

June 20, 2006

WHA Conference Paper

“Globalizing the U.S. Survey: An Overview”

by Urmi Engineer

I.

The project of globalizing the U.S history survey at UCSC began to materialize nearly 2 years ago, during a graduate seminar with Charles Bright. Since then, with the encouragement and intellectual insight of Bright, Michael Geyer, Thomas Bender, and Terry Burke, we have developed a complete, 2-part syllabus that places the nation in a world historical context. Our goal is to provide an alternative model to traditional representations of national history, in a format that is simple for instructors to implement. Rather than deconstructing the nation, our syllabus supplements the national narrative by including world historical events and outcomes, as they relate to local histories within the geographical boundaries of the modern U.S., including early narratives of trade and settlement in Alaska, Hawai'i, California, and the Southwest, and further, by contextualizing the making of modern nationalism during the second half of the course. By situating the United States in a global, international framework and discussing the histories of non-European and native Americans, our inclusive and critical framework reflects the changing demographic of American classrooms.

World history has been criticized for overlooking local and regional perspectives in constructing large-scale meta-narratives. However, it is evident that scholarship under the national framework also tends to ignore or marginalize narratives that fall outside of the nation. And in fact, adopting a world historical perspective expands the focus of current surveys of national history in terms of time and geographical space. Our intent in implementing a world historical perspective is to broaden the perspective of national histories by assessing the impacts of global history on the local, and the impacts of local histories on world historical events.

Additionally, our syllabus includes culture and gender in the narrative. While many global narratives tend to ignore these categories of analysis, our syllabus aims to historicize ideologies of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion in the context of colonial settlement during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, and modern nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century. This syllabus, by placing world history into slightly more constrained parameters, offers space for race, class, and gender in local and national narratives.

II.

In terms of teaching world history, the transition from a national framework to a world historical perspective necessitates a temporal shift from the current periodization of U.S. history for several reasons. Such a shift would benefit both halves of the U.S. survey, thematically and logistically. However, the movement towards a world historical perspective necessitates altering the accepted periodization of most 2-part U.S. history survey courses. In a U.S. History survey course that begins with the first migrations to the Americas and ends with Reconstruction, it is nearly impossible to incorporate world historical events, as well as local historical accounts. It is evident that the curriculum of a course on national history that includes larger and smaller narratives in relation to the dominant national narrative would be substantially greater than a traditional survey, which only presents the national narrative.

This move also makes a thematic shift in the nation's history, by repositioning the Civil War. Most survey courses on the first half of U.S. history end in 1877, during the end of Reconstruction. This periodization emphasizes the centrality of the Civil War in U.S. history, marked by the abolition of slavery and Emancipation. Inherently, this division creates an analytical binary in which students view the U.S. as either a "free" or "unfree" nation. It de-contextualizes the Civil Rights Movement, and disables students from learning about the gradual process of attaining social citizenship and enfranchisement among African Americans and women, and the connections between both movements in the

twentieth century. By beginning the second half of the survey in 1850, students will learn about the Civil Rights Movement in the context of slavery, Emancipation, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow.

The twentieth century is currently isolated, especially in surveys of U.S. history that begin c. 1877. By focusing primarily on the twentieth century, this approach fails to provide a context for the development of modern nationalism and industrialization. This type of framework introduces students to nation as an uncontested political space, and most glaringly ignores the social and cultural impacts of national expansion in the West.

By beginning in about 1850, our survey de-emphasizes modern conceptions of the twentieth century and provides a context for historical events that culminate in the early to mid-twentieth century, such as the women's movement, Pan-Africanism, and the final native American wars in the Western United States. Our survey allows for a more complete history of California and the Southwest borderlands, as they become part of the nation, in the context of the Gold Rush and the Transcontinental Railroad.

The years surrounding 1850 not only mark the California Gold Rush, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, and the end of continental expansion in the United States, but also point to a conjunctural period in world history, as national

independence movements emerged in Brazil, Argentina, Ireland, Germany, and Hungary. These revolutions were influenced by the rhetoric of freedom and national independence in the U.S. Constitution, but also significantly impacted political ideology in the United States. The year 1848 witnessed the Seneca Falls convention in New York, which reflects the beginning of women's suffrage movements in the United States and Europe. Additionally, ideologies of freedom, equality, and nationalism contributed to the formation of the Republican Party and the eventual Compromise of 1850.

Additionally, the history of institutionalization in the late nineteenth century provides a basis for studying technological advancement and industrial growth, and contextualizes modern industrial development in the U.S.

III.

Thomas Bender's new book, *A Nation Among Nations*, demonstrates the accessibility of world history and provides a basis for globalizing the U.S. survey. The periodization in his book is similar to our syllabus, and he repositions the Civil War in the context of modern nation-making, imperial expansion, and racial ideology in the nineteenth century, rather than focusing on the aspect democratic liberalism. This method also contextualizes slavery in world history rather than

isolating plantation slavery in the U.S. as a “peculiar” social institution, by emphasizing the gradual dissolution of slavery around the world in the context of nation-building and free labor. This perspective reveals the contested ideas of freedom and nationalism among various groups of European, African, Mexican, immigrant and native Americans.

In my experiences teaching U.S. history during this period, I find that many students are unaware of the magnitude of colonial expansion in the early modern world. Many first-year students in an introductory level U.S. History class have not been exposed to world history, and it prevents them from understanding the meaning of the formation of the United States in its geographical-temporal context. Although the conventional framework exposes students to the “Atlantic World,” it fails to incorporate the histories of trade, settlement, and colonization in the western Americas. When histories of the West are included, they often seem disconnected from the central narrative of American History. This narrative usually begins with the Puritan colonies in the Northeast, and presents a kind of Anglo-centric perspective on settlement and colonization. While many U.S. History textbooks focus on British North America, they fail to address other venues of British expansion (most notably absent is the history of settlement in Jamaica, Barbados, Bermuda, India and Australia).

Additionally, if students are not familiar with French and Spanish colonial projects, international events, such as the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, the acquisition of Florida, and the Mexican-American War, become decontextualized. Histories of the Atlantic World can help us to understand the global currents in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries as they relate to the narratives of colonial contact the development of independent nation-states in the Americas; however the Atlantic World model often isolates the study of development in this region from the concurrent mercantile, colonial, and national regimes that emerged in the western regions of North America.

The history of colonial contact with the Americas in a Pacific-Eurasian context has not been included in most national histories. A world historical model that includes historical accounts of trade and settlement in the Pacific Americas during the early modern period would enable students to evaluate relations and make connections to the political and economic structures that emerged by the mid-nineteenth century. The simultaneous development of Russian settlements in the north Pacific and Alaska, British and French settlements in Hawai'i, and British, French, Dutch, colonies in the south Pacific had impacts on growth and development in these regions, as well as the world economy. If the 'Atlantic World' is constructed as a historical region of analysis from 1492 to 1880, then perhaps an analysis of economic development, social interactions, and migrations in the 'Pacific World' between 1600 and 1945 as a "long term geographical-

historical structure” would enhance our understanding of the early modern world.

As we enter the twenty-first century, we can more confidently historicize the twentieth century. A temporal shift seems a logical methodology, in order to contextualize the twentieth century in the long durée, as period in which scholarly discourse on ideologies of modernity, post-modernity, and nationalism emerged in the field.