

**Modern Global History – History 492-20**  
**Wed 2:00 – 4:50 • Harris Hall L-40**

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### **Introduction**

National boundaries often define the parameters of scholarly research and yet so many historical developments transcend such borders. Whether we examine histories of migration and population growth, resource consumption, colonialism, scientific innovations, capital flows, epidemics and pandemics, warfare, technological change, or even industrialization and urbanization, it is rare to be able to explain these patterns fully without analyzing their transnational and global dimensions. Indeed, for many of these examples working solely within the confines of the nation-state can lead to inaccurate and misleading interpretations.

This seminar is designed to help students explore the methods, underlying assumptions, and central findings of global history, a field that is increasingly pivotal to the ways we understand interconnections and shared experiences in the modern world. We have selected case studies that highlight developments across continents and oceans. The readings move in a loose chronology from the eighteenth to the early twenty-first century and underscore the different kinds of questions and research strategies that scholars bring to the field.

Global history can of course be defined in many different ways. For our purposes, we emphasize three overlapping objects of analysis. First, are those trends inherently associated with movement: migrations, circulation of ideas, disease flows, and trade networks, to name a few. Second, are isomorphic patterns that operate on a variety of scales and that require a comparative approach; this could include the growth of cities, the rise of industries, and the commodification of the natural world. Finally are those phenomena that are truly planetary in scope and that make little sense unless one takes a panoptic perspective. Here we consider empires, international organizations, and even globalization itself. No ten-week course could be comprehensive: our primary aims are to help students 1) develop the skills to think transnationally and globally; 2) evaluate the merits of the burgeoning research in this field; and 3) lay the groundwork for you to conduct your own research along these lines should you be so inclined.

### **Assignments**

The writing assignments for the course should help you master the literature and develop the skills to engage critically with leading scholars' arguments, evidence, and, where applicable, limitations.

- 6 weekly reading responses: (see handout) -500 words
- Midterm book review, due on Feb 21<sup>st</sup>: -2000 words
- End of term historiographical essay, due on Mar 17<sup>th</sup>: -4000 words

For your final essay, you may choose a theme from the course (or, with our approval, select a topic we haven't covered) and analyze at minimum three to five sources on the topic, of which three should be monographs.

## Weekly Meetings

## January 8

**Week 1** - Introductory Conversation: Methods, Perspectives, and Historiography

Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *American Historical Review* v. 100 (1995), pp. 1034-1060.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 27-46.

William Taylor, "Between Global Processes and Local Knowledge: An Inquiry into Early Latin American Social History, 1400-1900," in Oliver Zunz, ed., *Reliving the Past: the Worlds of Social History* (University of North Carolina Press, 1985) 115-190.

During this introductory week, we will take up the decentering and provincializing impulses in global history even as we also consider the different ways identity and underlying assumptions shape knowledge production, both past and present. What kinds of stories do we tell about the world as a whole? Whose perspectives and, more to the point, foundational concepts, triumph? How do we explain the unevenness of power – economic, social, environmental, political, intellectual – and does our focus on this question prevent us from noticing other kinds of phenomena that circulate (or remain spatially fixed) in no less influential and interesting ways?

The readings we've selected are meant to get the conversation started, but they are hardly the last word. Geyer and Bright, for instance, offer just one perspective on the origins and uses of "world history in a global age" and there are many more. Likewise, Chakrabarty's analysis of "post-coloniality" is part of an on-going conversation about the ways colonial and national categories are "variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe.'" Finally, William Taylor's piece on "Global Processes and Local Knowledge" introduces us to dependency and world systems theories while also exploring secular, religious, legal, and social developments in Latin America between 1400 and 1900. Our hope is that Taylor's article lays the groundwork for next week's conversations on the Atlantic World.

## January 15

**Week 2** - Life Histories and African Epistemologies in the Atlantic World

James Sweet, *Domingos Álvarez, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011)

This week we consider James Sweet's analysis of the life and times of Domingos Álvares, an intellectual and healer from contemporary Benin whose forced migrations took him first to Brazil as a slave and later in life (following arrest under the orders of the Inquisition) to Portugal. Reconstructing Álvares' trans-continental life story, Sweet is able to highlight the multiple ways "African categories of knowledge" were deployed to interpret and influence developments in the eighteenth century Atlantic world. Sweet reminds us that the outcomes of various economic, religious, and political processes, underway in this period, were by no means a foregone conclusion. His book is part of small, but growing body of work in global history that uses individual biographies to illustrate sweeping geopolitical patterns and economic transformations.

