

Meeting 17 • 05 March 2013 • Tuesday  
Week 9: Societies & outlooks

Version:  
3/5/13

pictures of the week



Humboldt showing Indians how to use a sextant



Cargueros (native porters)

thought-bite of the week:

"'I knew,' said the young Indian girl coolly, 'that the crocodile would let go when I stuck my fingers in its eyes.'"

(Humboldt, "Personal Narrative", from *Jaguars and Electric Eels*, ed. & trans. Wilson, p. 67)

mini-text of the week (start):

"'...but the *zambo* would expect to be treated as an equal, and that I cannot do with a man of his colour.'"

Humboldt, "Personal Narrative", from *Jaguars and Electric Eels*, ed. & trans. Wilson, pp. 47 ([read more](#))

Topics for today

(10') Is everybody HAPPY? Initial check for later discussion

Thought-bite of the week: The Indian girl - what other encounters with indigenous people, as individuals, are recorded in *Jaguars and Electric Eels* or in the Helferich biography? How does AvH portray the "non-indigenous" (but sometimes long-resident) people(s)?

Followup on previous meeting's music (Gottschalk): link to NPR broadcast (5 March 2012, ca 7:45 am) about "zumba" exercise vs. "true" salsa, and "true" yoga vs. "phony" yoga: What does it mean when cultures borrow from each other? For now just the question - we'll get back to it during the rest of the course. (broadcast sound file and transcript)

(15') Comparative validity of sources of evidence about "VERY long ago": a) pre-1700 "science" (word didn't exist then in that sense); b) oral history and tradition, including folk knowledge; c) classical ("pagan") history & "science"; d) Bible. What issues of truth, validity, purpose are raised here? How fast does "signal loss" occur (ideas become obsolete; knowledge is distorted in transmission)?

Some misconceptions about earlier worldviews and conflicts (science vs. technology; science vs. religion/myth): flat/round Earth (Columbus and before); rotating Earth; geocentric universe with "Man as center of universe"; age of the Earth / world, including the notorious 4004 BC dating (the "Ussher Chronology").

Small groups: Where do you get your citizen information, opinions, conclusions, solutions, and how do you check it out? If you are into "think globally, act locally", where do you get your local info? What "signs" are there that your sources are

reliable?

(20') Initial discussion that will attempt to bring it all together: (re)interpreting the past and sustainable environmentalism. Small groups: define and distinguish happy/happiness, prosperity, wealth(y), rich(ness?), standard of living, equity. *fortunate!*

A snapshot of happiness and standard of living in the past: the "turnspit" (the thing, the animal, the people), from *Consider the Fork: A History of How We Cook and Eat*, by Bee Wilson (2012, pp. 87-7).

Questionnaire: Your experience compared to the common experiences of the past. If you are comfortable with the idea you might do the questionnaire as a partner-interview. If time afterward: We generate a list of bad experiences that people in the Past did not have.

First: Let's separate happiness from the other concepts so we don't get stuck in arguments about what it means to say "Your generation has it better now." The "Easterlin Paradox" (Wikipedia): above a certain level, self-reported *personal* happiness does not correlate closely with income — above a certain level; below that level, in the realm of destitution, increase in income is paralleled by increase in happiness. See "Where money seems to talk," *The Economist*, July 12, 2007. (The Legatum Prosperity Index [Wikipedia] attempts to rank the happiness of countries as a whole, based on a range of factors: wealth, economic growth, personal well-being, and quality of life.)

Thesis: In the West (Europe, North America, related societies) material well-being (whatever the feeling of happiness) has increased greatly, starting around 1800 or, at the latest, 1850. In the lower middle class, this well-being reached a point where general lifestyle / standard of living shows a great difference between people born around 1900 and later, and people born any time earlier. The difference in well-being between people born around 2000 and people born around 1950 is not nearly as great; the difference between people born around 1950 and those born around 1900 is considerable, but not as great as the very big difference in material well-being between 1900-present and 1900 and before.

(15') Now a more systematic view: The world Now and in 1600 (-1900+): your probable individual fate, and what you, transported back to then, would find very different (very absent, very present); standards of living for the (decile) range of population; What caused the change, and what did the change cause? How does that relate to social responsibility (activism?) and sustainable environmentalism? See also handout from previous meeting: pictures from Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip*; article from *The Economist*, about malnutrition in the present.

