The Global Middle Ages: An Experiment in Collaborative Humanities, or Imagining the World, 500–1500 C.E.

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In 2002–03, fresh in the aftermath of September 11, the West seemed to find itself in an odd temporal wrinkle that materialized the specter of a neo-Middle Ages, evidence of a kind that the "medieval" was not only a historical category that named a temporal interval but also a transhistorical category that could be repeatedly reinscribed, with difference, in later time, rendering postmedieval and contemporary time non-identical to itself, as some of us medievalists had argued. The foremost leader of the Western world was expatiating blithely on crusades and crusaders in the context of international war; a model of empire as a positive form of governmentality in international affairs was re-emerging in political theory; and dispositions of race practiced at airport security checkpoints, in the news media, and public political discourse suggested that religion was once more on the rise as a mechanism by which fundamental distinctions between populations could be delivered through strategic essentialisms, in a quasi-medieval racialization of religion.[1]

Even as the West seemed shadowed by premodern time, humanities departments teaching the Middle Ages continued to be frozen along disciplinary, national literature, and area studies lines that made well nigh impossible a broad critical teaching across civilizations and systems, and their geopolitical mobilizations, that would deliver a multilayered grasp of how to scrutinize the past in our time. Nor did September 11 decenter the near-exclusive focus on Europe in literature and history departments in which the Middle Ages were taught. At best, courses like Europe and its Others continued to be offered, and a new enthusiasm for teaching the crusades was found.

In spring 2004, however, as the new director of Medieval Studies at the University of Texas, I was able to experiment with an alternative kind of teaching. Five faculty members from different departments, centers, and programs, with two visiting faculty, would collaboratively introduce to graduate students a decentered world, encompassing points of viewing in Europe and Islamic civilization, SubSaharan and Maghrebi Africa, India and South Asia, the Eurasian continent, China and East Asia. Vectors and cultures would be introduced in relationship to one another as simultaneously interdependent and discrete formations— without privileging any locations—and examined through a linked set of issues, questions, and themes. We would critically assess, not survey, the materials with which we conjured to see if we might cultivate new contexts for studying a multilocational past.[2]

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Our effort would not, thus, reproduce the trajectories of world history courses which are regaining popularity today, especially on the undergraduate level.[3] Given that the fields of the instructional faculty included literary studies, social history, art history, religious studies, women's studies, the history of science and mathematics, and law and linguistics, interdisciplinarity would be an inescapable condition of our teaching. But rather than codify a priori how interdisciplinarity would operate in the seminar, we would work through the pragmatics of the day-to-day instructional process, each teaching from the disciplinary assumptions and practices most familiar to us, while reaching across to address what differed from our practices in the examples offered by our colleagues. We would in this way aim for a kind of laboratory: an open-ended process of trial, correction, and experimentation.

Our reasoning was pragmatic. Collaborative, interdisciplinary work in the humanities is the dream of many, but a dream that is often elusive. A classroom, however, is a practical place for a beginning. We hoped, moreover, that our experiment would initiate new habits of thinking and research among graduate students—foster habits of reaching across cultures and methods, even as individual departments ensured accreditation in local disciplinary training and knowledges—and that the process would produce, in time, a distinctive group identity for our graduate students in a contracting national academic market.

To allow for individual needs, we let students enroll for as few or as many credit hours as served their purposes. The seminar met for six hours a week in two three-hour classes, totaling ninety contact hours in a fifteen-week semester; students enrolled for three to nine credit hours, according to the complexity of their research projects, and their need for supervised conference hours. Everyone attended the same seminars, completed all the readings, and wrote twenty-five to thirty-five pages of critical responses to course instruction and materials at regular intervals. Those who enrolled for the fewest hours were released from a research project, provided they met all other requirements. Their obligations to the seminar were thus not slender: the course packet was over a thousand pages; books were assigned; and one instructor made a CD of images and readings. When teaching began, we added ad hoc readings from week to week, as students voiced particular interests or suggested particular directions. The syllabus alone amounted to twenty-one pages.

