If this course has an imbedded narrative of which I am conscious, it is about the age of Europe’s empires (c.1500-1865) and the rise of their global hegemony. It is about the causes, consequences, and spread of an international market economy as both the impulse (cause) of European political expansion and as the partner (sponsor) of imperialism. It is about the creation of the United States as a nation, with an emergent identity and global imperial ambitions. It is about how the world created the United States (c.12,000 BC-1865), how the U.S. affected the world, and how the push and pull of those two integrated processes account for the distribution of power, the prevalence and nature of war, and global identities and relationships in the twentieth century. It is about the birth and growth of the modern, and of a global empire that always contained the seeds of its overextension and demise.

Readings marked by an asterisk (*) are required for discussion in class the week they are listed. Together, all the readings on this syllabus constitute the list for the first half (America, 1500-1865) of the teaching-field qualifying exam in American history.

**Course requirements**

Students are required to write two review essays (covering all of the listed readings for one week, not just the required readings), one during the first half of the semester, which is due no later than 9:00 A.M. on the day of the class meeting in which the readings are discussed, and another during the second half of the semester, which is due on the same schedule. There will also be a final writing assignment, which is due on December 18 at 9:00 A.M.

I will assign no “incomplete” grades except in a case of extraordinary personal circumstances. Students will be graded on the quality of their written work and their active, knowledgeable participation in each week’s discussion. I expect you to read the assigned texts and take an active, knowledgeable part in every class discussion. I expect you to attend every class—no exceptions for travel; class is your highest priority.

Except for the two weeks’ readings addressed in your essays, you decide whether you want to read only the books and articles labeled with an asterisk.

The class is yours, not mine; talk to each other. No personal attacks; be kind, but feel free to disagree, preferably passionately. Take personal responsibility for leading, not dominating, discussion. Listen. Think. One of you every week will start the discussion, and it will not be someone I designate. Work together; work it out. Teach yourselves; that’s what a humanist education means—that you are capable of teaching yourself new subjects of great complexity (maybe not brain surgery). You do not really need me here at all; well, maybe a little.
P.S. I do not care whether you like the books; that is beside the point. You need to come to terms with them, while avoiding caricature and simple-minded reductionism. Try starting your analysis from a point of modesty; assume that the author is smarter than you are (not necessarily true) and knows vastly more about the subject than you do (highly likely). If the author makes an argument that seems to you wrong, try to imagine her/his rejoinder to your criticism. Then, and only then, engage in critical analysis. Assume also that you do not know how to write a book as ambitious as the ones assigned; if you ever do, we will all be very proud.

Week 1 (August 31): Introduction

Week 2 (September 14):

Week 3 (September 21):
*Steinberg, Down to Earth, 72-135.

Week 4 (September 28):


Week 5 (October 12):


Week 6 (October 19):


Week 7 (October 26):
*Bender, A Nation Among Nations, chapter 2.

Week 8 (November 2):

Week 9 (November 9):


Week 10 (November 16):


Week 11 (November 23):


Week 12 (November 30):


Week 13 (December 7):
*Bender, A Nation Among Nations, chapter 3.

*Writing assignment due 9:00 A.M. on December 15 (preferably as a Word Document attached to an email—not as a pdf).

Draft a syllabus for a course entitled America and the World, ca. 1500-1865. The class has twenty-eight meetings. You must include a descriptive title for each lecture; assign six books for the whole semester (selection not limited to books on this syllabus), and indicate when readings are to be completed. Include at least two writing assignments, which you describe in detail; and include the mid-term and final exams (the actual exam questions). Write out in full one of the lectures (2500 words) and provide an annotated outline of another lecture.

Or: Write an essay of about 2500 words, which uses either a global or environmental perspective as the lens through which you read this semester’s syllabus and vice versa. Remember, you need a thesis and your essay is an argument.