HIS 185 Syllabus: Big History: Human Society and the Natural World
Fall 2008

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Course Description: This course is intended as a broad survey of the relationship between humanity and the long-term changes caused by natural forces throughout history, what historians today refer to as “Big History”. We will examine the relationships between resources; climate change; interaction with other species through disease, domestication, harvesting; migration; and the development of human societies. Basically - how people changed their environment and how environments changed people and their societies. The class is structured thematically and chronologically around different topics relating to “Big History.” An emphasis will be placed on the relationship between differing environments and the means by which human societies have coped with them throughout history. Most importantly, you will be asked to think over the long term and on large scales. In doing so, this course will fulfill and add to the “Ethics and Environmental Awareness” animating themes of Menlo College’s curriculum, as well as oral and written communication skills. The course will proceed in a way that is roughly chronological as well as thematic and will be broken up into three units.

1. The development of complex societies: How did the development of agriculture change humanity’s relationship with nature? What does Christian point to as the mechanism by which societies grew in complexity? Why did agriculture develop in certain locations? How did early civilizations manage resources? What advantages and disadvantages did different locations provide? How would you answer Yali’s question? Is Brown optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

2. The Downfall of Complex Societies: What causes societies to fail? What common factors do the societies Diamond studies share? What role does culture play? What is more critical, culture or resources? How do we avoid ‘The Tragedy of the Commons”? How would Brown explain these failures?

3. The Germs and Seeds of Industry: Why is 1492 so significant? How were biological factors crucial in European expansion? What were the effects of biological interaction on indigenous peoples? What demographic effect did the exchange of crops from the Eastern and Western hemispheres have? How has the industrial revolution changed the way people live? How has resource consumption changed? What problems have increased as a result? What problems have decreased? What impact has the Green Revolution had in agriculture and population growth? What problems do the authors see with the future after industry?
Learning Outcomes:

Skills:

- Improved critical reading and written analysis of historical arguments.
- Improved writing and oral communication skills demonstrated by written exams and in-class debates, discussions and presentations.
- Research skills demonstrated by a research paper and in-class presentation of material.
- Critical thinking on long-term trends.

Demonstrated Historical Knowledge of the Following Topics:

- Agricultural Revolution
- Development of Complex societies
- Resource management
- Domestication of plants and animals
- Disease and Society
- The Columbian Exchange
- The Industrial Revolution

Required Texts:


Recommended Texts (on Reserve):


Course Requirements:

1. **Class leaders: 20% of grade.** Over the course of the semester, students will lead 2 discussions on case studies from the readings. Each student will lead the class discussion of a chapter from Big History, Collapse, Something New Under the Sun or Germs, Seeds and Animals. Students will be evaluated on preparation, engagement with the class, critical thinking and a written summary to accompany the discussion.

2. **Take Home Reading Exams: 45% of grade.** There will be three take home exams given over the course of the semester on the four units we will be covering over the course of the semester. Each exam will focus on one work and will pose questions related to the text and to class material. These will be seven to ten pages in length and typewritten.

3. **Class attendance and participation: 20% of grade.** The student will be expected to attend class and be punctual, as well as contribute to class discussions. This means doing the assigned readings in advance of class meetings.

4. **Debate: 15% of grade.** There will be three in-class debates over the course of the semester. Each student will work as part of a team to research and present their arguments. In addition, the student will turn in a research paper of three pages, properly footnoted, and using at least three scholarly sources including at least one published (non-internet) text. The students will be expected to back up their arguments with historical examples. The three debate topics will be:
   - A. Can offshore drilling solve America’s energy problems?
   - B. Is corn based ethanol fuel worth the cost?
   - C. Can emerging countries such as China and India sustain Western lifestyles and energy use?

Weekly Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

**Week 1:** What is Big History?
August 26: Intro to the Class
August 28: Yali’s Question
   **Read:** Christian “This Fleeting World,” Diamond (handout)

**Week 2:** The Diamond Thesis
September 2: Conquest
September 4: Into the Tropics
   **Read:** Christian “This Fleeting World”

**Week 3:** The Universe and Us
September 9: The Structure of Big History
September 11: Life on Earth
   **Read:** Brown, “Big History,” pp 1-74

**Week 4:** Early Human History
September 16: Early Agriculture and cities
September 18: The Afro-Eurasian Network  
**Read:** Brown, 75-146

*Week 5: The Modern World*  
September 23: Connecting  
September 25: Industry and after  
**Read:** Brown, pp. 147-248  
*First Take Home Due, 5:00pm Monday, September 29.*

*Week 6: Collapse*  
September 30: Montana  
October 2: **Debate #1**  
**Read:** Diamond, Prologue and Chapter 1.