One of our aims was to bring medieval studies, a field too-often dismissively represented as concerned with largely obscure interests—knowledges mainly interesting, it is thought, to academic antiquarians performing custodial functions for archives of little urgency to anyone else—more visibly into conversation with other kinds of teaching and investigation in the twenty-first century academy.[4]

In response, we wanted to foreground how knowledge is produced and mobilized from generation to generation, and what underpinned disregard of premodernity. We would also interrogate received wisdom on the opposition of "premodern" to "modern" by critically

assessing indicators—social and economic organization, demographics, technology, *mentalités*, growth and change—that operate to emplace categories of premodernity and modernity in different zones of the world. With the advantage of our global perspective and *longue durée*, we were unusually well-positioned, we reasoned, to revise the old repertoire of questions asked. Might modernity be a repeating, transhistorical phenomenon that recurred in different vectors of the world moving at different rates of speed—a phenomenon that took on a range of characteristics across macrohistorical time, including "premodern" temporalities?

Global Interconnections: Imagining the World 500–1500 was thus designed to address several considerations.[5] For senior administrators who supported us—the deans of the College of Liberal Arts and Graduate Division—the course functioned as a test-case to identify obstacles to interdepartmental teaching, and, if such teaching proved feasible and desirable, solutions that could be entrenched as precedents for future collaborative instruction. Optimism spiked when the dean of liberal arts, consulted to approve course releases, instantly offered himself as part of the instructional team. This dean, now president of another university) was later ranked in course evaluations as one of the two finest teachers of the instructional team. Plain to faculty and administrators, and perhaps crucially persuasive to the departmental chairs who had to release their faculty members to teach in the seminar, was that the model of Global Interconnections was also transferable to the everyday work *within* individual departments.

Global Disconnections? Bridging the Unbridgeable, or, the Teaching Process

Given the diversity of the instructional group, we did not worry that the seminar might be captured by a single orientation, or homogenized by particular theoretical or political coordinates. Our Islamicist, with three distinguished teaching awards, specialized in gender, sexuality, and Islamic historiography; she taught an Islamic world that included Spain and North Africa, and had a minor specialization in Greek Constantinople. One Indologist researched temple architecture, built formations, and the politics of space; the other—the liberal arts dean—was a renowned Sanskritist specializing in premodern Indian law codes, philosophy, caste, and religious and legal institutions. A trained mathematician, the Sinologist taught Chinese and Western science, technology, and mathematics, as well as philosophy and religion in China, Korea, Japan, and the history of China from the Neolithic period onward. He also taught his department's graduate courses in poststructuralist and critical theory.

The visiting Africanist was absorbed with African trade routes, world systems theory, oral and written African literatures, manuscripts, the kingdoms of Sudanic (SubSaharan) Africa, and Arabic cartography. The visiting Eurasianist, a Silk Road specialist, taught archeology, material culture, Buddhism, migration, and the Mongol empire; she, too, taught across a timeline that began from prehistory. As the sole literature teacher whose work in medieval English and European literature extended to the crusades, romance, gender and sexuality,

travel, race and ethnicity, and empires and nations in the medieval period, I was the least wide-ranging member of this instructional group.

A group so diverse needed to be allowed a degree of freedom, in order that their talents and skills might come into play to best advantage. At the same time, I needed to ensure that the group addressed a set of questions and issues in the classroom that could be incrementally complexified and developed from week to week. As coordinator, I thus outlined three broadly overlapping trajectories for the seminar, and made certain that instruction circled back to the moving body of themes animating our collective interests. One trajectory involved the mobility and routes of culture: how people, material artifacts, technology, commerce, armies, religion, money, and ideas circulated through the networks that interconnected the world, and the impact sustained at varied locations of culture.

Another trajectory centered on points of anchoring: cities and states, the imagined unities of countries, geographical regions, trading blocs, and empires. We compared social organization—the reproduction of administrative cultures and military castes, systems of gender relations, laws and institutions, technological developments, literary and cultural motifs, and ethnic diasporas—geospatially, macrotemporally, and at individual sites, to examine continuities and discontinuities. Our third trajectory turned on time—how the dynamics and relations of modernity and premodernity are identified across the world, to help us scrutinize the fictions through which premodernity is produced as modernity's antithesis.