(5') Still more advice about "educated citizen" reading; example (with free samples: *New York Review of Books*)

(5') Announcements, Checkups & Previews: 1) still more advice about "educated citizen" reading, with yet another example (NYRB); 2) one focus of "interpreting the past" to the present during the rest of the course: land and water allocation and use in the American West, including Oregon, and how Humboldt play an important role in that.

One theme of next several weeks: Humboldt's influence on the development of systems of land and water measurement and management in the US.

been few worse than that of the turnspit or turnbroach, the person (usually a boy) charged with rotating the roasting spits. "In olden times," wrote the great biographer John Aubrey, "the poor boys did turn the spits, and licked the dripping pans."

By the reign of Henry VIII, the king's household had whole battalions of turnspits, charring their faces and tiring their arms to satisfy the royal appetite for roast capons and ducks, venison and beef, crammed in cubbyholes to the side of the fireplace. The boys must have been near-roasted themselves as they labored to roast the meats. Until the year 1530, the kitchen staff at Hampton Court worked either naked or in scanty, grimy garments. Henry VIII addressed the situation, not by relieving the turnspits of their duties, but by providing the master cooks with a clothing allowance, with which to keep the junior staff decently clothed, and therefore even hotter. Turnspits were employed in lesser households, too. In 1666, the lawyers of the Middle Temple in London were making use of one "turnbroach" alongside two scullions, a head cook, and an under cook. To be a turnspit was deemed suitable work for a child well into the eighteenth century. John Macdonald (b. 1741), a Scottish highlander, was a famous footman who wrote memoirs of his experiences in service. An orphan, Macdonald had been sacked from a previous job rocking a baby's cradle and next found work in a gentleman's house turning the spit. He was aged just five.

But by that time, turnspit boys like Macdonald were something of a throwback. Over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Britain, their work had largely been taken over by animals: In a 1576 book on English dogs, a "turnspit" was defined as "a certain dog in kitchen service." The dogs were bred specially to have short legs and long bodies. Stuck in a wheel around 2.5 feet in diameter, suspended high up against a wall near the fireplace, they were forced to trundle around and around. The treadmill was connected to the spit via a pulley.

