

History for the 21st Century: Sample Syllabus

The sample syllabus below is a modified version of a course taught at Washington State University that combines five History for the 21st Century modules to create a 15-week introductory world history course. The course modules used are:

- Atlantic Piracy in Global Perspective, c. 1500-1750
- Hunting, the Wilderness, and Imperialism, c. 1850-1900
- Africa and Africans in the First World War, c. 1910-1920
- Questioning Decolonization, c. 1940-present
- Unsovereign Space, c. 1600s-present

These modules were selected to emphasize the theme of imperialism, its impacts on societies, and legacies in the world today from the early modern era to the present. For the purposes of this course, each module began and ended by emphasizing the relevance of history in the present day, whether by highlighting the legacies of historical dynamics and processes, or the parallels between the past and the present.

Unit 1: Atlantic Piracy in Global Perspective: The first unit begins by examining early modern globalization in the Atlantic world through the lens of piracy. Students learn how piracy emerged and flourished between 1500 and 1750, in the context of European colonial expansion to the Americas. As European imperial competition intensified in the 16th and 17th centuries, European rivals first welcomed piracy, before later viewing it as a threat and prosecuting it. In addition to considering the role of piracy in imperial rivalries, students also consider who became a pirate and why, as well as the implications of labeling some acts as piracy versus others, and what this history can tell us about popular perceptions of piracy versus its realities in the present.

Unit 2: Hunting, the Wilderness, and Imperialism: The second unit continues the history of empire into the 19th century by examining the dynamics of imperial hunting and emergent ideas of conservation. Students begin by reflecting on their own perceptions of the wilderness as “untouched” nature, and where these ideas may come from. From there, they learn about the relationship between power, masculinity, and hunting by examining accounts of imperial hunts in three regions of Anglo-European colonization: British East Africa, North America, and South Asia. Students consider how, in these cases, hunting served as a proxy for imperial power and conquest, as well as how early conservation efforts reflected the viewpoints and concerns of those in power. The conclusion of the unit asks students to consider cases of trophy hunting in Africa and North America today, and what they might tell us about power and our current human relationships to the wilderness.

Unit 3: Africa and Africans in the First World War: Next, the class moves to examine World War I. The unit emphasizes the geostrategic considerations that shaped the role of the African continent in the war and the experience of it from an African and African diasporic perspective. Students compare case-studies of colonial soldiers in French West Senegal and the East Africa Campaign, and learn about African American soldiers and the views of W. E. B. Du Bois in order to compare their motivations, experiences, and responses to the war. This approach allows students to see various vantage-points on the war, while also gaining a greater understanding of

the various currents of anti-colonial resistance and solidarity that emerged from it. Students are also asked to consider how and why this history has been marginalized in favor of other narratives of the war, and to think about how learning about these experiences today transforms their understanding of the past.

Unit 4: Questioning Decolonization: The fourth unit focuses on the post-World War II era and political decolonization from about 1945 to 1990. Students consider what the causes of decolonization were and weigh both global and local factors in facilitating independence in order to help them think about the relationship between individual agency and broader historical structures and processes. In addition, students draw on prior discussions of imperialism and use a definition of colonialism that emphasizes the political, social, cultural, and economic ways it shapes societies, in order to determine what it would mean to fully decolonize and consider where they see legacies of colonialism in the world today. The module concludes by asking students to reflect on their own historical agency, and what changes they might make to their course plans or curriculum, or transformations they might like to see on campus that could address legacies of colonialism and inequity they might identify in their own lives.

Unit 5: Unsovereign Space: The final unit of the class challenges students to think about how human understandings of and claims to space have changed across time. The unit begins by asking students to consider the nature of different borders (national and domestic), what controls are exerted over them, and what their purpose is. Using southeast Asia as a historical case-study, the unit then turns to the 17th century and contrasts competing Chinese, English, and Dutch understandings of and claims to space as the era of European colonization in the Indian Ocean was beginning. Then the module moves to the 19th century, when European imperial influence in the region was growing and new borders were being drawn and negotiated. Finally, students turn to the 21st century where they consider what space means in an era of global environmental concerns, intensifying online connectivity, and expanding exploration of outer space. The unit ends by asking students to consider the issues of power and equity in these spaces today, and how the past might inform our efforts to negotiate space in the present world.

The course below also includes a final research paper project, in which students selected an issue in the world today and conducted historical research on it. Work on this final paper unfolded throughout the entirety of the class, and was guided by four scaffolded assignments.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Atlantic Piracy in Global Perspective, c. 1500-1750

Week 1

Tuesday: Introduction to the Roots of Contemporary Issues

- In Class: Introduce ourselves and our goals in the class, and discuss the major topics to be covered and components of the course.

Thursday: Introduction to Atlantic Piracy and Piracy in the Emerging Atlantic World, c. 1500

Readings: About this Module; Reading 1: Piracy in the Emerging Atlantic World, c. 1500;
Primary Source Packet 1: Cabot, Staden, and Lery

- In Class: Consider popular representation of piracy and news of piracy in the contemporary world. Introduce the 16th century Atlantic world, early Spanish and Portuguese colonialism and cases of piracy.