**January 22****Week 3** - World Economies and Their Origins

Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

Peer Vries, "The California School and Beyond: How to Study the Great Divergence," *History Compass* v. 8 (2010), pp. 730-751.

Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence* is probably the closest thing to a canonical text that global history has. By focusing carefully on China in the eighteenth century, it challenges a long-familiar story about the "inevitable" European domination of the global economy, resulting from superior European ideas, capacities, or institutions. Within economic history, Pomeranz's work continues to be debated and by no means are all convinced that, had it not been for coal and colonies, Western Europe would have hit a developmental wall as China did. Global historians have been far more enthusiastic adopters of the Pomeranz thesis, since it (1) offers a non-racist explanation for the Western European ascent, (2) paints the pre-nineteenth century world as a world of "surprising resemblances" containing no single power center, and (3) highlights the role of the environment and particularly energy.

**January 29****Week 4** - Commodity Chains and Continental Connections

Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the Place of Sugar in Modern History* (Penguin Books, 1985).

Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* is the oldest book on this syllabus by about fifteen years, although you wouldn't know it to read it. Mintz follows a commodity, sugar, through the economy of the Atlantic world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as it moves from Caribbean cane fields to English teacups. Trade has been, of course, one of the most important ties binding different parts of the world to each other. Mintz's insight was that, by writing the history of a commodity rather than a place or a person, one could highlight the connections between different social systems, worlds of meaning, and labor regimes. In particular, Mintz reveals with unusual clarity the bonds between slave labor, which we sometimes think of as an old system incompatible with the modern world, and the factories that depended on the crops that slaves grew. In 1985, commodity history was a novelty. Today, and in part because of Mintz, one can find writing in this vein on cotton, uranium, hemp, and many other products.

**February 5****Week 5** - Fertility, Domesticity, and Empire

Nancy Hunt, *A Colonial Lexicon: of Birth Ritual, Medicalization, and Mobility in the Congo* (Duke University Press, 1999).

This week we turn to the intimate social relations that are all too often neglected in studies of geopolitics and socio-economic power. Nancy Hunt began her research for her book, *A Colonial Lexicon*, with the straightforward though hardly simple desire to understand the logic of "colonial childbearing and obstetrics." (p. 10) What she found took her far beyond childbirth itself and revealed how deeply enmeshed

fertility, sexuality, and domesticity were to colonial regimes and even to colonial violence. Hunt calls her book a “microhistory” because it concentrates on a small region of the Congo in the vicinity of Yakusu, the site of a British Baptist Mission Station founded in 1895. But like the best microhistories it is also much more besides: an investigation of “concrete objects” like soap, bicycles, automobiles, and baby scales that infused and transformed colonial situations; an exploration of the transnational flow of ideas concerning hygiene, demography, tropical medicine, and Christianity; a social analysis of “colonial middle figures” including teachers, nurses, and midwives; and an interrogation of reproductive dynamics in post-independence Zaire.

### February 12

#### Week 6 - Contours and Limits of Empires

John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: the Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (Bloomsbury Press, 2008), introduction and chapters 4-9.

Global history, especially when operating in “transnational” mode, can sometimes appear as if it is all about connections and cosmopolitanism. But transnational interactions have not taken place on a level playing field. Global space is hierarchical, and for most of modern history empires have been the political structures that organize that hierarchy. Yet empire is a famously complex and heterogeneous form of rule, appearing in different ways in different places, and it can be hard to understand. John Darwin, luckily, possesses an unusual gift for wide-ranging synthesis and formidable expertise in the field of imperial history. For our purposes, then, *After Tamerlane* is valuable not for its methodology or unusual thesis, but as a clearly labeled diagram of a complex machine.

### February 19

#### Week 7 – Oceanic History, (Anti-Colonial) Nationalism, and Diasporic Solidarities

Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2006).

Cemil Aydin, “A Global, Anti-Western Moment?: The Russo-Japanese War, Decolonization, and Asian Modernity,” in S. Conrad and D. Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 213-236.