Teaching surfaced a number of surprising emphases. The Islamicist and I, examining religious war and occupation, and the lives of minority communities, found varied, if congruent, emphases. She foregrounded cultural tolerance, adaptations, and accommodation in the contact zones of the Mediterranean; I found persecutions and the race-ing of Jews in Western Europe, and the production of the "Saracen" in Europe's international contest with Islam in martial and economic arenas, during the long formation of Latin Christian European identity. The Africanist and Eurasianist used the rubric of routes to demonstrate the vast extent of trading linkages and economic-cultural networks under early globalisms. As the Africanist traced gold caravan routes and webs of ramifying story themes, a eureka moment occurred when we found ourselves able to track a name in romances from Africa and Arabia all the way to England. The Eurasianist, in detailing technology, money, religions, languages, and populations along the overland and maritime silk routes from points of embarkation to termini in emporia, demonstrated how brocade featured as a form of social power from China through the Islamic East to the kingdoms and courts of Western Europe.

The invocation of modernity and moderns in the opening verses of the Rg Veda, a millennia-old codification of law, religion, and social life in India, instantiated a lively exchange over the meaning of modernity in Asian locations—a discussion that thickened when the Sinologist had us consider the flourishing iron and steel industries of eleventh-century Sung China in the context of Western claims of scientific modernity and the Industrial Revolution. Students persistently tracked themes from week to week. They were riveted by

how similar cultural strategies were developed over vast spaces: the curious resemblance between the Eastern Christian utopia of Prester John, imagined by Europeans in the twelfth century eager to project Christianity as universal, and a Europe imagined as equally utopian by Chinese in China centuries later also eager to advance the project of Christian universality.

The Rg Veda materialized a sublime instant that magically articulated the seminar's multiple forms of convergence. Galvanized by the Indologist dean's teaching, students found themselves gathered around a centuries-old manuscript of the Rg Veda belonging to him, as he discussed manuscript production, paleography, recitation, and communal transmission—all familiar subjects in medieval studies instruction, yet queerly defamiliarized here by centering on a South Asian, not a European, book. On impulse, a student asked him to read from this Sanskrit text, to perform, as it were, the procedures of transmission the dean had detailed. As the ancient syllables rolled off his tongue, accompanied by head movements and facial gestures we did not associate with this senior university administrator, the class held its collective breath, mesmerized, till the recitation wound to an end. We, a critical community that relentlessly questioned the past, its locations, uses, and presence in our time, found ourselves pulled along, spellbound, in a dilated instant in which that past suddenly materialized, in incomprehensibly magicalized form, to disturb yet transport our classroom community.

Convivencia? or a Culture of Coexistence, Inquiry, and Diversity: The Students

One might imagine that a seminar like ours would, by its nature, attract a certain type of student—but it was impossible to tell, from the composition of the class, what that type might be. The sixteen students who sat around the seminar table were from different departments, schools, and colleges; possessing some seventeen languages collectively, they also had no language in common except English (French, Arabic, Spanish, German, and Latin were the next commonly shared languages, with Greek, Catalan, Mandarin, and Malay bringing up the rear). Not only was a spectrum of ancient, medieval, and modern European, Semitic, and Asian languages represented, but the students themselves—like their faculty instructors, but more dramatically—crossed all racial, national, and ethnic boundaries. They were Caucasian, Asian, Asian American, Arab, Mexican American, African American, Bolivian, and Spanish. Two were not even graduate students, but high-achieving Plan II Honors undergraduates who had been given special permission to enroll. One individual had been a Special Forces Group Three team leader for twelve years; currently on sponsored leave from the military, he was slated for future assignment to U.S. embassies in the Middle East. Another student was from Damascus, and wore *hijab*.

