

**“Globalizing the U.S. Survey: Part 1”**

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The beginning of our course explores an exciting and vast range of peoples and experiences: from the building of enormous earthen mounds for ceremonies by people in eastern North America in the twelfth century to free African societies in Spanish Florida to Portuguese Jewish slave and rum traders in Newport to horse societies that changed the face of the plains of western North America to Chinese immigrants that worked on sugar plantations, mines, and railroads throughout the Americas to Texan nationalists. It is particularly clear at the start of our course that the people connected to America are also very connected to the larger world. These people are part of global forces such as the Columbian Exchange, revolution, international trade, evangelicalism, slavery, industrialization, and imperialism. These forces transcend the histories of specific geographic regions and nation states; they help us understand how such a diverse group of peoples became part of an Atlantic World culture and later the nation of the United States. Today I will highlight the areas in the first part of our course that are important to understanding these transcendent forces and cultures and why we need to situate U.S. history within the world. The histories of indigenous peoples and Africans, the culture of the Atlantic World, and the

tensions Americans faced mid-nineteenth century are all signposts in the beginning of our course.

The histories of indigenous peoples and Africans are especially important to our course not only because they were so necessary for the survival of the colonies, but because they were a part of the Atlantic World culture and they were a significant part of the ongoing American quest of defining citizenship. It is not enough to only briefly describe the backgrounds of these peoples, particularly when so much time is traditionally spent on European histories. Equal time needs to be spent on the cultures that rim the Atlantic Ocean and that will soon converge and create a new culture that is global in its nature.

For instance, comparisons need to be made between expanding European empires and the fastest-growing empire during the fifteenth century – the speed and magnitude of the Aztecs' development was rivaled only by the Ottoman Empire. The Aztecs' land-based empire presents a point of contrast to the ocean-based empires in Europe and in Africa, which can further be set in context of Russian, Japanese, and Chinese empire-building at this time. The Incas, the Toltecs, and the Mexicas are other empires in the Pre-Columbian Americas. The examination of the complex societies in the Americas and the Pacific Islands up through the sixteenth century will highlight such cultures as the Pueblo and Navajo and their settled agricultural society in the American southwest, gender

and the Five Iroquois nations in the American east, and the large society of mound-building peoples in eastern North America.

African societies are points of contrast for the societies of the Americas and Europe as well. The course will take from John Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* that Africans had a complex seafaring culture, adopted chiefly to trade along the West African coast; that African states were political units, usually linguistically bounded, organized around lineages and kin groups and that many African states became trade and religious centers and were important in cross-cultural exchanges; and that slavery was part of African society and slaves were used in several contexts, including agricultural and artisan labor. Slavery was part of the Pre-Columbian Americas as well. Many comparisons can be drawn between the nature of African slavery and slavery in the Americas. As we can see from James L. Brooks' *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*, slaves often assimilated into their masters' kinship groups; the same can be said of many slave cultures in Africa.

As these three areas come more and more into contact, an Atlantic World culture is formed. We can see this culture particularly in the cities of the Atlantic World and our course uses the cities as a lens into the global forces of international trade, revolution, and religion. Atlantic history coheres geographically around the Atlantic Ocean as well as the significant historical

processes from the seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. The concentration of travel and commerce connecting port cities in the Americas, Africa, and Europe made historical developments in each of these areas deeply dependent on each other. In the cities, changes linked with the coming of modern society first occurred and then gradually spread out to the agricultural communities in the hinterland. The cities harbored the beginnings of the market economy; they were the location where a medieval economy that regulated transactions for the good of the public to an entrepreneurial economy where the individual took primacy over the group. The transition from a primarily oral culture to a written culture started in the cities of the Americas. Cities first became secularized and the social system became more flexible, displacing the social order where previously status was designated at birth. The people of the cities initially transitioned politically from the deferential and hierarchical nature of earlier politics to a more involved and argumentative polity.

While the changes generally associated with the advent of modern society happened in cities all around the Atlantic at this time, there were common elements that, while occurring in cities throughout the Atlantic World, were markers of colonial cities in the Americas. Racial fluidity, violence, and disease pervaded early urban life in the Americas. Peoples from Africa, Europe, and the Americas mingled and the concept of "race" began to form. Interracial marriage, for example, shows the fluidity at this time in terms of racial relations, but widespread racial slavery indicates that that was starting to change. Racial

slavery is also part of the violence present in the cities. While these characteristics are similar, we recognize that life experiences varied widely throughout the cities of the Americas because not all factors were the same in each city. The colonizers and the colonized differed in nationality and religion, the climate and geographical features were not the same, the national and racial composition varied, as did multiple other details.

Thus, our course will focus on the cities in the Americas, including Quebec, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Charleston, New Orleans, Tenochtitlan, Havana, and Paramaribo. The lectures and readings of this week are inspired by Gary Nash's project in *The Journal of the Commonplace*, which makes connections between the colonial cities in the Atlantic World in a series of articles. Particular attention will be paid to the poverty in Boston, the riots in Philadelphia and the mixing of British and French colonials in Quebec. For these cities, it is important to see the interactions between the French and English empires, as well as all settlers' interactions with the indigenous Americans, particularly in terms of the French and Indian War. The different religious natures of these northern ports are also important, particularly the involvement of the British colony in the Great Awakening. In the southern cities, slavery is the focus and its importance can be seen in New York's extensive involvement in the slave trade and Charleston's involvement in not only the slave trade, but also the selling of slaves to plantations and other slave owners. These cities' involvement in slavery can be compared to the cities of New Orleans, Tenochtitlan, Havana,

and Paramaribo. These cities will also show interactions between the British and Spanish empires, particularly in the form of the War of the Spanish Succession, and the differences in Spanish colonial urban development to the British. Also, the importance of religion, the inclusion of women and Africans, and the syncretic practices of African-American religions can be compared to the cities in the North.

Connected to these changes in religion were changes in the exercising of political power. Atlantic polity will be seen through the lens of revolution—the ideas and realities of the American Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and the French Revolution. By examining these revolutions together, their impact in the Atlantic World and the limits that revolutionary ideas, specifically in the realms of slavery and women's rights, can be seen.

Out of the Atlantic World cultures came more national societies, particularly with the force of revolution. The end of the first part of our course explores the tensions that Americans were facing mid-nineteenth century as they defined what it meant to be a citizen of the United States. It is important to compare the United States with the rest of the Americas. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Americas were either controlled by European states or, like the United States, they were shaky new nations. By the end of the century, Canada and most of Latin America had broken free from colonial rule and American nationalism was much stronger. The issue of expansion was

prominent in the Americas and indigenous people were removed so that expansion could occur in the United States, Canada, Argentina, and Chile. Questions concerning citizenship and race were also being asked throughout the Americas. The racialized concept of nationhood was a deep undercurrent in the Mexican-American War and in the subsequent debates over territorial acquisition and slavery. The tensions concerning the power of the state, citizenship and race, and the power of industry all mark the lives of Americans in the mid-nineteenth century. The rest of the Americas faced many of these tensions as well, and as we begin the second half of the course, we will see that these forces are global and that this is a time of tension for the world.

The nature of a globalized U.S. history course is vast and nebulous. The themes presented in such a course are drawn from many histories around the world and connected to an American history. The dates are not always matched perfectly and there are contradictions that make creating and teaching such a course complex. Such a project is worth the complexities. The meaning of slavery in Africa, Europe, and the Americas throughout their histories; the connections between people and their ideas through the commerce of port cities; and the similar responses to citizenship in worlds that are culturally and racially diverse are just some of the deeper understandings that make this project important and meaningful.