

My participation in the P-Project workshop, or the Magnolia project, has caused me to look at an old course in a new light. As Wendy Peterson-Boring argues in "Sustainability and the Western Civilization Curriculum,"¹ including sustainability as a theme in traditional survey courses can re-energize classic texts and issues. I have taught Medieval World Civilizations a number of times, but the discussions and materials in the workshop have inspired me to rework the course in three ways, all of which examine the intersection of environment, economy, and society at specific times and places in the human past.

Firstly, while the major belief systems of medieval societies (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism) have always been part of the course, I have shifted the focus of this unit to include these various religions' conceptions of the relationship between humans and the natural world. While this focus will still allow students to grasp the fundamentals of these different belief systems and to understand the way they have affected societal structures, the focus on humans in the natural world will hopefully allow for more specific comparisons and contrasts between societies. I have also added a regular focus on a particular city to give these sometimes abstract ideas a more concrete and definite sense of place. The themes of this unit will re-occur in the third unit, when many early modern societies struggle with new scientific world-views that sometimes challenge and sometimes complement pre-existing religious conceptions.

Secondly, while I did mention the Medieval Warming Period (c. 800-c.1250) in the old course, I have added a unit that looks at the global effects of this warming more explicitly and comparatively. While northern Europe in particular benefitted from the expanded land under cultivation and growing season, warm temperatures and droughts de-stabilized several other societies, including the Maya and Hohokam in the Americas and the Angkor culture in Cambodia. This unit also investigates debates among historians about societal collapse, through chapters from Jared Diamond's *Collapse* and McAnany and Yoffee's *Questioning Collapse*. The unit has three pedagogical goals: first, to show students that climate change is not a new problem but one that many human societies have had to confront; second, to demonstrate the varied and sometimes unpredictable effects of human intervention in the natural world; and third, to introduce students to the different types of evidence historians use to write histories and the debates that occur over the interpretation of that evidence.

Thirdly, I have re-organized the unit on the early modern world to account for the end of the Medieval Warming period and the beginning of what is sometimes called the "Little Ice Age," connecting the rise of modern, or at least early modern societies, to changes in climate and to the resulting changes in the way societies in Eurasia interacted with one another. Finally, I have included a focus on markets and patterns of consumption, using the American products chocolate and tobacco and the Asian tea and coffee to ask how society, habit, and ideology shape consumption patterns and what happens when new global relationships reshape these habits and patterns. As a result of these changes, students will hopefully be able to grasp the complex forces that shape the world they live in now.

¹ *Environmental History* 15 (April 2010), 288-304

Course Texts

- Smith, Mieroop, et al, *Crossroads and Cultures, A History of the World's Peoples* Volume I
- Sources of Crossroads and Cultures (included in Bookstore package of Crossroads and Cultures) Volume I
- Other readings will be available through the Sakai site for this course.

Tentative Course Schedule: Medieval World Civilizations

Th: Why World History? Why Medieval World History? Why Sustainability and World History?

Unit One: Human Societies and the Natural World (400-800)

T: Multiple Christianities in a Post Roman World (Focus: Carthage)

Reading: Dado, "Life of St. Eligius," Pope Gregory the Great, "Letters," Augustine, "Autobiography."

Th: The Rise and Spread of Islam (Focus: Mecca)

Reading: Ibn Ishaq, "Life of the Messenger of God," Selections from the Qu'ran.

T: Consolidation of Hindu Society in India (Focus: Varanasi)

Reading: Vatsyayana, "Conduct of the Well-Bred Townsman," Selections from the *Mahabharata*.

Th: Tradition and Innovation in Tang China (Focus: Xian)

Reading: Du Fu, "The Quintessential Tang Poet," Yan Zhutui, "Family Instructions of the Yan Clan."

T: Diffusion of Indian Traditions in Asia (Focus: Borobudur)

Reading: The Reception of Buddhism in East Asia, Ennin, "Attacking Buddhism in Tang China," "Lives of the Nuns," Scenes from 8th Century Java.

Th: Societies and Networks in the Americas and the Pacific (Focus: Cahokia)

Reading: The Origins of the Human Race from Maya and Zuni traditions

T: In-Class Exam I

Unit Two: Expansion, Cross-Cultural Contact, and Collapse (c. 800-c. 1250)

Th: Global Climate Change: Evidence and Effects In Northern Europe

Reading: Fagan, *The Great Warming*, selections; Viking Iceland Saga.

T: The Power of Water (Foci: Venice and Angkor Wat)

Reading: Zhao Rugua, "Angkor and Java," Selections from Fagan, *Elixir*.

Th: Debating Collapse (Focus: Tikal)

Reading: Selections from Diamond, *Collapse*, and McAnany and Yoffee, *Questioning Collapse*.

T: The Rise of Commerce in Afro-Eurasia I: the Song Dynasty (Focus: Hangzhou)

Reading: "Splendors of Hangzhao"

Th: The Rise of Commerce in Afro-Eurasia II: Mediterranean Merchants (Focus: Fustat/Cairo)

- Reading: Market Inspector of Seville, Geniza Letters
- T: Pilgrims, Merchants, and Scholars in West Africa (Focus: Timbuktu)
Reading: Sundiata
- Th: Indian Ocean Networks and Exchanges (Focus: Kilwa)
Reading: Ibn Battuta, "East Africa"
- T: Love, Literature, and Monastic Cultures in Japan and Europe (Foci: Paris and Kyoto)
Reading: Sei Shonagon, *The Pillow Book*, Murasaki Shikibu, "Tale of Genji," Heloise, Letter to Abelard.
- Th: Warrior Values in Cross-Cultural Comparison
Reading: "Song of Roland," *The Taiheiki*, Bernard of Clairvaux, "In Praise of the New Knighthood."
- T: Centers of Learning and the Transmission of Culture
Reading: "The Education of Ibn Sina," al-Ghazali, "Deliverance from Error," Ibn Rushd, "On the Harmony," Hong Mai on China's civil service exam.
- Th: In-Class Exam 2

Unit 3: Collapse and Revival in Eurasia and the Americas, c. 1250-1500.

- T: The Mongol World Empire (Focus: Samarkland)
Reading: European and Muslim Descriptions of the Mongols
- Th: Disease in an Interconnected World (Focus: London)
Reading: Henry Knighton, "The Black Death," Froissart, "English Peasant Revolt."
- T: Exploration and Withdrawal in Ming China (Focus: Beijing)
Reading: The Expeditions of Zheng He
- Th: European Revival (Focus: Florence)
Gregorio Dati, "Diary," Ringmar, "Audience for a Giraffe."
- T: Islam's New Frontiers (Focus: Constantinople/Istanbul)
Reading: Fall of Constantinople
- T: Empires and Alternatives in the Americas (Focus: Tenochtitlan)
Reading: Aztec Sacrifice and Religion
- Th: Fall of Native American Empires and the Rise of An Atlantic World (Focus: Potosi)
Reading: "The Broken Spears," Hernan Cortes, Third Letter.
- T: Exploitation, Competition and Mercantilism in the Atlantic World
Reading: Montaigne, "Comparing the Old World and the New," Mun, "England's Treasure By Foreign Trade,"; Waman Poma, "Letter to a King," Afonso I, "Letter."
- Th: Commodities and Consumption (Focus: Seville)
Reading: Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures*, selections.
- T: Asian Encounters (Focus: Nagasaki)
Reading: Matteo Ricci, Diaries, Francis Xavier, "A Jesuit Missionary in Japan."
- Th: Conclusion to Course