Danziger, “Dividing Lines: What India’s Hindu Nationalist Turn Portends for Relations with Pakistan,” *South Asia*, 19 June 2020. WATCH: Youtube: Why was India split into two countries?

12/5—**The Irish Republican Movement: Origins and History.** WATCH: Youtube: The Troubles: Unraveling Northern Ireland’s 30-year Conflict.” Video: “In the Name of the Father”

12/7—**Nationalism and Genocide: The Balkans and Rwanda.** Finish video. What is the role of forgiveness and gratitude in human history? Given Rwanda's history, is the current president's rejection of political opposition justifiable? READING: Website: *US Holocaust Museum*: "Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1992-1995: Background," "History of Ethnic Tensions," "Serbian Forces Target Civilians." "Rwanda: Divided by Ethnicity," "Massacre of the Tutsi Minority." WATCH: Youtube: He murdered her children, now he's her neighbor.

12/12—**Resurgent Fascism?** Fascism v. populism—similarities, differences. Is "liberal democracy" still widely accepted as the preferred form of governance in the world? Strengths? Weaknesses? Representativeness? Is fascism resurgent? Is fascism right-wing or left-wing or both? READ: Daniel Nexon and Justin Casey, "The Vexing Rise of the Transnational Right: Lessons from Interwar Europe," *Foreign Affairs*, 19 January 2023. **ASSIGNMENT (due by Friday, December 15, 5:00):** The recent rise of right-wing populists across the globe has caused some commentators to suggest that fascism is resurgent. Using evidence from the interwar period (1918-1939) as your guide, do you believe it is accurate to label contemporary groups in places like the US, Brazil, or Italy as "fascist"? Why or why not?

12/19—**Final Paper due by 5:00 pm: Who are you in world history?** Go back at least three generations in your family (i.e. at least to your great-grandparents), choose one person, and write a short research paper on that person and their relationship to world history. What were the primary forces that shaped this person's life? Were they impacted by any of the "isms" we discussed in the second half of the course? In light of your findings, how does your sense of your own role in history change, or not? Limit: 1250 words.

You must include at least one example of primary source evidence that demonstrates how you researched your paper—birth record, census record, newspaper article, etc. These should be attached to your paper on a separate page.