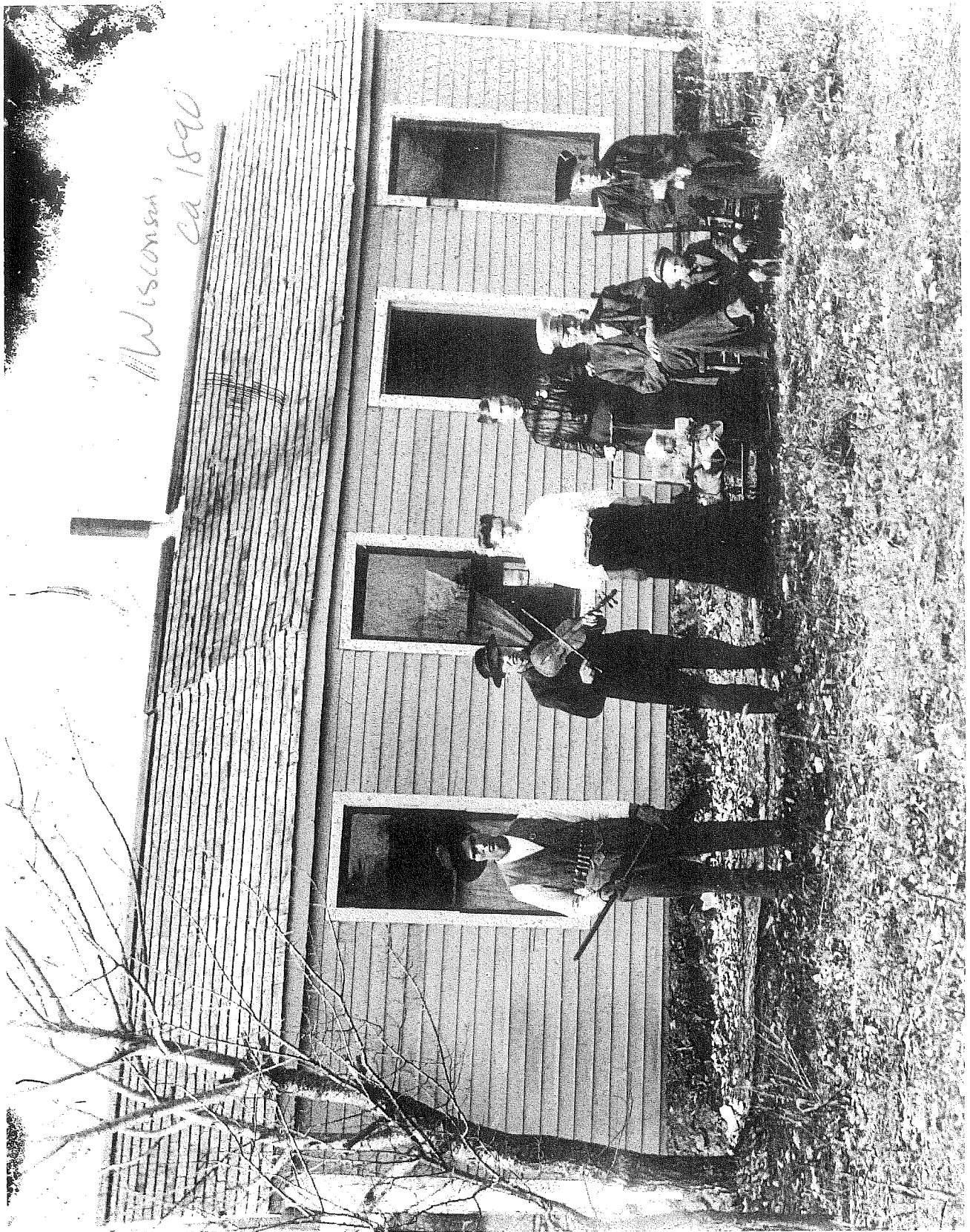
Some cooks preferred to use geese instead of dogs. In the 1690s, it was written that geese were better at turning spits than dogs be-

cause they kept going for longer at the treadmill, sometimes as long as twelve hours. There were signs that dogs were too intelligent for the job. Thomas Somerville, who witnessed the use of dog wheels during a childhood in eighteenth-century Scotland, recalled that the dogs "used to hide themselves or run away when they observed indications that there was to be a roast for dinner."

The turnspit breed is no longer with us. It would be nice to think that they died out because of a sudden fit of conscience on the part of their owners. But history doesn't usually work like this. Dog wheels were still being used in American restaurant kitchens well into the nineteenth century. Henry Bergh, an early animal rights lobbyist, campaigned against using dog wheels to roast meats (along with other abuses of animals, such as bear baiting). The fuss Bergh made about turnspit dogs did finally attach some shame to the practice, but it also had unintended consequences. When Bergh paid surprise visits to kitchens to check for the presence of dog wheels, he several times found that the dogs had been replaced at the fire by young black children.

In the end, it was not kindness that ended the era of the turnspit dog but mechanization. From the sixteenth century onward, inventors devised numerous mechanical jacks to rotate the spit without the need for anyone—boy, dog, or goose—to do the work. By 1748, Pehr Kalm, a Swedish visitor to England, was praising the windup iron "meat jack" as "a very useful invention, which lightens the labour amongst a people who eat so much meat." Based on his travels, Kalm claimed that "simply made" weight-driven jacks were to be found "in every house in England." This was an exaggeration. However, judging from probate inventories—lists of possessions at the time of death—around one-half of all households, not only affluent ones, did possess a windup jack, a strikingly high percentage.

Still, no wonder. Archaic as they might seem to us, these were highly desirable pieces of kitchen equipment. Mechanical jacks really were brilliant devices, culinary robots that took much of the labor out of spit-roasting. The basic mechanism was this. There was a



Wisconsin,  
ca 1890

Lesly, Wisconsin Death Trip

# Where money seems to talk

*The Economist*

The rich are different from you and me—and they say they are happier

Jul 12th 2007 | From the print edition

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EVERY summer, the world has its temperature taken twice—once by climate scientists, literally; a second time by opinion pollsters, metaphorically. This year two new surveys have thrown up a lot of fresh data on how the world really feels. And they have, so the pollsters say, cast some unexpected light on the link between wealth and happiness.