The collective personality of the class was extraordinary. Only about a third of the students were medievalists, and with our decentered spread, no one—neither instructor nor student—might claim or expect universal expertise. Students quickly learned, then, the value of not fearing to embarrass themselves by asking what might seem obvious to others. A

seminar culture thus coalesced in which no questions or ideas were ever ruled out-of-bounds, and a fearless and lively intellectual culture was produced after the first weeks, helped along by the two preternaturally intelligent undergraduates, who never hesitated to speak their minds. The first weeks, of course, were the most difficult, when all were strangers to one another, and all was strange. History students were confounded when obliged to think and analyze like literature students. Literature students, habituated to critique, found themselves tacitly guided by our Islamicist to rein back critique of Islamic documents we read, in a mode of deferential reticence frustrating to them, and they vehemently posed pointed questions about equal-opportunity analysis and judgment of texts, cultures, historical events—all of which, in fairness, had to be addressed.

I thus began to schedule extra discussions outside seminar time to brainstorm vexed questions that could not be exhausted in class: questions about disciplinary methods and assumptions, intellectual traditions and practices, and how to read formations of knowledge-power in medieval contexts and in the twenty-first century classroom. The seminar community found itself convening outside the seminar for as many hours as, if not more than, it met in class. It was necessary to coalesce an atmosphere of mutual trust, and an ability to engage critically and with respect for difference, as quickly as possible, in our multifarious classroom community—a contact zone miming the intercultural zones we studied, and in the crucible, moreover, of post-9/11 tensions.

The students themselves rapidly took over. They began to meet informally in groups over tea and sushi (and stronger beverages) to brainstorm readings, hash out thorny issues, or simply get to know one another better. The sheer amount of time we spent together, as a collectivity sharing an intense absorption with the work at hand—in tandem with the breaking of bread, as people brought and shared food, including homemade delicacies—began to work a kind of magic. Students scanned texts for one another, shared links and resources. Lively exchanges and humor flew daily across the class e-mail list. There had been an early political firefight in the first weeks between the Special Forces student, and two left-leaning students, over the presence of military intelligence on campus. It ended amicably and remarkably quickly.

Curiously, students never took the same seat from class to class, but circulated unpredictably around the seminar table. A more stable routine was the way our Muslim students would disappear to perform afternoon prayers during seminar breaks: once this ritual was discovered, everyone made sure to allow for privacy, and tactfully cut a wide swathe around a section of the lounge outside the seminar room, where silent prayer could be performed undisturbed. The two undergraduates, holding their own among older and more intellectually sophisticated peers, were enfolded in protective affection by their graduate classmates. There were remarkably few absences from class, and no one grumbled about the large quantity of reading matter, or, after the first weeks, about having to think outside one's disciplinary box.

As it turned out, among the students who worked with the most dedicated passion, pursuing tough questions with admirable success, were those who could take the seminar only for three credit hours—despite being in class six hours a week and accomplishing all the reading and writing. Typically, they were English students who were modernists, not medievalists, and possessed no familiarity with Islam, and scant acquaintance with Asian, African, or other non-Western cultural knowledges. Having conjured up Global Interconnections to benefit medievalists, I came to see how modernists might be the keenest beneficiaries. The future of the past—a past that, to these students was by no means obscure, or important only to specialists—began to seem bright indeed.

Futures of the Past: Collaborative Teaching and Research, a Digital Global Middle Ages

In the last weeks of the semester, when we were studying China and the Far East, students had so hit their stride that, when asked by the Sinologist to produce weekly analytical summaries of Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, Foucault, and philosophers of science in their response papers, even as they were concurrently reading original documents from China, Korea, and Japan, they scarcely faltered. English and comparative literature students found these assignments on theory most to their taste; Middle Eastern studies, history, and communications students found them least to theirs. Yet all but one acquitted themselves creditably, and a few performed magnificently.

I had wondered whether our attempts to teach as we did would carry students through the very long pedagogical journey with sufficient energy and momentum, but I need not have worried. Encountering the texts of ancient and medieval China—texts new to everyone except one person from Southeast Asia—the students puzzled over how to make sense of the Analects in their first class, but by their third class were answering questions of Chinese philosophy as if they were old hands at this. It would seem that the seminar's methods worked: habits of mind could be inculcated that could be reliably called upon in a variety of contexts.

