

HIST 6820-5001, New Trends in the Historiography of the Modern World

BSGU, Spring 2010, Syllabus.

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Williams 141
6.00-9.00 PM
Office Hours: TTh 4.00-5.30
and by appointment.

I. Basic Themes

The purpose of this graduate seminar is to give future teachers of introductory course on the 'Modern World' the background they will need to deal with this material in a manner consistent with the current state of scholarly knowledge, and literature in the field. It would be difficult to point to another field of historian inquiry which has changed more rapidly over the last 20 years. In 1988, Jean Baechler, John A. Hall, and Michael Mann published a volume, *Europe and the Rise of Capitalism*, which was based on the assumption that Europe differed in essential ways from the other great pre-modern civilizations. These differences, the contributors held, made Europe and Europe alone capable of initiating the changes which produced the modern world. Some of them traced European difference back to antiquity, notably to the unique inheritance of Judeo-Christian monotheism, Greek philosophy, and Roman law. Others assigned crucial importance to the feudal legacy of medieval Europe in setting that continent's development path apart from other pre-modern societies. The contributors to this volume were drawing on a tradition of scholarship which reached back to the 19th century, positing European exceptionalism. Thomas Malthus, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, among many others, contributed substantially to it. Today, most world historians believe, in contrast, that the great pre-modern civilizations of Eurasia were fundamentally similar until the eve of the modern era. From the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the 4th century until the Late Middle Ages, China, we now know, was the most technologically innovative society in the world, and during most of this era, East and South Asia, and the Islamic world were more developed, in many respects, than Christian Europe. Ideas and technologies diffused across the Old World, with Europe, for many centuries, being more of an imitator than an innovator. Europe pulled ahead, to be sure, at some point, between the Italian Renaissance and the European voyages of exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries, and the Industrial Revolution, in the 19th century. Exactly when and why is still a matter of contention, but many scholars today believe that the causes of Europe's ascendancy were more contingent than structural, and not deeply rooted in Europe's history or past. Thus a view of the rise of the modern world as the 'rise of the West,' rooted in 19th century thought, has given way to a view of the great Eurasian civilizations as broadly similar, and engaged in a continuous process of exchange of knowledge, and

goods over many centuries. The undoubted era of European ascendancy, which coincided with modernity, is viewed as temporary and contingent, and Asia's catching up as inevitable. The older view arose during the era in which Europe's political, military, economic and cultural superiority was at its zenith. The new view has arisen in an era in which first Japan, and then China and India have modernized, bringing about a major regional redistribution of world power.

This transformation of our understanding of world history has occurred in a period in which our students in Ohio are growing up with significant liabilities compared to their counterparts in the states along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, to say nothing of their counterparts in other developed countries. Our students are less likely than students on the two coasts to study a foreign language or study abroad. They are less likely to travel abroad, and they know less about other countries and cultures. Under these circumstances, teaching the history of the modern world well, and exposing our students to more recent scholarship, takes on an added imperative.

I have divided our class reading into seven parts. We begin in part one by reading selections from the work of Max Weber. Weber, arguably more than any other thinker, articulated the older view of Western civilization as fundamentally different from that of other world regions. Even today his presence in discussions about the nature of modernity, and the nature of the West looms large in the scholarly literature. Even his critics credit him for asking questions which remain highly relevant, and for his early contributions to the comparative study of civilizations. In part two of the course we read a recent study by the father-and-son team William H. and J.R. McNeill. The authors view the Old World as a single network, trading goods and ideas, since at least the Bronze Age. They contrast this view with an older, organic conception of civilizations, which characterized the work of earlier world historians, including Arnold J. Toynbee and Oswald Spengler. Like plants of different species, these historians argued that different civilizations grew, flourished and declined according to their intrinsic cultural logics. Exchanges among the civilizations failed to alter their essential natures. The shift from this sort of essentialist approach, emphasizing the differences between civilizations, to the network approach of the McNeills, emphasizing the links and exchanges between them, is an essential part of the paradigm shift which has taken place in the study of world history. In part three we read Jared Diamond's Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. Diamond's book summarizes and synthesizes most of the important findings of historians and other scholars about how biology has affected the development of the modern world. This work has transformed our understanding of interactions between the peoples of Eurasia and Africa, on the one hand, and the peoples of the Americas, Australasia and Oceania, on the other, since the era of European exploration. In part four, we read three recent studies by members of the so-called 'California School' of historians, who have challenged most explicitly the thesis that Europe differed in essential ways from other civilizations in ways which made it inevitable that it would dominate the modern world. In part four, we read three recent studies by historians who make considered cases that features of European culture in the Middle Ages gave it a developmental advantage over other civilizations. The rise of the California School has made certain forms of Eurocentrism untenable, but the debate goes on, and these three books make serious arguments. In part five we explore the question: how and when did modernity begin? Joel Mokyr argues the scientific revolution of the 16th, 17th and 18th

