

HIS 568 Big History: From Big Bang to the Future

Purdue University Northwest

Asynchronous

3 credit hours

Summer I 2022

Professor Wendy St. Jean

Course Description: In this "Big History" course, we will examine trends from over two hundred thousand years of Homo Sapiens' evolution, drawing upon insights from many disciplines to piece together a cohesive narrative. This class is designed with the needs of instructors of World History and Human Geography in mind.

Course Themes: We will address national World History standards across wide expanses of time: How has the changing relationship between human beings and the physical and natural environment affected human life from early times to the present? How have the ways that people relate to one another changed over time? How have human views of the world, nature, and the cosmos changed?

Reading List: These scholars have attempted to discover broad patterns, the overall 'Shape' of history, by sifting through the world's long development process.

Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*

Tamim Ansary, *The Invention of Yesterday: A 50,000-Year History of Human Culture, Conflict, and Connection*

Alfred Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy*

Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Ages of Globalization: Geography, Technology, and Institutions*

Overview: Harari and Ansary emphasize the role of shared myths in shaping the world: The strangers we cooperate with are not only people in our community; they include the now-massive number of humans living on Earth. Examples of the myths that allow cooperation, development, and relatively peaceful living include religion, empires and government, mathematics and writing, and money. These ideas allow family groups, communities, and nations not only to exist but also to grow and flourish. In contrast, Crosby and Sachs emphasize technological innovation and economic development in accelerating societal changes.

ASSIGNMENTS/GRADE:

Ten quizzes. 60%

One zoom meeting check-in (there will be multiple opportunities): 10%

Two short assignments. 15%

A book review (5 pages) explaining which of the four monographs is most useful as a framework for organizing a portion of your world history course. 15%

TOPICS/ READING ASSIGNMENTS:

Organization is guided by the sense that human relations and interconnections become more complex over time.

1. **Symbolic Language:** Ansary, "History Begins with Language," *The Invention of Yesterday*, ch. 2. [Sometimes called the Cognitive Revolution].
2. **River Civilizations:** Ansary, "Civilization begins with Geography," *The Invention of Yesterday*, ch. 3; Sachs, "Neolithic Age," *Ages of Globalization*, ch 3; Harari, *Sapiens*, ch. 5. [Sometimes called the Agricultural Revolution].
3. **Statehood and Inequality:** Harari, "Building Pyramids," *Sapiens*, ch. 6 and 8.

4. **Long Distance Trade:** Ansary, *The Invention of Yesterday*, chs. 4 and 6; Sachs, "Equestrian Age," *Ages of Globalization*, ch 4.
5. **Major Religions:** Ansary, "Birth of Belief Systems," *The Invention of Yesterday*, ch. 5; Sachs, "Classical Age," *Ages of Globalization*, ch 5; Harari, *Sapiens*, ch. 12.
6. **Money and Record Keeping:** Ansary, *The Invention of Yesterday*, ch. 7; Harari, *Sapiens*, ch. 10.
7. **Crossing Oceans:** Sachs, "Ocean Age," *Ages of Globalization*, ch 6; Ansary, *The Invention of Yesterday*, chs. 17 and 18.
8. **Expansion and Imperialism:** Asary, *The Invention of Yesterday*, ch. 19-21; Harari, *Sapiens*, chs. 11 and 15. [Sometimes linked to the Scientific Revolution].
9. **Increased Energy Consumption:** Alfred Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy*, chs. 4 and 5; Harari, *Sapiens*, ch. 17. [Sometimes called the Industrial Revolution].
10. **Machine Age:** Asary, *The Invention of Yesterday*, chs. 23-25. [Looking at unit 9 from a different vantage point that includes military technology].
11. **Globalization in the Digital Age:** Sachs, "Digital Age," *Ages of Globalization*, ch 8; Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy*, ch. 6.

12. **The Future:** Asari, *The Invention of Yesterday*, chs., 30-31; Harari, *Sapiens*, ch. 18.; Sachs, "Digital Age," *Ages of Globalization*, ch 9; Crosby, *Children of the Sun: A History of Humanity's Unappeasable Appetite for Energy*, ch. 9.

Where do we go from here? And how will we protect this fragile world from our own destructive powers?