 Unusual graduate projects grew out of the seminar, and two students (one in his graduate freshman year) were invited to present papers at a conference in May, which they did to critical acclaim, with publications, afterward, to follow. Two others (one also in her freshman year) were invited to present at a conference in fall 2004; also meeting with enthusiastic reception, they, too, received invitations to publish. In summer 2004, a Global Interconnections student traveled—by camel and boat—to the fourteenth-century Malian capital of Timbuktu in West Africa, to examine the vast manuscript trove there, African manuscripts whose existence he had learned of for the first time in our seminar, an experience he detailed later for a newspaper.[6] Not all the projects from the seminar were medieval in focus. One of the most exacting studies—a painstaking, multilingual comparative analysis of the differential valencies of "crusade" and "jihad" as these concepts were invoked in newspapers in Arabic, Turkish, European, and Anglo-American countries—had an entirely

contemporary focus, and was accomplished by a student from the College of Communications with a background in journalism. The quality, depth, and range of the projects undertaken was impressive, suggesting that collaborative interdisciplinary pedagogy had measurable value.

For our university—where some faculty members had already begun, surreptitiously, to teach in pairs, dodging the institutional gaze—our course identified institutional hindrances in the way of larger-scale collaborative pedagogy, and improvised some solutions. That semester, I also served on a dean's advisory committee to examine team-teaching and advise on processes, if warranted, to render such teaching easier down the line.[7] Global Interconnections thus served as a beachhead and benchmark: after initial difficulties were surmounted, new challenges appeared with punctual regularity, and their resolution furnished some useful templates. Even grading triggered problems ranging from consistency in practices and criteria across different instructors to how and when grades had to be reported for a course where students were enrolled under different rubrics, hours, and numbers. The question of how each member of a multi-instructor team and the course as a whole was to be evaluated also needed thought, since course evaluations are not designed to assess collaborative teaching.

Though Global Interconnections was merely a rough-and-ready beginning, the euphoria felt by all bore out the intuition that collaborative teaching is a worthwhile endeavor, one whose time had resoundingly arrived. All involved—including faculty members who had been terrified, if game, at the prospect of such a course as ours—found the experiment exhilarating, and unlike any classroom experience we had known. People were sorry to have the experiment end, and in the year afterward, students and colleagues complained that ordinary classes, in the wake of Global Interconnections, felt drab and one-dimensional.

For the teachers, future collaborative courses would be one answer. In spring 2005, two of us reconvened with new partners to teach a seminar on medieval geography, maps, and travel. Other seminars were planned: Global Stories, Global Cities, a course that would encompass the *Arabian Nights, Decameron, Canterbury Tales, Mahabharata*, and other narratives, and a seminar on pre- and early modern science in the West and East. I also wanted a course that would revisit the long history of race and ethnoracial theories, beginning in antiquity, traversing the medieval and early modern periods, and ending in the twenty-first century. War—so much with us today—is another subject that can be exceptionally well taught by a team, whether in a single department, or in interdisciplinary partnership with the social sciences and law. Beyond the desire to teach communally, moreover, lies research: ways of making our disparate disciplines, objects, and artifacts converse intelligibly, to unravel conundra and answer questions in collaboratively-framed research projects. Finally, because I was repeatedly asked if Global Interconnections could be reconstituted beyond the University of Texas, I should like to see a cybernetic project where the seminar can reach the rest of the planet.

Imagine, if you will, an Internet portal, dubbed, say, "*Mappamundi*," where an exquisite fourteenth-century world map unfolds before your eyes. Imagine tracing Ibn Battuta's or Marco Polo's journeys through layers of the past—the bridges, canals, and markets of fourteenth-century Hangchow in China; the gilded pediments of Constantinople; fabled, storied Damascus; temple dance and carvings in India; shadow puppets and bronze drum tympany in island archipelagos—with the ability to click, in an instant, to the twenty-first century seminar room, to see how that past is transacted, in original documents and scholarly discussion today. Moving across time and webs of links, you could access the Jewish diaspora, silk and spice routes, the Mongol postal system, European manuscripts and paintings; manipulate simulations of astrolabes, automata, and clocks; follow calculations in Chinese linear algebra; read letters by lovers, popes, and far-flung missionaries; consider artifacts unearthed from caravan routes in Africa; peel through the multiple histories of the Dome of the Rock or the Hagia Sophia; calibrate the politics of space in Kublai Khan's summer palace; meander through a virtual medieval city; or hear readings of the *Canterbury Tales, Decameron*, and the epic of the Cid. You might contemplate a reconstructed soundscape of a global city, study the cosmological world-view of Islamic maps, enter a Silk Road cave to examine its paintings.

