Fall 2020 & Summer 2020
History Department
79-104, Global Histories Course Descriptions

Fall 2020

79-104   Global Histories
Lecture 1   Global Histories: History of Democracy
Lecture 2   Global Histories: Genocide and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Human activity transcends political, geographical, and cultural boundaries. From wars to social movements, technological innovations to environmental changes, our world has long been an interconnected one. Acquiring the ability to understand such transnational and even worldwide processes is an indispensable part of any college education. This course provides students with an opportunity to develop the skills and perspectives needed to understand the contemporary world through investigating its global history. All sections are comparable in their composition of lectures and recitations, required amounts of reading, and emphasis on written assignments as the central medium of assessment. The sections all aim to help students: (1) master knowledge through interaction with the instructors, reading material, and other students, (2) think critically about the context and purpose of any given information, (3) craft effective verbal and written arguments by combining evidence, logic, and creativity, and (4) appreciate the relevance of the past in the present and future. For descriptions of specific sections, see "First Year Experience" at the Dietrich College General Education Website:
http://www.hss.cmu.edu/gened/topics-79104.html

79-104/1   Global Histories: History of Democracy
9 units   Lecture 1, MW 12:30PM-1:20PM                        R. Law
Recitations on Fridays
By the end of the 20th century, the spread of democracy seemed all but inevitable as most nations in the world had established a version of it as their governing system. Even many of those that had not still adopted trappings of democracy such as popular elections, representative assemblies, constitutions, and terms of office. Yet the history of collective governance has shown repeatedly that its progress is not unstoppable or its continuation irreversible, and that democracies rose and fell just like other systems of government.

Nevertheless, the ideals of democracy remain a powerful inspiration today. How did democracy become such a widespread phenomenon? What are its features, strengths, and weaknesses? What factors determined whether a democracy would thrive or collapse? This Global History course will answer these questions by surveying the origins and developments of democratic systems in Ancient Rome, Revolutionary France, Weimar Germany, Taisho Japan, and others. By the end of the course, students will come to understand the importance of past lessons and the appeal and challenges of collective governance, and decide for themselves what role democracy should play in their lives.

Summer 2020

79-104/2   Global Histories: Genocide and Weapons of Mass Destruction
9 units   Lecture 2, MW 1:30PM-2:20PM                      R. Law
Recitations on Fridays
Today, halting genocide and curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction rank among the top priorities in international relations. This understanding of world affairs, however, did not always hold true. In fact, if anything, in the last few centuries various individuals and institutions channeled much effort into the invention and refinement of new ideological, organizational, and technological means for mass murder or waging war. How and why did modern societies become so competent in inflicting death and destruction on fellow humans? What has been and can be done to prevent similar occurrences from happening again?

This Global History course will answer these questions by analyzing the causes of and responses to past incidents resulting in mass deaths or tools for armed conflicts. Through lectures, discussion, primary sources, and assignments, the course will examine events within the European encounter with the Western Hemisphere, Imperialism in Africa, the Holocaust, the atomic bombings of Japan, the Cold War, and decolonization and independence. By the end of the course, students will come to realize the historical significance of unintended consequences and the ambiguity of human progress.
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The Civil Rights Movement and the World
Throughout the twentieth century, the fight for racial justice involved multiple areas of conflict that transcended national borders. The purpose of this course is to understand how global events and crises influenced the ways in which activists understood political power. For example, how did civil rights activists pioneer a global identity for American blacks and how did these identities, in turn, influence activism at home? Answering these questions will require us to discuss various world crises and events and their impact on anti-racist activism at home. This class will cover the League of Nations, the 1917 Russian Revolution, the rise of Fascist Europe, the Second World War, the United Nations, the Cold War, and today’s struggle for racial justice. By examining these issues, this class will shed light on the geo-political and socio-economic conditions that shaped the civil rights movement as well as today’s activism.