centuries was the great divide, laying the conceptual foundations for the industrial revolution, which followed. Vaclav Smil, in contrast, argues that the real historical discontinuity wasn't even the first industrial revolution, centered on textile production in late 18th century England, but rather the 'second industrial revolution' of the second half of the 19th century, centered on the proliferation of internal combustion engines, electricity and electrical motors, and new processes in chemicals and metallurgy. Finally, Nobel Prize Laureate Robert Fogel uses biometric data to argue that the vast modern improvement in nutrition, health and life expectancy dates from 1700; but really great improvements only emerged in the latter part of the 19th century. Part six looks at world history and the growing world environmental crisis. A scientific consensus has emerged in recent years that human activity is forcing global climate change, notably warming. The main anthropomorphic cause of global warming has been CO₂ emissions associated with the burning of fossil fuels. The burning of fossil fuels, in turn, has been an essential part of the immense increase in human energy use which has occurred beginning with the industrial revolution. Anthropomorphic forcing of climate change, in other words, is closely bound up with the activity which has created the modern world and driven economic development. Surely that makes global environmental change a core issue in any course on the modern world. Students have a choice in part six between reading a recent book by Alfred Crosby or one by Vaclav Smil.

I have compiled the course reading list as a sort of 'fourteen books you have to read before you teach the history of the modern world.' Not all of these books are suitable for undergraduates, although I have used several of them in my undergraduate courses. However, becoming familiar with them should make you a more knowledgeable and sophisticated teacher of world history.

II. Basic Course Readings.

Crosby, Alfred W., *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy* (New York: Norton, 2006).

Crosby, Alfred W., *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Diamond, Jared M., *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005).

Diamond, Jared M., *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1999).

Fogel, Robert William, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100: Europe, America, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Goldstone, Jack A., *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500-1850* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008).

Goody, Jack, *The Eurasian Miracle* (Bristol (Britain): Polity, 2010).

Greif, Avner, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Huff, Toby, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

McNeill J.R., and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York: Norton, 2003).

- Mokyr, Joel, *The Gifts of Athena: The Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- Pomeranz, Kenneth, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- Smil, Vaclav, *Creating the 20th Century: Technological Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Smil, Vaclav, *Energy at the Crossroads: Global Perspectives and Uncertainties* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003).
- Weber, Max, *Readings and Commentary on Modernity*, ed. by Stephen Kalberg (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2005).