A collaborative project of this kind might seem utopian in the way that Global Interconnections once appeared to us: a glimmer on the horizon of pedagogical desire. A team with a very large slate of abilities would be needed to actualize a project of these dimensions. But the result would be quite a journey to the future of the past indeed.[8]

CODA

In 2007, Professor Susan Noakes of the University of Minnesota and I began three new collaboratives.

The *Global Middle Ages Project* (GMAP) is our name for a teaching and research initiative to see the world whole across a flexible timeline of a thousand years or more. One plan of action is to seek resources and a campus for a residency year in which a group of faculty from different disciplines and geographic concentrations can gather to brainstorm, in sustained fashion, how to teach and research an interlinked world. Mid-year, the group would teach an experimental graduate laboratory to students from all disciplines, gathered from all over, to test methods and materials, which would continue afterward to be improved. At year's end, the group could teach a summer institute to faculty colleagues, who could then return to their campuses and adapt the teaching locally. Usable texts could be generated as needed, and public and academic community events mounted during the year: exhibits of comparative cartography or chivalry, workshops and symposia, interreligious forums, performances of premodern world music, film festivals, museum exhibitions of material culture such as fabrics and coins, and so forth. All would be recorded as electronic archives for *Mappamundi*, the cybernetic initiatives.

GMAP was selected as a SEASR (Software Environment for the Advancement of Scholarly Research) research project in 2008. Supported by a million-dollar Mellon grant, SEASR creates computer applications that query databases of scholarship compiled across disparate academic disciplines and in varied formats, to support academic research through advanced forms of text-mining.

Mappamundi is a digital and Web entity that, in its fully mature form, would take an avatar— a twenty-first century Ibn Battutta or Marco Polo—for a walk around the world. Numerous Web sites and digital projects currently offer data in scattered contexts: e.g., the Timbuktu manuscripts project; the international Dunhuang project that is creating a walk-through virtual environment of paintings, carvings, sculpture, and manuscripts at a magnificent cave complex on the old Silk Road; digitizations-in-progress of cities like Byzantium, Cairo, and Rome and sites like the Hagia Sophia; as well as scores of projects placing European manuscripts, music, and art online. *Mappamundi* aims to coordinate available materials to see how they might narrate civilizational encounters in a global web across time.

Mappamundi is also poised to begin two new projects: "'Discoveries' of America," led by Lynn Ramey, and the "Global Middle Ages Social Media Project," led by Ana Boa-Ventura. The *America* project showcases the navigational techniques, maps, scientific instruments, and state of knowledge that formed the background to Columbus's journey in 1492.[9] Focusing on geographic imagination in premodern Islamic civilization, China, and Europe, the project asks how maps circulated in cultural exchange, whether linear timelines might be rearranged, and how people imagined or traveled to America pre-Columbus, by creating an interactive platform for shared knowledge-creation. The *Social Media* project proposes to farm the rich plethora of public digital material on medieval subjects—material often mined by undergraduates—available in blogs, wikis, image- and video-sharing sites such as FlickR and YouTube, to see how public media can be aggregated, indexed, and analyzed for building *Mappamundi* and supporting the study of a global Middle Ages.

Mappamundi's institutional partners include supercomputing centers, especially the Institute for Computing in Humanities, Arts, and Social Science at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (iCHASS/NCSA), and the Texas Advanced Computing Center (TACC), and will expand to include supercomputing centers in Cyprus, South Africa, and Beijing. In 2008–09, *Mappamundi* shares a new $250,000 NEH Institutes for Advanced Topics in the Digital Humanities grant, the outcome of a collaborative effort led by Kevin Franklin of iCHASS, awarded to fund needs analysis, mini-residencies, and first-step collaborations with supercomputing centers.

