Technology and the Global Economy, 1000-2000
Contextualizing people, resources, technology, and economic growth.
21H.982 (meets with 21H.383)
Spring 2019 – Tuesday 1-4pm – E51-285

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Office Hours: by appointment

This course is a graduate/advanced undergraduate reading seminar in the global history of the last millennium, with a particular focus on technological change, commodity exchange, systems of production, and economic growth. This course will be of interest to students wanting to engage with core problems in economic and global history, particularly the medieval and early modern origins of modern systems of production, consumption and global exchange. Topics covered will include the long pre-history of modern economic development; medieval ‘world systems;’ the ‘age of discovery’ both east and west; the global crisis of the 17th century; demographic systems and global population movements; the industrial revolution and its discontents (both of its participants and its historians); the rise of the modern consumer; colonialism and empire building; patterns of inequality, within and across states; the ‘curse’ of natural resources and the fate of Africa; and the threat of climate change to modern economic systems. Participants will have the opportunity to explore in depth a major controversy in global economic history or the history of technology, but will also become familiar with the range of debate that informs current research and teaching across a variety of sub-fields in medieval, early modern and modern history more broadly. Participants will also review the range of methodologies available to explore these questions as they prepare for their own research projects.

Participants are expected to engage actively in the weekly seminar, to write short responses to the readings for each session, to prepare at least once for leadership of the seminar discussion, and to produce a substantial work of original scholarship as a culminating exercise. The final project could take the form of an extended review essay of a major debate in the field, or a research project centered on an archival body of evidence that would further inform a topic covered by the course.

Topic Organization and Readings
All students should read the articles (or in a few cases designated selections from longer books) assigned for each week. All articles and book selections are available as pdfs at the course Stellar site. The assigned readings are listed first after the Reading heading for each week. Graduate students should further supplement that reading with an additional
book selected from the second list below each Reading heading. Any undergraduate who wishes to read one of the suggested books is of course welcome to do so. Moreover, book review subjects should be drawn primarily from the readings listed on this syllabus as noted in the assignment explanation at the end of this syllabus.

Week 1 – February 5
Deep History and Big Data: Understanding Long-term Global Processes
Readings:
Adam Davidson, “The Economy’s Missing Metrics,” NYT Magazine JULY 1, 2015

For discussion: Eric Weinstein, Thiel Capital, ”Is Technology Killing Capitalism?”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYsy6qbKp3Y
Deirdre McCloskey, “Explaining Modern Economic Growth”
http://serious-science.org/explaining-modern-economic-growth-5979
Hans Rosling, TED Talk, “Global Population Growth, Box by Box,” 2010
https://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_on_global_population_growth

Week 2 – February 11
Climate vs. Ideas (let alone the Household or Geography): What Accounts for Economic Growth?
Readings:

Book suggestions:
Ian Morris, Why the West Rules - For Now and The Measure of Civilization
Amartya Sen, *The Standard of Living*
Nancy Folbre, *Greed, Lust and Gender: A History of Economic Ideas*

**Week 3 -- February 19**  NO CLASS –Monday schedule of classes

**Week 4 – February 26**
**The Tech Boom of the Middle Ages**

*Readings:*

*Book suggestions:*
Thomas Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles*
Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*
Maarten Prak, *Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West*
Joel Mokyr, *The Lever of Riches*

**Week 5 – March 5**
**Was Malthus Right? -- Plague and the Post-Plague Economy**

*Readings:*
George Grantham, “Explaining the Industrial Transition” *European Review of Economic History*, 12, 155–165. (There are also other articles in the same volume reviewing Greg Clark, *A Farewell to Alms.*)

*Book suggestions:*
Bruce Campbell, *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late-Medieval World*
Wrigley and Schofield, *The Population History of England*

Bengtsson, Campbell and Lee, *Life under Pressure: Mortality and Living Standards in Europe and Asia, 1700-1900*.