*Week 7: Isolations*  
October 7: Easter Island, Pitcairn and Henderson Islands  
October 9: Anasazi and Maya  
**Read:** Diamond, Chapters 2-5.

*Week 8: The Vikings*  
October 14: Settling the North Atlantic  
October 16: **Debate #2**  
**Read:** Diamond, Chapters 6-8.

*Week 9: Problems and Solutions*  
October 21: Rwanda and Haiti  
October 23: China and Australia  
**Read:** Diamond, Chapters 9-13.

*Week 10: So What Now?*  
October 28: Disasters and Decisions  
October 30: Business and the Environment  
**Read:** Diamond, Chapters 14-16.  
*Second Take Home due, 5:00pm Monday, November 3*

*Week 11: Disease, Migration and Demographics*  
November 4: The Columbian Exchange  
November 6: Ecological Imperialism  
**Read:** Crosby, Chapters 1-3 (On Reserve).

*Week 12: Smallpox and Potatoes*  
November 11: Disease, Food and Population  
November 13: **Debate #3**  
**Read:** Crosby, Chapters 8-11 (On reserve).  
Week 13: Something New
November 18: Soil and Air
November 20: The Hydrosphere

Week 14: Water and Agriculture
November 25: The Biosphere
    Read: McNeill, pp. 118-266.

Week 15: Engines of Change
December 2: Cities and Energy
December 4: Ideas, Politics, and So What?

Finals: Last Take Home Exam Due at Final Exam Period (TBA)

Expectations
This is basically a series of guidelines on how to do well in my class. These are by no means just for me, but basically good tips for overall success in college classes. This covers your written assignments, in-class assignments, participation, presentations, leading class discussions and so on. I know sometimes what’s on the syllabus can be hard to get in terms of “How do I get an A (or at least a C)” so this should help.

Written Assignments:
- Follow the directions on the assignment. This is basic and they are there for a reason.
- Have a thesis or summary statement that introduces your essay. Basically, tell me - what am I reading?
- If assert a point or argue something, provide evidence to support what you are saying. If you can cite a quote from a text or lecture, even better. Make sure any quotes are cited properly!
- When citing, use the style you are most comfortable with (MLA, Chicago manual, APA) unless otherwise specified. The important thing is that I know where you got the information from. If you use Chicago, footnotes are preferred to endnotes.
- Grammar and spelling count! At the very least spell-check your document. Use grammar check as well. Avoid passive voice (your computer can look for it and suggest changes). Look out for common errors of spelling.
- Make sure your paper is double spaced so I have room to write comments. Use a common font (I like Times New Roman). Indent your paragraphs and avoid added spacing between paragraphs (I realize Word 2007 does this by default but it can be turned off).
- When I give the paper back to you, read my comments! The quickest way to improve your grade is to see what you did wrong the first time around. I realize my handwriting is terrible at best, but if you can’t read it, ask me. I’m happy to help and it might be a good idea for you to do this anyway.
Your papers should also have a conclusion that sums up the entire essay.

When doing book reviews or take-home essays, cite any quotations from the book, and state the author’s subject or thesis clearly at the beginning. When reading a secondary source, critique the author’s arguments- how well does the author support what they are arguing?

When doing a research paper, make sure your sources are clearly cited. There is no faster way to a bad grade than turning in a debate paper with no sources. I’m not a fan of Wikipedia. Use the library’s web page to look for articles and books on your subject.

I frequently give out assignments that allow creativity, but the above rules still apply.

In Class

- Read the daily assigned readings **before class**!
- Be ready to discuss the readings or lecture.
- Be an active participant in class. This means asking questions, answering questions, and contributing to class discussions of the readings.
- If I give you group work, don’t rely on everyone else to carry you, because I grade individually by what I see from each person.
- Relax. It’s OK to be wrong sometimes.
- Be polite, especially to your fellow classmates.
- Be on time.
- Turn off your cell phone ringers (even vibrate can make a noise)
- Attendance counts. Even though I don’t call roll, I expect you to be there. You are all adults and can manage yourselves, I shouldn’t have to. Remember, you are the ones paying for this.