Erez Manela, “Dawn of a New Era: the ‘Wilsonian Moment’ in Colonial Contexts and the Transformation of World Order, 1917-1920,” in *Competing Visions of World Order*, pp. 121-150.

Oceans separate lands, but they also connect them, as anyone who has contemplated the relative difficulty of overland and maritime travel in the pre-industrial period knows. As historians have shifted their emphasis from nations to transnational phenomena, oceans have loomed particularly large in their imaginations. Navigable bodies of water are no longer seen as empty spaces on the map but as arenas where cultural contact is constant, movement is the rule, identities are negotiable, state power is weak, and no one is on her “home turf.” In *A Hundred Horizons*, Sugata Bose uses an oceanic perspective to examine a series of extra-territorial topics, including circular migrations, intermediary capital flows, transnational warfare, and

anticolonial action. The Indian Ocean not only enabled individuals, ideas, and objects to move, it also helped to create solidarities between faraway peoples. Whereas histories of anti-imperial nationalism were formerly told as part of nation-founding mythologies, now there is much more interest in the (somewhat ironic) transnational and diasporic aspects of nationalist movements. Erez Manela and Cemil Aydin have been important chroniclers of that phenomena and articles by them fill out the story, partly told by Bose, of a world connected by anti-imperial movements. Both of those articles correspond to full books, Manela's *The Wilsonian Moment* (2007) and Aydin's *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia* (2007).

### February 26

#### Week 8 - Licit and Illicit Flows of Knowledge and Innovation

Adrian Johns, *Piracy: the Intellectual Property Wars from Gutenberg to Gates* (University of Chicago Press, 2009), chapters 1, 2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17.

Intellectual property laws and patent offices exist in just about every country around the world. Their operations have for decades, and even centuries, been intimately tied to knowledge economies and systems of inter-state governance. Adrian Johns seeks to trace the origins of piracy and explore how contests over innovation and ownership often served as catalysts for the very regulatory regimes around copyright and patents that we now tend to take for granted. Johns' emphasis on historical precedent means we will spend a lot of time thinking through developments within Europe, but as he demonstrates, these are developments with trans-Atlantic and global reverberations. Through his analysis, we will shine the spotlight on central changes in the history of science, commerce, and law; we will also consider the varied institutions and actors that both define and police the boundaries between legal and illegal activities.

### March 5

#### Week 9 - Environments and Non-Human Inhabitants

Graham Burnett, *The Sounding of the Whale: Science and Cetaceans in the Twentieth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), chapters 1 and 4-7.

A survey of planetary phenomena over the last several centuries would hardly be complete without examining the history of changing environments and non-human nature. Burnett's analysis takes us back to oceans and focuses on their largest inhabitants, whales. His book bridges the history of science and environmental history to explore how industrial and conservation measures intersected with geopolitical negotiations and research strategies. How did environmental slogans such as "save the whales" become a benchmark of late twentieth century thinking, at least in northern climes and among international campaigners? Burnett's book reminds us of the many ways in which human fingerprints can be found in our descriptions and evaluations of the natural world.

### March 12

#### Week 10 - Globalization and the Postwar Economy

Thomas Zeiler, "Opening Doors in the World Economy," in Akira Iriye et al, *Global Interdependence: the World After 1945* (Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 203-361.

Akira Iriye, "The Making of a Transnational World," in *Global Interdependence: the World After 1945*, pp. 681-847.

Global history is very often the history of globalization, a teleological story about the acceleration of cross-border flows and the erosion of state sovereignty that culminates in a world of unregulated markets, cultural *mélange*, and cosmopolitan identity. The final destination of that narrative is usually the 1970s, the moment when the material forces of globalization (increased communication, hard-to-control international financial transactions, dramatic reduction in shipping costs) came off the leash. *Global Interdependence* collects synthetic writing on that climactic moment of globalization, although it extends the periodization somewhat by considering the entire post-1945 period. Particularly important trends within the history of late-twentieth-century globalization are the construction and subsequent breakdown of the Keynesian global economy, described by Zeiler, and the rise of non-state actors and "global civil society" within the international system, described by Iriye. Fuller accounts of each are contained in Barry Eichengreen's *Globalizing Capital* and Akira Iriye's *Global Community*, respectively.