Ever since social scientists at the University of Pennsylvania found that mansion-dwelling American millionaires are barely happier than Masai warriors in huts, some economists have been downplaying the link between cash and contentment. In a 2005 book, Richard Layard, a British scholar, said family circumstances, employment and health all mattered more to a sense of well-being than income. Rich countries might be happier than poor ones, but beyond a threshold, the connection weakens, and more cash would not buy more happiness—so the theory goes.

The new polls cast some doubt on that school of thought. They add weight to the contention that growth and income play a big part in boosting people's satisfaction with life and their attitude to the future.

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## TURN ME ON



### Recent Activity

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The slow road back  
414 people recommended this.



Popular only at home  
160 people recommended this.



Golden Dawn's "national awakening" sessions  
172 people recommended this.



## Scoring Guide for Assignment 4: "Describe a Humboldt-Related Species"

6 Exemplary (A+): The piece is a finished product that can go before its intended audience unchanged. It catches the eye immediately, the more so the younger the learner, but is not quirky (odd use of color, etc.); for older learners the presentation is dignified but not plain. The content, especially the science content, challenges the learner (but does not cognitively overwhelm younger learners); cuteness alone is not sufficient. Science includes classification, habitat, characteristic features, and something beyond that. Humboldt is there as an explorer and scientist, with an enticing detail. The piece is written for its audience, not its author, and the audience is not idealized in knowledge and interest. There is a voice, and that voice addresses the reader as a person. The information is organized, not just thrown at the audience. Typography and format show such skill that the author might become responsible for that in a group project of a similar nature. Graphics are unusually attractive and well placed in relation to text. Text is modulated with variation in font, text size, even color (for a purpose). THERE ARE NO SPELLING ERRORS, and no other text errors that would incite a K-12 teacher to reject the text immediately. Vocabulary level suits the audience but also challenges it a little. Sources and summary are there. Editor's function would be to spend a few minutes sharpening phrasing and adjusting punctuation.

5 Outstanding (A-): almost 6, not just halfway between 4 and 6. Editor would need to spend 15 minutes marking up text, format, and content, and then 5 minutes telling the author what must be changed and ALSO added. Author would need to spend an hour adding and adjusting content and half an hour improving the visual and typographical presentation.

4 Sufficient (B-): The piece is definitely deficient in presentation, but what it needs even more is improvement of its content, whether in quantity, quality, or both, before the author attempts to improve the presentation of that content. Likely flaws (but can't all be serious): the scientific content is thin, even for the specific audience; substitutes cuteness for information; link to Humboldt is vague (beyond the use of the word); lack of authorial voice (other than scientific-informational); organization defaults to that of the scientific sources and there is no evidence that the information is being sequenced to entice the reader into the science and Humboldt background (unless the reader is, for example, an AP student, but even then the organization should not be the "default"); typography and format are plain but not ugly and wasteful (example: graphics are accompanied by large blocks of white space); there are serious errors of spelling, punctuation, and phrasing, even beyond what "picky" schoolteachers would flag; vocabulary ignores the cognitive and linguistic level of the intended reader; sources/ summary are missing. Editor would need to teach (skills, language), offer comments that cover issues that the assignment's specifications already deal with, and see another revision stage before being fairly confident that the piece meets the 5/6 standard. Author would need to spend several more hours researching, writing, and improving the visual/ textual presentation.

3 Almost sufficient (C+): almost 4, not just halfway between 2 and 4.

2 Deficient (C): Hypothetical reader would stop reading well before the end. Keep the content and then expand it greatly (but also treat it selectively). Probably better to start with a new text, rather than attempt to rewrite what's there.

1 Severely deficient (D): almost 2, not just halfway between 0 and 2. The author has severely underestimated what is required in content, writing, and presentation, but there is hope.

0 Unacceptable (F): The author's problems clearly extend beyond the assignment itself.