

# Humanities Seminars Program

## SEEDS OF GLOBALIZATION: THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD

August 2014

9:00 a.m. until noon

Humanities Seminars/Dorothy Rubel Room

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This course is designed to help us to understand the making of our globalized economy and international culture. Of course, all histories are just “stories” we tell rather than ironclad proofs of cause and effect. We retrospectively impute connections among disparate people and events in the service of trying to refine our models of human behavior. We do not even have a *reliable* anthropology of humans. Are we more competitive than cooperative, more opportunistic than empathetic, etc.? Despite these serious unknowns, humans cannot live without telling stories about their own personal and collective pasts. The discipline of history is about coming up with the most plausible (least worst) stories that we can tell at any given time.

For a long time we have told stories about the “Rise of the West” that have often implied that there was something innately superior about “Western civilization” (in the late nineteenth and early-mid-twentieth centuries this was often linked to ideas about a superior “race”). As this class will suggest, there are better grounded stories to explain the emergence of today’s world system – based on European economic power, economic logic, science and technology, and, to a significant extent, culture – than appeals to ideas of cultural or racial superiority. We will learn the central roles of biogeography, epidemiology, patterns of trade, geopolitics, and pure accident in the “Rise of the West.”

Our readings first delve into the history of evolution, disease, trade, religions, and the pathways by which the various regions of the world eventually became linked up with one another.

These link with another set of readings which will focus on the narrower question of how the current global system of capitalism, characterized for 500 years by European and “Neo-European” (USA, Canada, Australia, NZ) political and economic domination of most of the rest of the world, emerged and maintained itself. Now the system is globalized and the era of Northern hegemony may be coming to an end. We will see if we can make some sense of it.

## TEXTS:

Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism* (NY: Cambridge, 2004)

Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* (Verso, 2002) (excerpts)

Robert B. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002)

### **August 6 The Old World System and the New**

- Crosby, xv-131
- Marks, 1-66.

Recommended:

- Andrew Watson, "The Arab Agricultural Revolution and Its Diffusion, 700-1100," *Journal of Econ. History* 34, no. 1 (March 1974): 8-35
- Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (NY: Norton, 1998): 157-191

### **August 13 The Contribution of the Americas**

- Crosby, 132-216, 269-308
- Marks, 67-94

Recommended:

- John R. McNeill, "Yellow Jack and Geopolitics," *Review of the Fernand Braudel Center*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2004): 343-364
- Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), chap. 7 The Slave Trade, pp. 195-231.

### **August 20 The Industrial Revolution**

- Marks, 95-121.
- Eric Jones, *The European Miracle* (NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), Conclusion, pp. 225—38.
- Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 1-33

Recommended:

- Joseph Inikori, "Eric Williams and the Changing Explanations of the Industrial Revolution," in Heather Cateau and S.H.H. Carrington, eds., *Capitalism and slavery fifty years later : Eric Eustace Williams--a reassessment of the man and his work* (NY: Peter Lang, 2000)

### **August 27 Imperialism and Capital Flows: Creating the "Third World"**

- Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts* pp. [1-59; 141-75; 279-310; 350-375]
- Marks, 123-162