Presentations

- Be prepared. That means have your research done and clearly organized. Not doing this embarrasses you and the class (and leads to a really bad grade).
- Powerpoints are helpful, but make sure they have a clear purpose and are well organized.
- Engage the class. Visuals help, but ask questions as well. Show some enthusiasm.
- Don’t just stand up and read your paper. This bores the class and your professor. Use note cards or your powerpoint to cue your speaking.
- When leading class discussions, come prepared. First, be well acquainted with the reading you are leading the class through. Have detailed notes to help you so you can share with your fellow classmates. Have a series of questions for the class to discuss. Encourage interaction. Be creative in how you engage the class. Use handouts, powerpoint, video, websites, or any other material to engage the class.
- Remember I’m there to help if needed, and that I can get bored too if I’m not engaged – and this has obvious effects on your grade.
Miscellaneous

➢ Don’t email me at the last moment asking for extensions. I don’t check my e-mail @2 in the morning very often.
➢ Let me know in advance if you are missing class. E-mail, voicemail, Facebook, text – whatever; just let me know if possible.

Grading Criteria for Written Assignments

An essay meriting an A demonstrates excellence in all areas.

➢ Thesis: The essay possesses a clear, insightful, analytical thesis that takes a position, advances an argument, and interprets events or experiences in history.

➢ Argumentation and Organization: The argument is unified, coherent, complex and nuanced. The arguments/interpretations set forth by the author are supported by evidence (cited sources). The argument/interpretation supports the thesis logically from paragraph to paragraph throughout the written assignment.

➢ Evidence: The writer uses materials that are appropriate to the thesis and topic. Sources are properly cited in either MLA or Chicago Manual format.

➢ Style: The paragraphs and parts of the paper are well-organized and the paper contains an appropriate introduction and conclusion, both of which frame the argument/interpretation in the body of the paper. Secondary sources in research papers are recent and demonstrate collection of evidence through library referencing (as opposed to solely internet research).

➢ Mechanics: The paper contains no serious errors of diction, grammar or punctuation, nor any errors in the requirements of the guides for citation of sources. There is a good variety of quotations and paraphrasing, properly cited. The paper shows evidence of careful editing.

An essay meriting a B is an example of very good work.

➢ Thesis: The essay possesses a clear, analytical thesis that takes a position, advances an argument, or interprets events or experiences in history; however, it is less ambitious than that of an excellent essay.

➢ Argumentation and Organization: The argument, while unified and coherent, does not have the complexity or insight or the integrated structure of an excellent paper.

➢ Evidence: The writer includes good selections from source materials that are appropriate to the thesis and topic. The presented evidence, however, is drawn from a narrower range of available sources and demonstrates less mastery of the material and topic.

➢ Style: The paragraphs and parts of the paper are well-organized and the paper contains an appropriate introduction and conclusion, which frame the argument/interpretation in the body of the paper. The sentences within the paragraphs, for the most part, are syntactically correct and clear, contain some variety of constructions and are reasonably readable.
• **Mechanics**: The paper has very few errors of diction, grammar or punctuation, or very few errors in the requirements of citation of sources. The errors do not detract from the paper’s content. The essay is well-edited.

An essay meriting a C is an example of average work and would be considered substandard for beginning historians.

• **Thesis**: The essay possesses a thesis, but it might not be completely clear or rigorously analytical.
• ** Argumentation and Organization**: Essays at this level tend to lack a sound argument and are poorly organized.
• **Evidence**: The writer includes selections of source materials, but many are not chosen wisely or are inappropriately used.
• **Style**: The paragraphs and parts of the paper are organized and possess an introduction and conclusion. The sentences may not have much variety in construction, though they are syntactically correct and clear for the most part. The paper may be somewhat tedious to read.
• **Mechanics**: The paper has a few errors in diction, grammar or punctuation or a few errors in the requirements for citation of sources. The errors occasionally prevent comprehension. The editing is a little sloppy.

A failing essay does not meet the basic requirements of university-level writing.

• **Thesis**: The essay is unfocused and/or lacks a thesis.
• **Argumentation and Organization**: The analysis is wholly unsound, or even inaccurate. There is little evidentiary support for the argument/interpretation, or the argument may stray from the thesis.
• **Evidence**: The writer uses poor or few source materials; mastery of the materials is not evident.
• **Style**: The paper is not well-organized and may not conform to the expectations of the assignment in terms of quantity of written product or sources. The sentences tend to be tedious and lacking in variety and quality of construction.
• **Mechanics**: The paper has many errors in diction, grammar or punctuation or in the requirements for citation of sources. The errors make the paper difficult to read. The presentation is sloppy and reflects a lack of attention to detail.

**Academic Integrity Policy and Disciplinary Action**

Menlo College expects that students will do their own work and that their quizzes, tests, examinations, laboratory work, research papers, essays, projects, internships, and all other assignments honestly reflect their own learning and knowledge in the course. Violations of this policy include: copying from another student during an examination; having another person write a paper on the student’s behalf; any form of plagiarism or cheating, etc.