The Scholarly Community for the Globalization of the Middle Ages (SCGMA) is the growing community of scholars and technologists whose members are the driving force behind all our initiatives. Instantiated at the first Global Middle Ages planning workshop in 2007, SCGMA is in the process of establishing an International Advisory Board. Distinguished academics who have consented to advise us include Hayden White and Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak, and SCGMA's members plan panels and discussions at academic conferences in the next several years. Our projects, collaborators, and institutional partners can be sampled in greater detail at <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/gma/portal/>.

We hope these many-pronged initiatives, pointing the way with ideas, energy, and new media, will be a step forward in rethinking how the past can be understood in the twenty-first century, as part of the larger effort to imagine the future of all our learning institutions.

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NOTES

[1] See Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003, 2004) and "Race Returns West to Medieval Mindset," *Times Higher Education Supplement* 20 Dec. 2002, <http://www.tes.co.uk>. These and arguments on modernity/premodernity are elaborated in "The Race Template," *Cloning Cultures,* ed. Philomena Essed (Durham: Duke UP, forthcoming), and a monograph being completed, "The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages." This *ELN* article is abridged and updated from a 2007 *ADFL Bulletin* article, "An Experiment in Collaborative Humanities: Imagining the World, 500–1500 CE," *ADFL Bulletin* 38.3 and 39.1 (2007): 20–28.

[2] Our experiment might be seen as a modest attempt at what Spivak recommends for comparative literary studies in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia UP, 2003). We were also obviously influenced by scholarship such as Janet Abu-Lughod's *Before European Hegemony: The World System, A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989); K. N. Chaudhuri's *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990); Donald F. Lach's *Asia in the Making of Europe,* Vol. 1, book 1 of *The Century of Discovery* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1965); E. W. Bovill's *The Golden Trade of the Moors* (London: Oxford UP, 1968); *inter alia.*

[3] World history courses are often large lecture surveys taught by individuals or faculty pairs, commonly offering premodernity as prologue to the modern world. For example, the 2002 textbook by the Princeton history department, *Worlds Together*, seems designed to enable one person to survey undergraduate world history in lecture form. See Robert Tignor, et al. *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the Modern World from the Mongol Empire to the Present* (New York: Norton, 2002).

[4] A 2003 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reports *The Guardian* quoting Charles Clarke, Great Britain's Secretary of Education, announcing at University College, Worcester, "I don't mind there being some medievalists around for ornamental purposes, but there is no reason for the state to pay for them." Responding, a Cambridge University medievalist indignantly defended medievalists as "working on clarity and the pursuit of truth." Her complaint, that Clarke was "someone who doesn't understand what we do" is precisely my point. Clarke's "criticism of the study of medievalism (*sic*) in all its forms" is neither atypical nor rare.

[5] Global Interconnections was the first course under the rubric "The Global Middle Ages." I also initiated a second team-taught series, "Medieval Cultural Studies," that offered transdisciplinary graduate instruction focused through themes, with the first course, Love in Western Europe: Literature, Music, Art, taught concurrently with Global in 2004.

[6] More than a million Timbuktu manuscripts exist, dating from the medieval period onward—in languages ranging from Arabic and Syriac to vanished African dialects for which we have no Rosetta Stone—with only a portion catalogued, digitized, or housed in libraries, while the rest molder in people's homes. The manuscripts' discovery ranks in magnitude with the discovery at Nag Hammadi and the

Genizah documents of Cairo. Our students' excitement, in learning of the manuscripts' existence, stems partly from the fact that the manuscripts give the lie to an old canard that Africa had no written languages before the arrival of European colonial powers, and the recognition that these manuscripts would transform received understanding of Africa's history and the continent's relations with the world. See <http://www.sum.uio.no/research/mali/timbuktu/>.

[7] The liberal arts dean, once concerned that team-teaching would attract faculty too lazy to offer a whole course, had his perspective radically altered by his experience in Global Interconnections. He taught again, despite his punishing administrative and travel schedule, in our 2005 collaborative seminar on medieval geography and travel.

[8] A course description of Global Interconnections, with sample texts and faculty details, can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/medievalstudies/global.php>.

[9] See Sezgin, Fuat, "The Pre-Columbian Discovery of the American Continent by Muslim Seafarers," *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttum* XIII (2006): 2–39.