Week 2

Tuesday: 16th C Commodity Trades, Labor Regimes, and Piracy and Final Paper Overview

Readings: Reading 2: 16th c Commodity Trades, Labor Regimes, and Piracy; Primary Source Packet 2: Nichols and the Drake Manuscript

- In Class: Examine the entanglement between colonialism, enslavement, resource extraction, and piracy. Contrast perspectives on early privateers/pirates in the cases of John Hawkins and Francis Drake, and examine primary sources to learn about piracy in the colonial world.

Thursday: Research Workshop #1 – Picking a Topic and Asking Historical Questions

- In Class: Meet in the library to discuss Research Assignment #1 and topics you are interested in working on for your final research paper. Time provided to begin working on the assignment.

**Research Assignment #1 due Sunday, 11.59pm

Week 3

Tuesday: 17th C Imperial Competition and Piracy on Land and at Sea

Readings: Reading 3: 17th c Imperial Competition and Piracy on Land and at Sea;
Primary Source Packet 3: Frethorne, Esquemeling, Morgan, Samuel

- In Class: Discuss why European powers began to persecute piracy in the Atlantic and examine the emergence of the buccaneers in the Caribbean. Compare primary sources on indentured servitude and buccaneer life to identify the appeal of piracy to 17th century colonists.

Thursday: 18th C Piracy, Plantations, and Global Markets

Readings: Reading 4: 18th C Piracy, Plantations, and Global Markets; Primary Source Packet 4: Villany Rewarded, Bonny and Read, Roberts

- In Class: Discuss piracy in the Indian Ocean and popular perceptions of piracy in the Atlantic world. Consider the “end” of the golden age of piracy, and how we can apply lessons about early modern piracy to the present day.

**Unit 1 Assessment due Sunday, 11.59pm

Unit 2: Hunting, the Wilderness, and Imperialism, c. 1850-1900

Week 4

Tuesday: Introduction to Hunting, the Wilderness, and Imperialism

Readings: About this Module; Reading 1: Hunting in the Wilderness

- In Class: Draw what comes to mind when we think about ‘wilderness,’ and consider where those ideas come from. Reflect on ways the wilderness is depicted historically and consider Cronon’s analysis of contemporary American ideas about the wilderness and conservation. Define elite, commercial, and subsistence hunting and identify examples of them.

Thursday: Hunting and Masculinity in Imperial Africa

Readings: Reading 2: Hunting and Masculinity in Imperial Africa; Primary Sources: Kipling and Patterson

- In Class: Discuss the “New Imperialism” of the late 19th century and British expansion in Africa. Analyze the relationship between masculinity and imperialism Rudyard Kipling’s poem, and J.H. Patterson’s account of *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo*. Practice “reading against the grain” to identify what Patterson’s narrative can and can’t tell us about the lives of imperial subjects.

Week 5

Tuesday: Clearing the Way for National Parks in the United States

Readings: Reading 3: Clearing the Way for National Parks in the United States: Primary Sources: Catlin Text and Images

- In Class: Examine westward expansion and indigenous displacement and consider its relationship to hunting and early ideas about conservation through Catlin’s writings. Examine the establishment of the Adirondack and Yellowstone national parks and their impacts on indigenous communities and subsistence hunters.

Thursday: Research Workshop #2 – Finding Secondary Sources

- In Class: Meet in the library to discuss Research Assignment #2 and identify history books and journal articles for your final research paper. Time provided to begin working on the assignment.

**Research Assignment #2 due Sunday, 11.59pm

Week 6

Tuesday: The Human Experience of Wildlife in India

Readings: Reading 4: The Human Experience of National Parks in India; Primary Source: Corbett

- In Class: Look at the relationships between British hunter Jim Corbett and local villagers in *My India* and consider what the text can and cannot tell us about the lives of colonial subjects. Examine the establishment of national parks and their impacts in India.

Thursday: Conclusion: Elite Hunting in the 21st Century

Readings: Reading 5: Elite Hunting in the 21st Century: Conservation or Destruction?

- In Class: Examine contemporary cases of trophy hunting in North America and East Africa, their entanglement with conservation, and various perspectives on elite hunting today.

**Unit 2 Assessment due Sunday, 11.59pm

Unit 4: Africa and Africans in the First World War, c. 1910-1920

Week 7

Tuesday: Introduction to Africa and Africans in the First World War

Readings: Reading 1: Introduction; Primary Source: Gold Coast Leader

- In Class: Look at contemporary narratives of World War I and introduce the geostrategic place of Africa in the war. Examine how observers in the Gold Coast thought about the war's outbreak through a primary source editorial.

Thursday: French West Africa and the Senegalese Riflemen

Readings: Reading 2: French West Africa; Primary Sources: Cisse and Niang; Primary Sources: Senegal Images

- In Class: Review the dynamics of life in colonial French West Africa and how colonial subjects were enlisted into the war. Examine what their motivations and experiences of the war in Europe were through primary sources.

