The Big Questions
This course covers a pivotal era in world history—perhaps the most transformative in the human experience. It provides broad and in-depth coverage of the Portuguese Empire—the first truly global empire in human history—as well as the Spanish and Dutch overseas empires. Thus the British and French overseas enterprises are considered in the latter portion of the course in the context of the much-neglected work of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch who laid the basis for their emergence. The course is framed by two significant moments in world history: first, the intensification of African-European interactions along the West African coast in the early 1400s; second, the French and Haitian Revolutions of the late 1700s. Many of the ideas, institutions, exchanges, and forces that have continued to shape the world up to the present day reached an apogee in this period, including plantation slavery, the reliance on the sea for warfare and imperial dominance, racism, and religious conversion, and the dissemination of a “scientific” world view which would alter societal perceptions globally of the relationships among humans, animals and the natural world, and between humans and the cosmos. The course also examines the pivotal roles played by women, pirates and freebooters, and indigenous peoples on continents and in archipelagos around the world.

Lectures and Discussions; Readings, Films, and Slides
Lectures and readings are intended to challenge and support one another. One is not a substitute for the other. It is therefore imperative that, if you wish to do well in the course, you attend class regularly and keep up with the reading. The readings we have selected are diverse, and all selections listed on the syllabus are required for the course. They include a mix of narrative overviews and essays that seek to interpret key events and historical processes in light of more recent theoretical insights and historical approaches. No prior coursework or knowledge of the early modern period is required of students, and readings are selected for their readability, as well as for their capacity to illustrate, critically examine, or outright challenge common assumptions concerning the time period in question. Segments of several films, and in one case a complete film, make their way into the course. They illustrate the high drama, intense emotion, and profound contradictions inherent in history—both in its making and in its understanding. Slides will be used to provide visual images illustrating the materials covered in the lectures, and are intended to work in much the same way as the films. Discussion sessions focus on major debates, critical issues, and broader patterns and themes of the course. We will provide questions in advance of each discussion session to orient your reading and prepare you for discussion. We have intentionally selected materials that are at odds with each other in order to explore different interpretations and arguments. We should all be prepared to rethink our preconceptions.
Assignments and Evaluation
Required assignments for the course include:
1) The writing of a short paper (30%) of between 6 to 8 pages on a topic relating to materials covered in the course of particular interest to each student and chosen in consultation with the instructors.
2) Completion of an in-class midterm (25%) and a cumulative final exam (35%).
3) General preparedness as indicated by 3 or 4 short quizzes (10% total) spread over the semester and given during discussion sessions.
4) Although participation in the discussion sessions is not obligatory, extra credit will be given to those students who contribute to class deliberations.

Schedule of Lectures, Discussions and Readings
1/16 Introduction: The World as of 1450 and the Drama of Global Empire
1/18 Unknown Waters: Motives for Overseas Expansion
Required Reading: Carlo Cipolla, Guns, Sails and Empires, 1-45.
1/23 Means for Exploration, Conquest, and Migration
Required Reading: Cipolla, Guns, Sails, and Empires, 45-90.
1/25 Discussion: Science, Technological Innovation, and Global Transformations
Required Reading: Lynn White, Jr., Science “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.”
1/30 Perils and Strategy on the High Seas FILM: 1492 (excerpt).
2/1 The Prize: Trade and Conversion in China
Required Reading: Cipolla, Guns, Sails, and Empires, 90-124.
2/6 Discussion: Why Europe? Why not Ming China or the Ottomans?
Required Reading: Cipolla, Guns, Sails, and Empires, 124-148.
2/8 Forts, Ports, Passes, and the Conquest of an Ocean
Required Reading: David R. Ringrose, Expansion and Global Interaction, “The Indian Ocean as Crossroads.”
Clash of Worlds: Aztecs, Incas, and Spaniards

Settler Society: The Spanish in the Americas

The Nature of Empire: Plagues, Plants, and Environmental Degradation
Required Reading: Elinor Melville, A Plague of Sheep, “The Conquest Process.”

Evening Session: FILM: Yo la peor de todas (I the Worst of All) Time and Place: TBA

Discussion: Empire on Edge: Privateers, the Maya, and the Dutch
Required Reading: Bartolome de Las Casas, Devastation of the Indies, selections. Inga Clendinnen, Ambivalent Conquest, “Crisis.”

Midterm Exam
No required reading; students should prepare for the midterm exam.

West Africa and Global Empires

Slaves, Diasporas, and the Lands that Sugar Made

SPRING BREAK

Discussion: Why slaves? Why Africans? Why Racism?
Required Reading: Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, “The Origin of Negro Slavery.”
George Frederickson, Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience, “Toward a Social Interpretation of Slavery.”
Michael Adas, Machines as the Measure of Men, “First Hierarchies of Humankind.”

In Brazil: Between God and Grindstone
3/27 North America: Contested Ground  
**Required Reading:** Francis Jennings, *Invasion of America*, “Savage War.”  
**FILM:** *Black Robe* (excerpt).

3/29 Discussion: Changes in the Land: English and Indians in the New World  
**Required Reading:** William Cronin, *Changes in the Land*, (entire).

4/3 At Full Steam: Plantations and Society in the Caribbean  
**Required Reading:** Dale Tomich, *Caribbean Slavery in the Atlantic World*, “Slavery in Martinique in the French Caribbean.”

4/5 Opening? Japan: No Required Reading  
**FILM:** *Ran* (excerpt).

4/10 The Dutch Reach for Global Empire: From Brazil to Japan  
**Required Reading:** C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire*, “Fort and Factory.”  

4/12 Discussion: On the Margins? Women and Empire  

4/17 Toward a World Culture: Commodities, Consumption, and Changing Rhythms of Life  
**Required Reading:** Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, “British Commerce and the Triangular Trade.”  

4/19 The First World Wars  
**Required Reading:** Frank McLynn, 1759, “Introduction” and “Epilogue.”

4/24 Empires Strike Back: The Haitian Revolution and the End of Empires in the Americas  
**Required Reading:** Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, “Epilogue.”  

4/26 Toward High Colonialism: India as Microcosm of Colonialism  
No required reading; students should prepare for the final exam.