

1. Empire, colonialism, globalization

The nation-state comprises what has become a near universal form of imagined community and political organization in the modern world. Taking nationality and state building as contested historical and cultural processes, the courses in this thematic area focus on the emergence of modern states and their characteristic forms of political and public culture.

Some courses focus more specifically on the politics of contention and social movements within the framework of nation making, while other courses examine alternatives to the modern nation-state through the lenses of pre-modern, post-modern, and/or non-modern communities and their political expressions.

Course topics might include: war and society; democratic or social revolutions; public and counter-public spheres and the rise of civil society; popular and/or ethnic politics; race and cultural nationalism; and variations on monarchy, urban structures, and post-colonial projects of nation-building and economic development.

2. Environment, health, science, technology

Courses in this thematic area seek to apply the methodologies developed in a variety of fields to the question of the impact of nature, human as well as non-human, on history. Environmental historians have joined other historians of a more materialist or geographic bent in exploring the ways in which cultural values, technologies, and systems of labor and production have shaped—and been reshaped by—both urban and rural environments.

Historians of health and medicine have meanwhile explored the human body in historical interaction with a nature within as well as beyond. Still other historians, interested in the powerful and often controversial roles science and technology play in the modern world, have studied the origins and means by which our knowledge and manipulation of nature has helped reconfigure modern politics, society, and culture.

Stony Brook faculty members and graduate students have plied their research skills along all these fronts. Topics of courses and investigations might include history of the contrasts and inter-relations between city and country; technoscience in history; environment and health in global perspective; the history of technocracy; industry, place and politics; history of the body; and natural history and national culture.

3. Gender, race, sexuality

In recent years, the role of race, gender, and sexuality in the construction and marking of identity has become increasingly central to historical scholarship of every period and region. Courses in this thematic area examine the ways in which race (and/or ethnicity), gender, and sexuality have shaped social and political hierarchies and communal relations within and across specific societies and times.

At Stony Brook, faculty in American, European, Latin American, and Asian history conduct research and teach courses with a focus on race, gender, and sexuality, allowing many opportunities for comparison across cultures and times. Many graduate students who take coursework in this theme area also complete the Women's and Gender Studies Certificate program while pursuing their doctorates.

Topics might include: technologies of reproduction, discourses of sexuality, the intersection of class, race and gender in social movements, inter-ethnic relations and representations, the sexual division of labor, and the family.

4. Nation-state, civil society, popular politics

Although it has been imagined and experienced from very different vantage points, the modern world-system has only recently become a coherent and integrated object of historical analysis.

Focusing on transnational historical processes, courses in this thematic area help students learn to analyze western imperial expansion, cultural encounter, and the politics of representation; the articulation of metropolitan and colonial social formations; the transnational flow of peoples, ideas, and goods and the unequal power relations they embodied; and the cultural contradictions of empire, colonialism, and modernity.

Possible course topics might include: comparative slavery in the Atlantic world; migration, hybridity, and diasporic identities; British, French, or Iberian imperial conquest, slavery, and subaltern struggles; global capitalism and commodity histories; North-South relations; and the impact of technology and the mass media on globalization.