III. Assignments.

Students in the seminar will be expected to do the assigned reading, and participate in class discussions of it. In addition, students will make at least one oral presentation in class, and will hand in some sort of written assignment. This course has been designed primarily as preparation for future teachers of BGSU's introductory course 'The Modern World' or similar courses at other universities and colleges. You can fulfill the written course requirements, therefore, by assembling a syllabus for your own version of the 'modern world.' Developing a syllabus will require identifying a corpus of assigned reading and other required materials. As is noted above, not all of the assigned reading in this course is suitable at the introductory undergraduate level. I propose that we use the student oral presentations to audition a corpus of material for use in undergraduate courses. You could review three textbooks, for example, which you are considering using in an undergraduate course, and discuss their strengths and weaknesses. If the seminar members work as a team, we could survey a substantial amount of material, and trade information about it. Seminar members could also review supplementary texts. I am thinking of material similar to Bedford/St. Martin's series in world history. Individual titles in this series feature texts running to about 200 pages, often including a scholarly introduction, and a corpus of primary materials. The topics are key events and processes in world history, including: Spanish and Nahua views of the conquest of Mexico; Christopher Columbus and the enterprise of the Indies; and slavery, freedom and law in the Atlantic World. Other publishers offer similar series. If we take the possibilities offered by the seminar forum seriously, we can assemble more knowledge collectively than any of us could working in isolation. Students interested in getting credit for the seminar, but no pressing need to produce a syllabus for an undergraduate course may take a different option. Write two 15-page reviews essays, with each discussing approximately three books. You can begin with the assigned reading in the course, but do some additional reading about two topics we address this semester, and fill in the other members of the seminar, about your independent reading, in one or two oral presentations. Models for the book-review style essays can be found in the *New York Review of Books* and major history journals, including the *Journal of Modern History* and the *American Historical Review*.

We will work out a program of oral presentations during the first couple weeks of class. We'll get started with the student presentations after the first few weeks have

passed, giving everybody a running start in preparing class presentations. Once we begin our cycle of student presentations, we'll typically divide our three-hour seminar sessions into two roughly equal periods, punctuated by a fifteen-minute break in the middle. We'll devote roughly the first half of the seminar to discussion of the assigned book, and the second half to student presentations.

I've been asking students in my graduate seminars to hand in some sort of written assignment roughly halfway through the semester, and to hand in the final assignment on the last day of classes. This seems to work pretty well. Many students appreciate the structure created by deadlines. Let's say, therefore, that students taking the two review essays option will hand in the first of their two assignments by 2 March, just before Spring Vacation, and the second by 27 April, our last day of classes. For those of you who take the syllabus preparation route, let's assume that by 2 March you will hand in a short essay (5 double-spaced pages) justifying the selection of a primary text for your world history course. On 27 April you'll complete the assignment by handing in a syllabus that looks something like the ones I prepare for my courses.

IV. Schedule of class discussion topics.

Week 1, Tuesday, 12 January. Introductory

Part One: Max Weber and the 'Rise of the West'

Week 2, Tuesday, 19 January.

Reading: Max Weber, *Readings and Commentary on Modernity*, ed. by Stephen Kalberg (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2005).

Part Two: World history from the organic models of Toynbee and Spengler to the network model of the McNeills.

Week 3. Tuesday, 26 January.

Reading: J.R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York: Norton, 2003).

Part Three: How biology has transformed our understanding of world history.

Week 4. Tuesday, 2 February.

Reading: Jared M Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1999).

Student Presentations: Joe Faykosh and Jon Klamerus on John P. McKay, et al, *A History of World Societies*; Katie Brown and Mike Greene on Merry Weisner, et al, *Discovering the Global Past*.

Part Four: The case against Eurocentrism.

Week 5. Tuesday, 9 February.

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

Student presentations: Jay Perry, Rex Childers, and Jessie Rainey on Craig Lockard, *Societies, Networks, and Transitions*; Amber Frisch on Richard Bulliet, et al, *The Earth and its Peoples*.

Week 6. Tuesday, 16 February.

Reading: Jack Goody, *The Eurasian Miracle* (Bristol (Britain): Polity, 2010).

Student presentations: Jessie Rainey on Albert Craig, et al, *The Heritage of World Civilizations*; Katie Brown, Jay Perry, Jeff Zalewski, Jessie Rainey, and Rex Childers on Daniel Headrick, *Tools of Empire*; Amber Frisch, Jeremy Huffer, and Jon Klamerus on Thomas F.X. Noble, et al, *Western Civilization Beyond Boundaries*.

Week 7. Tuesday, 23 February.

Reading: Jack A. Goldstone, *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500-1850* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2009).

