Course Descriptions

79-104 Global Histories

Lecture 1 Global Histories: Genocide and Weapons of Mass Destruction
Lecture 2 Global Histories: History of Democracy
Lecture 3 Global Histories: Empire, Environment, and the Economy

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. A variety of sections are offered in order to give students the opportunity to choose between different themes and approaches. 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 lectures, see “First Year Experience” at the Dietrich College General Education Website: http://www.hss.cmu.edu/gened/. [SEE INDIVIDUAL LECTURE DESCRIPTIONS FOR 79-104/1, 79-104/2, and 79-104/3, BELOW]

79-104/Lecture 1 Global Histories: Genocide and Weapons of Mass Destruction
9 units Lecture 1, MW 12:30-1:20PM R. Law
Recitations – 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.

79-104/Lecture 2 Global Histories: History of Democracy
9 units Lecture 2, MW 1:30-2:20PM R. Law
Recitations – 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.

79-104/Lecture 3 Global Histories: Empire, Environment, and the Economy
9 units Lecture 3, MW 10:30-11:20 A. Ramey
Recitations – Fridays

Empire, Environment, and the Economy explores the development of the modern world by looking at a major global transformation that has taken place over the past 500 years: the creation of a tightly connected global economy linking nation-states together through warfare, politics, and a near total-command of the Earth’s natural resources. This state of affairs, which we take to be normal at first look, is in fact a radical departure from the rest of human history. Over the past 500 years, large agrarian empires gave way to nations, a decentralized world economy came to revolve around a few key hubs, and natural resources from forests and fisheries to coal and the climate have become increasingly dominated by human activity. Whether this system represents a new normal or a temporary interlude before reverting back to deeper patterns from human history remains to be seen. By reading the works of leading scholars, examining historical documents, and discussing among ourselves, we will try to make sense of the modern world by looking at how we have gotten here and where we might be going.

79-104 Global Histories
Summer 2018
Course Descriptions

Summer Session Two

79-104/E & U Global Histories: Global Empire: Commerce, Finance, and Naval Power in the Rise & Fall of the British Empire
9 units MTWRF 10:30-11:50 J. Roszman

Great Britain at the height of its power controlled a quarter of the world’s population, a fifth of its dry surface, and mastery across its oceans. The British Empire operated as a vast network of people, institutions, commercial interests, and commodities that fueled Britain’s rising geopolitical importance and made London the financial capital of the world through the First World War. Often relying on the power of the Royal Navy, the Empire incorporated far-flung territories into this web of interconnectedness and unleashed what we now call “globalization.”

Using the writings of historians, as well as primary sources such as newspapers, travel accounts, letters, and literature, “Global Empire” will follow the development of the British Empire from the sixteenth century to its demise after the Second World War. We will pay particular attention to the way Britain’s economic interests shaped its imperial project. Thus, the course will explore topics such as colonial commodities, slavery, imperialism, naval power, free trade, and war in the Americas, Asia, Africa, and the British Isles. Ultimately, students will not only be able to recognize and assess the role of the British Empire in the development of “globalization,” but will also be able to identify the ways that economic interests shape state policy in the world we live in today.