Week 8

Tuesday: The East Africa Campaign

Readings: Reading 3: The War in East Africa; Primary Sources: East Africa Interviews; Primary Sources: East Africa Images

- In Class: Review the East Africa Campaign and its goals for European powers. Compare the motivations and experiences of soldiers in the German *Schutztruppe* and British Kings African Rifles, as well as the carriers.

Thursday: Research Workshop #3 – Finding Primary Sources

- In Class: Discuss databases and tips for finding primary sources related to your final research paper topic, and review skills for analyzing them. Time provided to begin working on the assignment.

**Research Assignment #3 due Sunday, 11.59pm

Week 9

Tuesday: American Views on the War

Readings: Reading 4: W. E. B. Du Bois and American Views of World War I; Primary Sources: African Roots of War, and Close Ranks

- In Class: Review African American perspectives on the war and contributions to it. Consider how W. E. B Du Bois perspective evolved over the course of the war and after.

Thursday: Conclusion: African Soldiers in WWI

Readings: Reading 5: Conclusion

- In Class: Consider the impacts of the war and post-war developments in Africa and the United States. Look at recent commemorations of the war and consider how a study of this history helps us better understand the war.

**Unit 3 Assessment due Sunday, 11.59pm

Unit 4: Questioning Decolonization, c. 1940-present

Week 10

Tuesday: Introduction to Questioning Decolonization

Readings: Reading 1: Introduction; Reading 2: What was Colonialism?

- In Class: Discuss various aspects of colonialism, how it functions, and what impacts it has on societies. Consider what it would look like for full decolonization to happen.

Thursday: Why Did Decolonization Happen?, Part I

Readings: Reading 3: Why Did Decolonization Happen?

- In Class: Review what factors historians suggest contributed to political decolonization after World War II, and introduce the question of whether decolonization was the product of global changes or local and individual efforts. Begin analysis of primary sources in groups.

Week 11

Tuesday: Why Did Decolonization Happen?, Part II

Readings: Primary sources: Ho, FLN, Wright, Azikiwe, Zhou (assigned by group)

- In Class: Continue groupwork analyzing primary sources, and present and discuss what the sources tell us about the causes of political decolonization after World War II.

Thursday: Research Workshop #4 – Drafting an Introduction and Outline

- In Class: Discuss tips for writing research paper introductions and outlines, look at examples, and consider our working theses. Time provided to begin working on the assignment.

**Research Assignment #4 due Sunday, 11.59pm

Week 12

Tuesday: Legacies of Colonialism

Readings: Reading 4: Voices of Decolonization; Reading 5: What was Not Decolonized?

- In Class: Discuss the arguments of political leaders and scholars about what was decolonized after World War II and what was not. Consider where we may see the legacies of colonialism in the world today.

Thursday: Decolonization Today

- In Class: Consider the relationship between global shifts and local and individual actions in producing historical change, and reflect on what this means for us as

individuals today. Examine our course offerings and educational plans and consider where we may see opportunities for structural change and/or individual action.

****Unit 4 Assessment due Sunday, 11.59pm**

Unit 5: Unsovereign Space, c. 1600s-present

Week 13

Tuesday: Introduction to Unsovereign Space

Readings: Reading 1: Introduction to Sovereignty and Space

- In Class: Begin to think about space and divisions of it in the world today by thinking about state and national borders and their purposes.

Thursday: Ordering and Controlling Space in the Indian Ocean

Readings: Reading 2: Chinese, Portuguese, and Dutch 'Systems'; Primary Sources: Ming and Portuguese Systems; Primary Sources: Grotius and Seldon;

- In Class: Examine Chinese and Portuguese competition in the Indian Ocean and compare their understandings of space and ways of exerting control over it. Compare the arguments of Dutch and English observers about maritime space.

Week 14

Tuesday: Mapping and Claiming Space in Southeast Asia

Readings: Reading 3: Cartography and Scientific Empire Building; Primary Sources: Treaties between Siam and Britain; Primary Sources: Analyzing Maps

- In Class: Begin to examine 19th century empire in South-East Asia and consider the role of map-making in imperialism. Compare treaties between Siam and Britain, and complete group activity to negotiate and draft a new treaty.

Thursday: Sharing Space in Outer Space

Readings: Reading 4: Sharing Space on Earth and in Outer Space and Cyber Space; Primary Sources: Outer Space

- In Class: Review the history of space exploration and efforts to negotiate and regulate it. Discuss how this compares to human space exploration today.

Week 15

Tuesday: Sharing Space on Earth and in Cyber Space

Readings: Primary Sources: The Internet; Primary Sources: Tragedy of the Commons

- In Class: Review the challenges of navigating environmental regulations on regional and global scales, and sharing space on the internet. Complete group activity to draft a treaty proposal for the internet, based on the 1967 Outer Space Treaty.

Thursday: Wrap-Up and Final Paper Workshop

- In Class: Review our class and the relevance of history in the world today, and time to work on final papers.

****FINAL RESEARCH PAPERS DUE****