Students found in violation of the policy are given a failing grade on the assignment. In any one course, repeat offenders will be given a failing grade for that course. In addition, students found in violation of the Academic Integrity Policy during a final examination, final project or related final evaluation or
assignment, are given a failing grade for the course. Any student who fails a course as a result of violating the Academic Integrity Policy will not be allowed to withdraw from that course. All violations of the Academic Integrity Policy will be recorded through the Office of Academic Affairs. Repeat offenders across courses will be subject to disciplinary action as determined by the Vice President of Academic Affairs. Such disciplinary action will normally result in the expulsion of the offending student from Menlo College.


Plagiarism Policy

To plagiarize is to present someone else's work, ideas, or writing style as your own. Another person's "work" includes printed or electronic copies of computer programs, musical compositions, drawings, paintings, oral or written presentations (e.g., papers, essays, articles, chapters), statistical data, tables, or figures (The Learning Centre, UNBC, "Plagiarism"). In short, if you use any information that can be considered the intellectual property of another without acknowledging the original source properly, then you are engaging in theft and deception, which is plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty.

There are various types and levels of plagiarism, all of which are unacceptable. The first and most blatant form is to submit or present someone else's complete published or unpublished work as your own with no acknowledgement that the ideas originated with someone else. This includes submitting for credit another student's work, with or without that person's knowledge or consent, using information from a campus file of old assignments, downloading a term paper from a web site, or buying a term paper from a mail order company or web site.

Other forms of plagiarism are more subtle but are just as unacceptable and consist of using the ideas, direct statements, or writing style of another without acknowledging the source or giving any credit to the author (Saupe, 1998; Student Judicial Affairs, UCD, 1999). This includes cutting and pasting information from electronic sources, leaving out quotation marks, and not citing the source in the text and on the Works Cited or References page. It also includes paraphrasing (putting the information into your own words) when you don't cite the source in the text and on the Works Cited or References page. Finally, plagiarism also involves copying the writing style or "thought pattern" of the source without acknowledging the source properly in the text and on the Works Cited or References page (Saupe, 1998). This can occur when you substitute synonyms into the original sentence rather than rewriting the sentence, switch the order of phrases in the original sentence, or lift phrases verbatim from the original source.

You are also guilty of academic dishonesty if you help another plagiarize (Saupe, 1998). This includes completing an assignment for that person or allowing him or her to look at, "borrow," or otherwise use your work to complete his or her assignment.

Plagiarism may occur intentionally or unintentionally, but it is generally accepted that intent does not determine whether plagiarism has occurred or what consequences apply. Just as a driver is responsible for knowing and abiding by the rules of the road and ignorance does not excuse the driver if he or she violates a law, a writer is also responsible for his or her writing and knowing the rules of writing. Pleading ignorance is not an acceptable defense or an excuse and does not protect the writer from the consequences of plagiarizing.

Examples of plagiarism from a published source:

If the original source includes the following statement:

"Although it is rarely tried, commercials can be constructed to send desirable messages to children"--from Perry and Bussey, Social Development, 1984, p. 132.
then all of the following are examples of plagiarism:

1. COPY TEXT, NO QUOTES, NO REFERENCES:
   Although it is rarely tried, commercials can be constructed to send desirable messages to children.

2. CHANGE A FEW WORDS, NO QUOTES, NO REFERENCES:
   Even though it is not often tried, commercials can be made to send desirable messages to children.

3. CHANGE SENTENCE STRUCTURE, NO QUOTES, NO REFERENCES:
   Commercials can be constructed to send desirable messages to children, even though it is rarely tried.

How to acknowledge or credit the source correctly:

1. QUOTE DIRECTLY WITH REFERENCE:
   "Although it is rarely tried, commercials can be constructed to send desirable messages to children" (Perry & Bussey, 1984, p. 132).

2. CONVEY IDEA IN DIFFERENT WORDS WITH REFERENCE:
   a. According to Perry and Bussey (1984), positive messages can be communicated to children using TV commercials, but this is not done very often. OR
   b. Positive messages can be communicated to children using TV commercials but does not occur very frequently (Perry & Bussey, 1984).

Students with Disabilities

Students with physical, learning or psychological disabilities who believe that they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Academic Success Center (ASC) as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. If you need accommodations for a disability, or if you have special medical needs that might arise in class or be of importance in case of an emergency evacuation, please see me privately after class or during my office hours. Students who require academic accommodations must have them approved by Menlo College’s Learning Specialist, Peggy Hock in Russell Center room 16, x3802.

Some Recommended Links:

http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=4271982381147720351


http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/34.2/mcneill.html#REF3