

“Globalizing the U.S. Survey: Part 2”

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As you can tell from the two previous presentations, the goal of our syllabus is to bring the concept of the global into the classroom. In the second half of the syllabus, we will follow the example of Thomas Bender, Charles Bright, and Michael Geyer and continue to tie historical trends and events in the United States to happenings in the rest of the world. We aim to cover material similar to what a student would hear in a conventional US history survey course, yet with the acknowledgement that the US is not in a bubble, not insular nor acting in isolation. Instead we emphasize that the forces at work in other geographical areas of the world do in fact affect the US, and vice versa.

Among the themes addressed in this second half of our proposed course are urban and suburbanization, industrialization, population growth, science and technology, and the exploitation of natural resources, especially petroleum.

Organizing a syllabus in this manner, where groups or geographical areas that are marginalized in the traditional survey course are brought into the historical conversation, generates a more comprehensive and textured account of US history. As a historian of California, I am particularly concerned with keeping California and the West as pertinent locations of interest. The history

collaborates in this regard. In our time frame, 1850 to the present, CA specifically and the West in general become focal points in the national imaginary; these places become physically integrated into the nation with the advent of the railroad and the continuation of westward migration with its concomitant non-Native settlement.

For those of us who teach in the American west, inclusion of our own local histories is a valuable tool in engaging students. With the rising importance of the Pacific Rim, as well as current debates surrounding immigration from Mexico and Latin America, it is essential that we recognize histories that are connected to the physical space of the west coast; our syllabus allows for the application of this broad geographical interpretation.

Part 2 Overview

Obviously, this course diverges from the traditional 1877 to the present US history survey. Perhaps the most glaring initial departure from the typical survey format is our chronology. As my colleagues presented, we have altered the periodization of the course, starting the second half of the syllabus in 1850, with the California Gold Rush and the prelude to the Civil War. The reasons are manifold; given the dynamics of industrialization and the implications of immigrant labor, international changes in the institution of slavery, and the repercussions of the Mexican-American War, which aside from the Gadsden Purchase and the annexation of Alaska and Hawaii, effectively completed

American provisional dominion over our current geographical borders. We based this change in periodization on a logical sequence of consequential historical events.

Opening with a review of the California gold rush immediately pulls the west coast to the center of the narrative. On a practical level, beginning here offers a brief refresher for those who took the first half of the course and a catching up point for those joining for the first time. On a historical level, the gold rush is a pivotal moment of westward expansion, bringing California prominently into the national conscious. In addition to the wealth it generated, the gold rush shows how the world is brought to California in a very tangible way through the immigration of miners and other entrepreneurs from Latin America, the East Coast, Australia, Europe, and Asia. It is a microcosm of the collision of conflicting cultures; all of these fortune seekers converge on a relatively small area, interacting with the Native peoples, Californios, and immigrants such as James Sutter who had already established links to the area. Also, covering the Civil War in the second half of the syllabus rather than assuming the traditional track of beginning with the end of reconstruction, allows for more continuity when discussing emancipation, the failure of reconstruction, and the subsequent enduring reestablishment of unequal race relationships.

From this point, the syllabus launches into a discussion of the changes in agriculture and industry from the 1880s to 1914. This conversation includes the

creation of a contract society as a consequence of the end of slavery and rise of sharecropping, heightened immigration from Europe, Mexico and Asia, and the increase in extractive industries, especially in the American West. As an international phenomenon, the hinterlands were increasingly feeding population in the growing cities. Coincidental with these changes, a new urbanity emerged, as people congregated in cities and were pushed into waged labor; pedagogically, these urban spaces offer a window for students to explore the experiences of women and the working class.

World War I marked a change in the way the United States interacted with the rest of the globe, propelling the US into the world and marking the switch from British to US global hegemony, a metaphorical passing of the baton of empire. While the United States made imperial overtures pre-World War, the Spanish-American War for example, World War I marks the ascendancy of American power. Its move from a debtor to a creditor nation, with burgeoning direct investment in foreign nations and increased manufacturing capacity, made the US a more prominent global player. Bringing to students' attention that the United States' super-power status is a recent development shakes up many undergraduate's preconceived notions.

The post World War I era offers another opportunity to view the events of the United States through an international perspective and underscore the inter-relations between the United States and the world. Looking at the Pan-African movement of the 20s and 30s highlights the cultural and political

interrelationships between Harlem, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. Other global overviews include the advent of immigration restrictions, including the creation of the US border patrol in 1924, and battles over women's suffrage culminating in the passage of the 19th amendment in 1920.

Our lectures on the 1930s stress the Great Depression as a global depression, not just a US phenomenon. For this era, we touch on US experiences such as Mexican repatriation and other internal migrations. In conjunction with these North American incidents, a variety of demographic shifts were also happening worldwide throughout this period as movement continued from the countryside to the cities. We also observe a unified, world-wide response of state intervention attempting to bring countries out of the depression, which only the Second World War will accomplish. The World War II lectures touch on the home front, as well as spend significant time on the creation of the bomb, a scientific endeavor that changed the world, and the increasing reliance on petroleum obtained from a world energy market.

With the onset of the Cold War our syllabus covers trends of increased consumption and suburbanization, such as Levittown, New York. Along with new modes of living came the "baby boom" and a massive population increase on a world-wide scale. Next we talk about the Vietnam War in the perspective of other anti-colonial struggles, and the activist movements of the 1960s including Civil Rights, anti-war actions and student movements. These moments of

rebellion are part of a pattern of world-wide social unrest occurring during this period.

To discuss the 1970s, we draw on Bright and Geyer's work to outline the global upheavals of that decade, including a crisis of American hegemony with the quagmire of the Vietnam War, stagflation, the OPEC oil embargo, and the continuing challenge of the Soviet Union.

Our syllabus ends in the present with an exploration of the US as a "global nation". We discuss the changes in the US economy with deindustrialization, the creation of the rust belt, and the move towards a service economy as work is outsourced to Latin America and Asia.

To sum up, as can be seen from this brief overview, our goal is to bring the US into the world, and show the intersections of US and world history from the 1850s to the present while also chronicling the basic concepts of traditional US history.

Conclusion

Looking at United States history through a world historical lens allows the instructor to highlight just how the global affects the local, and reveals the effects of globalization within our borders. It is an approach which "includes" the US within the world, which depicts the US as not necessarily the center of that world, but an integral part of the international community. Students need to recognize that the US does not interact with the global only in times of war, but

that there are other forces beyond politics, such as ecology and economics, which bind people together.

Overall, we feel that it is important not to view the history of the United States in isolation. The US is part of the world. The nations of the world are connected. With the collapse of space and time coupled with the advances of transportation and communication technologies, the 20th and 21st centuries are ages of globalization, and we need to place the US within that context. We need to push our students to think past the idea of the bordered political nation as the natural container for all history. As educators, we need to consider the advice of Thomas Bender and others, and reframe American history from a story of exceptionalism to one of inclusion in order to give our students the global understanding necessary for success.

Thank you.