Student presentations: Jeremy Huffer, Andrew van Camp, Jason Skock and Michael Greene, on Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *The World: A Brief History*; Amber Frisch, Danielle St. Julien, Joe Faykosh, Dustin McLochlin, Jeff Zalewski, and Rex Childers on Robert B. Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*; Jeff Zalewski and Jon Klamerus on Kevin Reilly, *Worlds of History*.

Part Five: Contemporary restatements of the case for Eurocentrism:

Week 8, Tuesday, 2 March.

(First essays due in class.)

Reading: Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Student presentations: Dustin McLochlin, Jeremy Huffer, Jason Skock and Andrew van Camp on Robert Tignor, *Worlds Together*; Danielle St. Julien, Joe Faykosh, Jay Perry, Dustin McLochlin, and Andrew van Camp on Peter Stearns, *World Civilizations*; Danielle St. Julien, Katie Brown and Michael Greene on Michael Adas, et al, *Turbulent Passage*; Eve Crandall on a selection of books of her choosing; Jason Skock on Howard Spodek, *The World's History*, vol. II.

(8-12 March, Spring Vacation).

Week 9, Tuesday, 16 March.

Reading: Toby Huff, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Student presentations: Katie Brown and Dustin McLochlin.

Week 10, Tuesday, 23 March.

Reading: Avner Greif, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Student presentation: Jeremy Huff

Part Six: How and when did modernity arrive? Three views.

Week 11, Tuesday, 30 March.

Reading: Joel Mokyr, *The Gifts of Athena: The Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Student presentations: Jay Perry and Jason Skock.

Week 12, Tuesday, 6 April.

Reading: Václav Smil, *Creating the 20th Century: Technological Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Student presentations: Joe Faykosh and Danielle St. Julien.

Week 13, Tuesday, 13 April.

Reading: Robert William Fogel, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100: Europe, America, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Student presentations: Eve Crandall and Andy van Camp.

Part Seven: History, energy use, and the global environmental crisis.

Week 14, Tuesday, 20 April.

Reading: Alfred W. Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy* (New York: Norton, 2006) or Vaclav Smil, *Energy at the Crossroads: Global Perspectives and Uncertainties* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003).

Student presentations: Jon Klamerus, Jessie Rainey and Jeff Zalewski.

Week 15, Tuesday, 27 April. (Last Day of Classes).

(Final assignments due in class.)

Reading: Jared M. Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005).

Student presentations: Rex Childers, Amber Frisch and Michael Greene.

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BSGU, Spring 2010, Book Orders,

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Crosby, Alfred W., *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy* (New York: Norton, 2006). Hardcover, ISBN-13: 978-0393059359; list: \$23.95.

Crosby, Alfred W., *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0521639903; list: \$25.99.

Diamond, Jared M., *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0143036555; list: \$18.00.

Diamond, Jared M., *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies* (New York: Norton, 1999). Paper, ISBN-13: 9780393317558; list: \$17.95.

Fogel, Robert William, *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100: Europe, America, and the Third World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0521004886; list \$29.99.

Goldstone, Jack A., *Why Europe? The Rise of the West in World History, 1500-1850* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0072848014; list: \$16.89.

Goody, Jack, *The Eurasian Miracle* (Bristol (Britain): Polity, 2010). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0745647944; list: \$19.95.

Greif, Avner, *Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0521671347; list: \$37.99.

Huff, Toby, *The Rise of Early Modern Science: Islam, China, and the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0521529945; list: \$35.99.

McNeill J.R., and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York: Norton, 2003). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0965739658; list: \$17.77.

Mokyr, Joel, *The Gifts of Athena: The Origins of the Knowledge Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0691120133; list: \$28.95.

Pomeranz, Kenneth, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0691090108; list: \$29.95.

Smil, Vaclav, *Creating the 20th Century: Technological Innovations of 1867-1914 and Their Lasting Impact* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Hardcover, ISBN-13: 978-0195168747; list: \$40.00.

Smil, Vaclav, *Energy at the Crossroads: Global Perspectives and Uncertainties* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0262693240; list \$19.95.

Weber, Max, *Readings and Commentary on Modernity*, ed. by Stephen Kalberg (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2005). Paper, ISBN-13: 978-0631214908; list: \$39.95.