

**History 525: The World and the West Since 1492**  
**MWF 9:55-10:45, Humanities 1217**  
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**“Western Civilization?? I think it would be a good idea.”**  
**--Gandhi**

### **Course Objectives:**

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to major themes in world history since 1492. At the same time, the course poses itself as a challenge to the idea that “the West” and “1492” are important to a broader understanding of world history. The course is split into three units. The first unit—Guns, Germs, and Steel—takes its name from the book that will be the centerpiece of our discussions. The constitution of the world that we live in—the haves and the have-nots, the “rich” and the “poor”—is not random or accidental. Human history was, and continues to be, influenced by forces that are largely beyond our control—geography, climate, disease, and so on. In short, the question we will be trying to answer in the first part of the course is: Why did human development proceed at such different rates on different continents, and how does this impact us today?

The second unit—Contextualizing “The Rise of the West”—compares and contrasts the economies and societies of Ming China with those of imperial Spain, emphasizing cross-cultural contacts in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, respectively. We will examine the social and cultural influences that shaped each of these societies during their eras of “discovery.” We will also look at long-term trends in the economies of each society. Many scholars now argue that China dominated the world economy until at least the middle of the eighteenth century. This argument destabilizes the idea of Western dominance since 1500 and calls into question the very notion of the untrammelled “rise of the West.” By carefully examining the Spanish conquest of the Americas and its impacts in the broader world, we will be able to better contextualize the historical significance of 1492 and Western colonialism.

The third unit—The Emergence of a “Modern” World?—deals with the influence of the Christian West on the world stage over the past 200 or so years. While a narrative history of the world will emerge, our primary concern will be the “—isms” that were by-products of the emerging “modern” world. These include capitalism, industrialism, Marxism, racism, imperialism, nationalism, and so on. Our goal will be to understand how these concepts have informed the histories of peoples and nations in a variety of comparative settings. Finally, in the last part of the semester we will examine collisions between “tradition” and “modernity,” “civilization” and “barbarity.” We will try to determine whether these concepts have any real meaning. Is one person’s “civilization”

another person's "barbarity"? Can we even talk about a "modern" world without having the "backwardness" of "tradition" to measure it against? Returning to questions raised in the first section of the course, how "modern" or "civilized" is the West compared with other parts of the world? Is there really a "Clash of Civilizations" that defines our contemporary world?

### **Procedures and Requirements:**

- 1) The course will ask you to concentrate your efforts on reading, writing, and discussion. As such, students will be expected to attend every class session and to participate actively in class discussions.
- 2) In order to benefit from class discussions, students must have completed assigned readings prior to the date that they will be discussed in class. On most days, the instructor will begin class with a short lecture and introduction of the day's central questions. We will then discuss the issues as a class. The quality of each student's participation in class discussion can influence the final grade.
- 3) There will be three exams during the semester. Exams will consist of short-answer identifications (20%) and essay questions (80%). The short-answer portion of your exams will be completed in class on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Your essay questions will be distributed on the day of the exam and completed at home. The essays should be typed, double-spaced. The following is the exam schedule:

EXAM #1—Friday, October 1. 5 IDS, 1 essay (8 pages). Essays due on Monday, October 4. 30% of final grade.

EXAM #2—Wednesday, October 27. 5 IDS, 1 essay (8 pages). Essays due on Monday, November 1. 30% of final grade.

EXAM #3—Wednesday, December 13 three exam questions distributed. Each student must answer two that will be turned in during the exam period on December 18. IDS will be completed during the exam period. 8 IDS, 2 essays (5 pages each). 40% of final grade.

### **Required Readings:**

Jared Diamond, Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies

Louise Levathes, When China Ruled the Seas

Inga Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquests

Adam Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost

Khushwant Singh, Train to Pakistan

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, A River Between

Coursepack

## Course Outline:

9/3—Introduction—Syllabus—What is world history? Space and orientation. Why is the world the way it is—socially, economically? What explains the inequities and differences that we see in the world? Why is the status of New Guinea fundamentally different from say, the United States, on the world stage? Yali's question.

### GUNS, GERMS, AND STEEL

9/8—Where do we come from? Evolution versus creationism? Religion versus science? Bible, Popol Vuh, etc. How did humans come to populate the earth?

9/10—Patterns of migration? If Africa was the cradle of civilization, why is it that Europeans were eventually able to colonize Africa, rather than the other way around? READING: Diamond, 9-52; 376-401; Coursepack: John Noble Wilford, "A Fossil Unearthed in Africa Pushes Back Human Origins," *NY Times*, July 11, 2002.

9/13—How does our physical setting impact our life chances? How can geological/climatic phenomena transform our economic and social circumstances? Case Study: Montserrat. READING: Diamond, 53-84; Coursepack: Nina Bernstein, "US is Ending Haven for Those Fleeing a Volcano," *NY Times*, August 9, 2004.

9/15—How does agricultural potential affect one's life chances, especially in the era prior to global trade? What are the implications of crop domestication for human populations? How do crops spread after contact? READING: Diamond, 85-156

9/17—What are the implications of animal domestication on human populations? Utility of animals? How do animals spread? Case Study: Cattle and West Africa

9/20—Animals and disease. How are diseases born and transmitted? AIDS? Smallpox? Case Study: Mosquitos in History. READING: Diamond, 157-214

9/22—What is the definition of "civilization"? Literacy and modern language diffusion. Is literacy a prerequisite for civilization? Case Study: The Talking Books

9/24—Technology and its diffusion. "Tradition" or "modernity"? Case Studies: The Talking Book; Horses and Cannons: A Conquest Story. READING: Diamond, 215-264

9/27—State formation and the culture of "kleptocracy." Why do/don't people tolerate kleptocracies? Case Study: Mobutu versus Bush. READING: Diamond, 265-321; 405-425.

