

Teaching History Backwards

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Once again I'm staring down the barrel of a World History II course this fall. Swallowing the entire elephantine half millennia of history (to mix my metaphors) is always a challenge.

I'm looking for a new way of approaching it, and the thought occurred to me that I might try to teach it backwards. Perhaps someone else has tried this?

I offer this example to show what I mean: In the past seven decades China again has become a major player on the international scene by challenging US leadership, moving closer to Russia, worrying its neighbors with aggressive local policies, and even establishing a new Silk Road.

Given that state of affairs, I propose to look at Asia in world history by first surveying China's current status and then stepping backward in time to, say, the mid-20th century and the rise of the Communists, then back again to the decline of Imperial China during the 19th century, and finish, for example, by looking back to the powerful China of Marco Polo.

I would cover that in a week or two of lecture time and give the students a nice hook up front to current events that (I hope) would grab their attention.

My question to my colleagues is to ask for suggestions of other topics that lend themselves to this sort of treatment? NATO? Human trafficking? Precision in warfare? Rule of law? Artificial intelligence?

I welcome any and all suggestions.

Thanks.

BTW, I am aware that this approach reinforces the appearance of historical inevitability, but I plan to address that and a few other shortcomings of the approach early on.