Prelim Exam in Global History
Sept. 2015

Instructions: Answer one question from each pair. Over the course of the exam, you should discuss a broad range of scholarship, so try to pick questions that will produce less overlap in your answers.

Pair 1:
A. Global histories often track the transnational itineraries of mobile people – indentured laborers, merchants, etc. – or focus on diasporic communities. In contrast, agricultural histories have tended to focus on relatively immobile peasant men and women who are “fixed” on the land they till. Is it possible to write global histories of immobile peasant men and women? How would you write a global history of an agrarian locality?

B. How have histories of the slave trade and labor migration affected understandings of governance, including international and interimperial collaborations and conflicts?

Pair 2
A. The geographical distinction between the “west” and the “rest” has been a standard trope in global history. What are the problems and limitations to this binary view of global history? How would you disrupt this seemingly enduring binary between Europe and non-Europe?

B. What kinds of characteristics make a history narrative “global” rather than regional, continental, oceanic, imperial, or pertaining to any one of a number of other possible geographic units? Must a certain number or range of places or scale be reached for a history to count as global? Are some global histories more global than others? In answering this question, you should be sure to draw on specific works of scholarship that reflect critically on geography and on global history as a changing field.

Pair 3:
A. How have histories of empires been complicated by (i) postcolonial theory and subaltern studies and (ii) environmental history? Compare and contrast the differing challenges posed by these two approaches to narratives of the rise and fall of empires.

B. How has scholarship focusing on commodity chains affected our understandings of the history (including the periodization) of global capitalism?