

A Journey by Road, Map, and Encounter: Following Strands of Global Connections in the Early Modern Era.

Intentions and Means:

Students of history tend to think of the field in discrete, differentiated terms. They break the discipline into fiefdoms of knowledge, bounded by geography, ethnicity, and time. In this tendency, students essentially copy what they see; historians as a rule adhere to the same types of intra-disciplinary balkanization. I have long believe that this approach, while reasonable – no one can study everything – creates a false understanding of the mechanisms and levers of history. The value in Global History lies in the chance that it offers historians to break out of this paradigm of specialization.

The syllabus for my class takes as its focal points the historical actors who moved between those spaces that we usually understand as historically fixed. Pilgrims, slaves, merchants, and others traveled cardinally – east to west, south to north, etc. – and temporally, flitting between constructed spheres which we designate as medieval, early modern, or modern. These movements demonstrate that far-flung places on the globe have long histories of connectivity that belie the ways that we study them. We can see the connective tissues in the actors on which this class will focus; their movements between regions underscores the importance of studying events globally.

These historical subjects are not only important heuristic devices in their own right, however. In a sense, they point the way to deeper, more important sinews of connectivity. Such travelers could move between cultures because the separate spheres all had similar structures in place. Most regions had merchants and slaves, and most religions have pilgrims; inter-regional travelers benefited from a familiarity of type. In fine, despite their differences, communities across the early modern globe spoke in similar registers – if different tones – about a wide range of subjects. My class examines these similarities by looking at points of commonality between these registers.

A secondary goal for the semester is to induce students to think spatially about history and historical subjects. Examinations of conceptualized space – for example, how actors understand questions of home and frontier, and what it might mean to go between them – will be a point of emphasis throughout the semester. Different cultures conceive of space in different ways; the later half of the class will investigate what happens when mismatched conceptions of space and cartography collide. I believe that unpacking how people understood, used, and layered their spaces gives valuable insight into how they lived and how they interacted with the world around them. This course, then, looks to address those questions during our study of liminal our liminal figures and ideas.

Structure:

From start to finish, I have attempted to give the semester something of a narrative structure. I have chosen the theme of a journey as an overarching framing device. The sections of study are broken up and labeled to indicate where in the voyage the class stands at any given time. The semester begins with the class at Home. The journey moves to cities, and from cities out into the world. The next section examines the types of people one might meet on the road (or at sea, as the case may be), before coming to the point of contact and exchange at a foreign location. Connections made, the narrative then takes us Home again, winding up where we started, though not as we started.

This framing runs certain risks, to be sure; the conceit of learning as a journey has a long, and hackneyed, tradition. However, I believe that in the case of this class such a frame makes conceptual sense. So much of the work over the course of the semester focuses on travelers and exchange – financial, religious, or cultural – that structuring the course itself as a journey feels appropriate. Moreover, in my experience, silly or cheesy constructions like this often serve to better cement in the minds of students the ideas presented. All syllabi tell narratives; I am simply seeking to use that common construction to my advantage by doing so does it more plainly.

Readings:

This class throws many different texts at the students. Some are articles, and some are essays from edited collections. However, many of the readings on the syllabus are drawn from monographs. Some selections come from interior chapters, but many come from the introductions and initial chapters of books. Only twice are students required to read an entire monograph. The wide range of topics covered under the syllabus precluded reliance on a small set of monographs, and I do not expect undergraduates to be able to read a book a week. Articles might have served as the primary texts, but I believe that using the first 50-80 pages of books offers opportunities for learning that articles don't. Asking students to approach books in this manner demands that they read strategically and work to glean the arguments of a book from its outset – necessary tasks for historians. Not only can they access the thesis of a book in this way, but students are also thus introduced to the historiography of a topic in a more complete way than might be the case with an article, with its greater limitations on length and space. Lastly, this approach opens up easy doors for students to pursue further readings. This final rationale is, admittedly, more aspirational than realistic, but some students may well benefit from it nonetheless.

The length of readings varies week to week. I began putting this syllabus together with the goal of asking students to read between 100-120 pages per week – 50-60 pages per class. Some of the readings are significantly longer, however. In Week 6, for example, the syllabus lists roughly 180 pages as due. In weeks like this, I would break the class into groups, with each group responsible for a specific section of the readings, with everyone required to have at least skimmed the rest. The following class period would then be partially dedicated to presentations by the responsible parties, and class discussion about how we understand and piece together the whole of the story.

I have given one week over to watching a movie – *Pirates of the Caribbean III: At World's End* – with little reading due that week. My purpose in this is three-fold. Firstly, many of the themes of liminality, space, and cross-cultural travel that we will discuss over the course of the semester make an appearance in the movie – albeit in odd forms. I thought it might prove generative to have the class consider this movie, which they have likely all seen before, using some of the analytical tools that we will be developing. Secondly, that week precedes the longest reading assignment of the term, accompanied by one of the required book responses. Having a lighter week allows students the opportunity to focus more fully their attentions on the upcoming work. Lastly, a movie in the doldrums of the semester offers a bit of a reprieve for all – there is something to be said for coming across to one's students as at least somewhat humane.

Graded Assignments:

The whole of the grade for the class come from four points: participation; two book responses; and a final research paper. Students may choose the book for the first response, while everyone reviews the same book for the second response. These two are of increasing worth, and serve to let the students become acquainted with my expectation before they write their semester-ending paper. That assignment has requisite benchmarks throughout the semester: students must turn in a proposal, then later a working bibliography, and last of all they must present their work-in-progress to the class for discussion. The purpose of these benchmarks is to ensure that students are giving attention to the project throughout the semester, and to give me ample opportunity to help them aim their work in fruitful directions.