**Week 6 – March 12**  
**The Global Crisis of the 17th Century**

*Readings:*

*Book suggestions:*
- Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*
- Geoffrey Parker, *War, Climate Change, and Catastrophe in the 17th c.*

**Week 7 – March 19**  
**Consumers Everywhere**

*Readings:*

*Book suggestions:*
- Timothy Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat: The 17th Century and the Dawn of the Global World*
- Jan deVries, *The Industrious Revolution*

**Spring Break – March 26**


Week 8 – April 2
The Industrial Revolution

Readings:

Book suggestions:
Deirdre McCloskey, The Bourgeois Virtues
http://www.deirdremccloskey.com/articles/revolution.php
Joel Mokyr, The Enlightened Economy
Robert Allen, The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective
E.A. Wrigley, The Path to Sustained Growth: England's Transition from an Organic Economy to an Industrial Revolution

Week 9 – April 9
Empire Building: East and West

Readings:

Book suggestions:
Peter Perdue, China Marches West
Sugata Bose, A Hundred Horizons: The Indian Ocean in the Age of Global Empire
Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Capital or The Age of Empire
Ian Morris, Why the West Rules, for Now

Week 10 – April 16 NO CLASS – Patriot’s Day Holiday
**Week 11 – April 23**  
**Divergence: When and Why?**  

*Readings:*  

*Book suggestions:*  
- Ken Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence*  
- Jean Laurent Rosenthal and Bin Wong, *Before and Beyond Divergence*  
- Prasannan Parthasarathi *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not*  
- Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East*

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**Week 12 – April 30**  
**Slavery, the ‘Resource Curse’ and the Question of Africa?**  

*Readings:*  

*Book suggestions:*  
- David van Reybrouck, *Congo: The Epic History of a People*  
- William D. Nordhaus, *The Climate Casino: Risk, Uncertainty, and Economics for a Warming World*  
- E. A. Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution*  
- David Armitage and Jo Guldi, *The History Manifesto*
Week 13 – May 7
No class – Individual meetings to work on projects

Week 14 – May 14
Class Presentations of Final Projects

Course Assignments

Weekly Responses

Each week students will post to the Stellar site a very brief (at most 2 paragraphs but could be just bullet points) response to the readings. These might offer comparisons between readings, a summary of the main arguments as you understand them, a series of questions the reading left you with, or if warranted the occasional rant about a particular reading.

Book Review Assignments

The first two writing assignments for this course are to select two of the books we are reading in class and complete a 3-4 page review of them. If there is another book you wish to review, this is fine as long as you consult with me in advance. Such a review should accomplish three things: 1) it should summarize the author's main argument; 2) it should place the work in question in its broader historiographical context; and 3) it should provide a critical assessment of the suitability of the employed methodology to advance the author's argument. One excellent way to learn how to write a strong review is to read a variety of book reviews in the relevant historical journals. This is also a good way to develop a broad sense of a literature at the same time that you become more familiar with the genre.

Historiographical Essay Assignment

For the historiographical essay, you may select your own topic (and within that a framing question) from among those considered in the course. Undergraduate students should write an 8-10 page paper (graduate students should aim for 15-20). All students should also develop a useful bibliography on the topic. The expectation is that you will encompass a major literature while demonstrating the ability to think critically about the theories and methods engaged by other historians to answer the question you have posed. You should organize the paper around this question, giving careful consideration to why different historians sometimes answer important questions in such different ways.

Timeline for assignments
March 5 — First Book Review due

March 19 – Topic selected for historiographical essay

April 9 — Second Book Review due

April 23 — Annotated bibliography for final essay due and update for class

May 14 – Class presentations of individual essay projects

May 17 -- Final papers due

**Grading**

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<tr>
<td>Weekly Responses</td>
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<td>Class Discussion</td>
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An excellent guide for writing an annotated bibliography is available from the Williams College Library: [Williams College Libraries](http://williams.edu/library).