9/29—Wrap-up of Diamond. What happened to Fertile Crescent? How might Diamond's argument be applied to the US? Is science useful for understanding history? Review for exam.

10/1—EXAM: Identifications in-class. Distribute take-home questions. Due on Monday, 10/4.

CONTEXTUALIZING “THE RISE OF THE WEST”: CHINESE DOMINANCE?

10/4—Confucianism and Patriarchy.

10/6—Movie: Raise the Red Lantern. READING: Levathes, 19-85.

10/8—Finish movie.

10/11—The Ming Dynasty. Growth and Expansion. READING: Levathes, 87-153.

10/13—Zheng He’s Travels. Why didn’t Chinese become “discoverers” of the world beyond the Indian Ocean? How did Confucian thought contribute to China’s attitudes in its explorations? READING: Coursepack: “Confucius on Good Government” in James Legge, trans., *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1893), 145-146, 152, 254, 258-259, 266; Levathes, 155-203.

10/15—1421? All students must look at [www.1421.tv](http://www.1421.tv) before coming to class. READING: Coursepack: Robert Finlay, “How Not to (Re)Write World History: Gavin Menzies and the Chinese Discovery of America,” *Journal of World History* (June 2004): 229-242.

10/18—China After 1430: Continued Dominance? Population growth, trade, science and technology, etc. China in Comparative Perspective: 1400-1800. Opium Wars as watershed? READING: Coursepack: “The First Opium War,” in Richard Lim and David Kammerling Smith, eds., *The West in the Wider World: Sources and Perspectives*, vol. 2 (Bedford/St. Martins, 2003), 207-233.

10/20—Conquest, Collision, Discovery, or Encounter?: Europe v. Africa and the Americas. What was the nature of European exploration in Africa and the Americas? Was Columbus’ arrival in the Americas an exceptional historical event? READING: Clendinnen, 1-128

10/22—The Aztec Before and After the Spanish Conquest. Aztec society and culture. Do we romanticize pre-Columbian history? Impacts of disease. Colonization.

10/25—How was European exploration same/different than that of the Chinese 150 years earlier? Forging of new peoples? Flows of capital? Review for exam. READING: Clendinnen, 131-209.

10/27—Identifications in-class. Take home exam due on Monday, November 1.

## THE EMERGENCE OF A “MODERN” WORLD??

10/29— The Impacts of Slavery. Video—“Wonders of the African World: The Slave Kingdoms.”

11/1—The Construction of the Atlantic World: Capitalism and Slavery in the Development of the “Modern” World. Economic impacts of European conquests? Slavery—Indian, African? Numbers? Where? Forms of labor?

11/3—The Age of Revolutions. Case Study: The Haitian Revolution. What outside influences contributed to the Haitian Revolution? How important were these influences?

11/5—Industry and Capital: The Birth and Spread of Industrialization. Putting-out system. Factory system. Impacts? Small artisan v. industrialists? Time, discipline, family, etc. Rise of cities, public transport, ghettos? READING: Hochschild, 1-100; Coursepack: Elizabeth Bentley Parliamentary Testimony from [www.wwnorton.com/nael/victorian/topic\\_1/parl.htm](http://www.wwnorton.com/nael/victorian/topic_1/parl.htm)

11/8—The Responses to Capital: Organized Labor and Marxism

11/10—Did Marxism go wrong? Leninism, Stalinism, Maoism, Castroism

11/12--Imperialism: India and Africa. Race and pseudo-scientific thought in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The “white man’s burden”? READING: Hochschild, 100-208. Coursepack: Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden,” *McClure’s Magazine* 12:4 (1899), 290-291.

11/15—Hitler, World War II, and the Holocaust. READING: Coursepack: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Boston, 1939), 390-414.

11/17—Video: “One Survivor Remembers.” READING: Hochschild, 209-306.

11/19—Nationalism: What is nationalism? Race? Religion? Sexual orientation? Holocaust deniers? White supremacists? Is nationalism healthy or dangerous? Are “national” boundaries “real” or “imagined”? How did imperialism/colonialism contribute to emerging forms of nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? Case Study: India/Pakistan. Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism.

11/22—Case Study: The Irish Republican Movement: Origins and History

11/24—Video: “In the Name of the Father”

11/29—Finish video.

12/1—Nationalism and Genocide: Case Studies: The Balkans and Rwanda. READING: Singh, ALL.

12/3—The Balkans and Rwanda, continued.

12/5—The Global Village: Tradition v. Modernity—“A Reasonable Man”

12/8—“A Reasonable Man,” continued

12/10—What is “tradition”? What is “modernity”? “Civilized”? “Uncivilized”? “Tokoloshis” and “chupa cabras”? Is there such a thing as universal morality? Capital punishment? Islamic law and “tradition”—hands chopped off, women oppressed? Circumcision? Aborting female fetuses in India? Eating cats, dogs, etc.? Is modernity anti-spiritual (as opposed to anti-religious)—voodoo, obeah, santeria, duppies, etc.?  
READING: Thiong’o, ALL. Coursepack: Claudia Dreifus, “A Life Devoted to Stopping the Suffering of Mutilation,” *NY Times*, July 11, 2000; Charlotte Bruce Harvey, “Doctor of Mercy,” *Brown Alumni Magazine*, January/February 2002.

12/13—Clash of Civilizations, Jihad vs. McWorld??? Discussion. READING: Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “The True Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Policy* 135 (2003): 62-70. Distribute questions for final exam.

12/15—Wrap up and review for exam.

12/18—Final exam 12:25-2:25.