Section 1: The Journey's Start

This section covers the first three weeks of the class, with an eye towards bringing students up to speed with the themes of the course while providing contextualizing background. The first week includes Sanjay Subrahmanyam's "Connected Histories" essay, which I found to be one of the most helpful of the articles that we read in providing an framework for understanding global connectedness. I decided against including any of the essays that we read that tried to bracket out the early modern period; I find that type of distinction to be problematic. I paired Subrahmanyam's essay with Doreen Massey's piece on space and place, which provides a highly accessible introduction to thinking spatially about history.

The next two weeks of Section 1 address the historical background of global connectivity in the pre-modern era. The mechanisms of early modern connections had deep antecedents, with threads of trade and travel stretching across all of the continents. Week 2 examines the Silk Road from both ends, looking at its Central Asian sections as well as its terminus in the Eastern Mediterranean. Week 3 looks to patterns of trade and migration that predated European involvement in both Mesoamerica and in the Indian Ocean. Taken as a whole, the weeks in this section should help to help make sure all of the students are coming to later issues from a consistent background.

Section 2: Setting Out

The theme of travel continues, with the envisaged Journey taking us from home towards the city, from whence we will catch ship to foreign parts. This is a short section, examining early modern cities in Europe and other parts of the world over two weeks. Cities provided important loci of power and commerce, acting as nodes of condensed culture that drew cross-border travelers. Consequently, understanding how cities formed and operated, and how citizens understood their urban spaces, plays an important role in tracing the strands of connectivity. These discussions will also help inform our discussions about cities and immigrants at the end of the semester.

Section 3: Along the Way

This section, and the next, provide the heart of the class, both conceptually and logistically. Weeks six through ten consider various types of travelers that crossed spheres in the early modern era. I picked Phillip Stern's book *The Company State* for a discussion of East India Companies in week six because of its unusual focus on the Company as a liminal state, rather than on it as a more traditional land-holding power. Week six also considers diasporic merchants; I chose to move away from Europe and the Sephardic or Feneriot trading diasporas, and instead looked to the East, to the Armenians and the Hokkien merchants. Class discussion would include the European diasporic merchants, as well.

Week seven looks at pilgrim travelers – a particular interest of mine – examining both European and Islamic traditions of religious travel. Eric Tagliacozzo's book will come up again later in the semester, and Laurence Aldersey's letter from Hakluyt will serve as an interesting comparison to William Wey's pre-Reformation itineraries, studied in week two. The second half of week seven considers Victor Turner's concepts of liminality and *communitas* in relation to ritual, and especially to pilgrimage. I have found these concepts useful for thinking about other issues, as my essay on the Liminal State demonstrated. They should provide good working tools for our continuing investigations.

Week eight brings with it the grace of Fall Break, after which we will look at disease. While germs might not rank high on the list of preferred traveling companions, I believe that the transmission of disease along line of connectivity marks one of the ways that cross-cultural movement has had a palpable impact on human histories around the globe. We will look at the spread of Yellow Fever in the Atlantic World, and at the spread of Cholera along the pathways of the Haj. Class discussion will also include Smallpox in North America, and Syphilis in Europe.

Weeks nine and ten continues our focus on less-than-desirable fellow travelers, considering slaves, smugglers, and pirates. Week nine's readings cast slavery in a global context, considering both the Atlantic slave trade through Robert Harm's *The Diligent*, and slave trade in the Indian Ocean in S. Arasaratnam's essay. William Clarence-Smith's essay brings the conversation more to the modern era; some class discussion will likely be given to Indian Ocean slave trade up through the twentieth century. The second half of week nine looks to smugglers in America and China, demonstrating the connective strands that illicit activity create worldwide.

That theme finds an echo in week ten, where the focus falls to pirates. I have designated the week primarily for watching *Pirates of the Caribbean*, as discussed above. The reading from John Anderson is short; the goal is to contextualize piracy, alongside smuggling, as a global issue that distorts and manipulates spheres of spatial and cultural understanding.

Section 4: Representing the World

Questions of maps and cartographic contestation take up the month of November. In the framework of our Journey, these weeks represent the time of contact and interaction at our destination. In week eleven we will look at Barbara Mundy's *The Mapping of New Spain*, using maps to investigate what happens when different cultures speak in registers that don't overlap. Mundy's book examines the deep differences between European and indigenous Amerindian mapping traditions, and demonstrates the power of cartographic visualization as a tool of conquest. The week also includes a reading from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, in which he wrote about the role of maps in reifying a communal identity.

Weeks twelve and thirteen continue the trend of looking at cartography as a cross-cultural mover. Week twelve includes readings from *Siam Mapped*, which demonstrate how Siam borrowed aspects of European spatial understanding to help stave off colonization, trading a sovereign cosmology for political sovereignty. Week thirteen looks at the Ottoman Empire, which stood at the center of the trade in maps during much of the early modern period. Taken together, the readings for these three weeks show different ways that ideas and cultural norms move across space and time, like other actors, to bridge divides and create newly imagined spaces.

Section 6: Returning Home

This last section brings our Journey back home. For these weeks I wanted to think about immigrants and diasporas again, this time with a focus on their homecomings. Week fourteen looks to British immigrants returning to Scotland from America, and to the repatriation of convicts and convict families from Australia. The expanded, and perhaps muddled, understanding of home spaces that returning immigrants carried with them marks an understudied way that global connectedness came home to small towns, as well as large cities. The readings for week fifteen also look to the creation of a home space, this time from the side of cities; both readings examine ways that cities sought to control immigrant movement and integration – to define the borders of their own identity, thereby sometimes forcing the issue of return on immigrants.