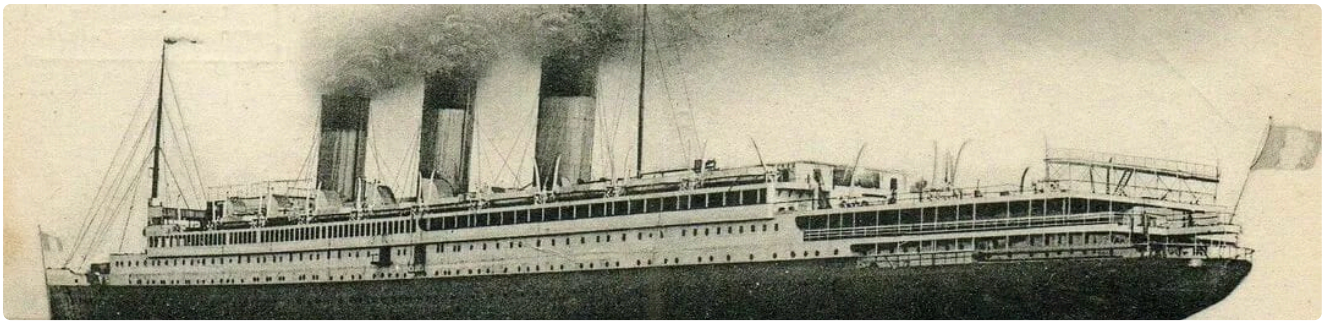
trans atlantic cultures
Cultural Histories of the Atlantic World 18th–21st Centuries

ISSN 2739-6614
transatlantic-cultures.org



Periodizing the Atlantic

Anaïs Fléchet, Gabriela Pellegrino Soares, Olivier Compagnon

A major challenge for the Transatlantic Cultures project has been creating a historical periodization that would explain not only shifting overarching systems of interchange throughout the Atlantic since the end of the 18th century, but also transformations and disruptions specific to places within this space.

TRANSLATION	Larry Kuiper
PUBLISHED	September 3, 2022
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE	French
AVAILABLE IN	English, French
TOPICS	Framework
SPACES AND PLACES	South Atlantic · North Atlantic · Africa · Europe · Caribbean · South America · North America
PERIODS	Atlantic Revolutions and Colonialism · The Steam Atlantic · The Atlantic Space Within Globalization · The Consolidation of Mass Cultures
KEYWORDS	periodization, chronology, atlantic, circulations
PERMANENT LINK	https://transatlantic-cultures.org/en/records/periodiser-l-atlantique/

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Anaïs Fléchet

Professor of Modern History · Laboratoire interdisciplinaire en Etudes Culturelles - UMR 7069 · Sciences Po Strasbourg · France

Anaïs Fléchet is professor of modern history at Sciences Po Strasbourg and member of the Laboratoire interdisciplinaire en Etudes Culturelles (CNRS - UMR 7069) . Her research focuses on music and international history, Brazilian cultural history, and the circulation of artistic practices in the Atlantic Area. She is the co-director of the Transatlantic Cultures digital platform.

Gabriela Pellegrino Soares

Professor of Latin American History · Department of History - Faculty of Philosophy, Human Sciences and Literature · University of São Paulo · Brazil

Gabriela Pellegrino is Associated Professor of Latin American History at the University of São Paulo, Director of Undergraduation in History at USP and Researcher of CNPq (National Committee for Scientific and Technologic Development). She is Co-Director of the international project “Transatlantic Cultures. A Digital Platform of Cultural Histories of the Atlantic World” (Fapesp/ANR) and Visiting Researcher of Brasiliana Library - USP.

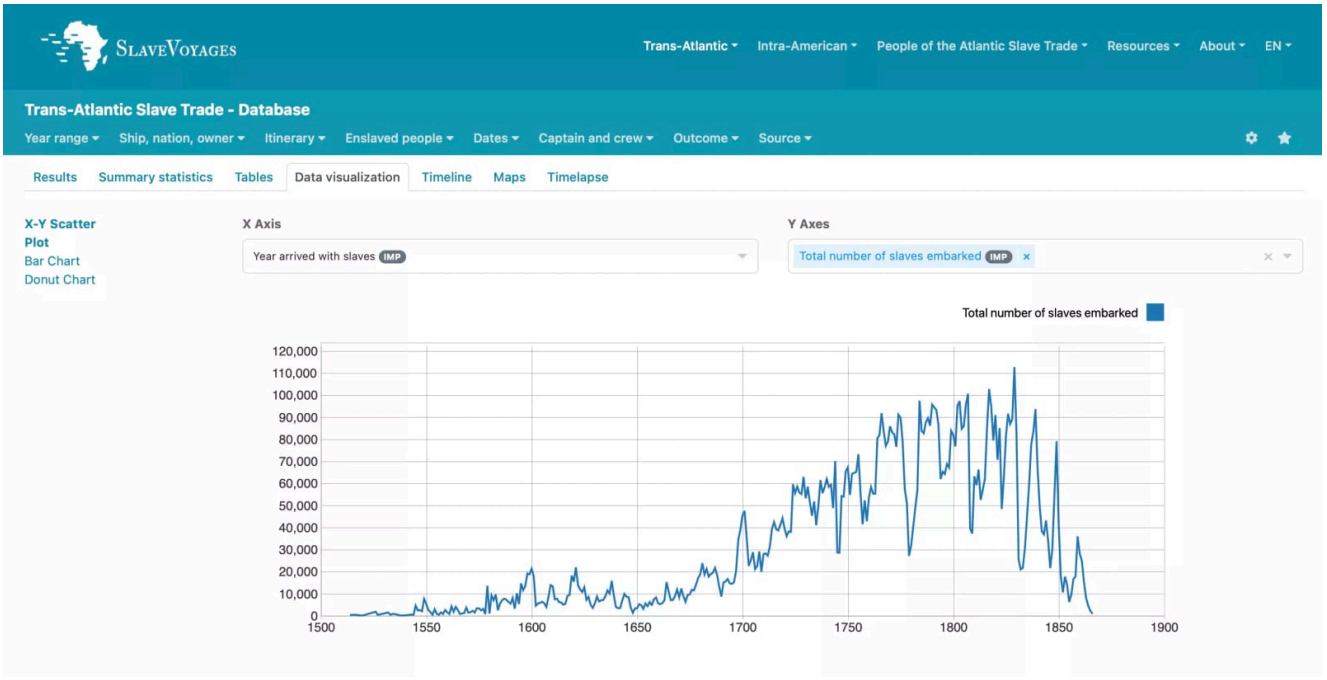
Olivier Compagnon

Professor of Contemporary History · Institut des Hautes Etudes de l'Amérique latine / CREDA UMR CNRS 7227 UMR IRD 280 · Université Sorbonne Nouvelle · France

Olivier Compagnon is Professor of Contemporary History at the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique latine), a member of the Centre de Recherche et de Documentation des Amériques (CREDA-UMR 7227) and of the Institut Universitaire de France. He has been a visiting professor at the University of California at Berkeley, as well as at the University of Salamanca, the University of Costa Rica, the University of São Paulo or the Free University of Brussels.

Atlantic Revolutions and Colonialism (c. 1770-c.1860)

The 1770s have been selected as the point of departure for this exercise, because this is when the cycle of Atlantic revolutions began to profoundly transform the power relations between Europe and the Americas and to eliminate the essential core of imperialism. This decade also corresponds to a sharp increase in transatlantic exchange, including economic exchange. Madrid's progressive opening of trade between the Spanish New World and homeland ports, for example, led to an important increase in maritime traffic. The Atlantic slave trade also started growing exponentially during this decade, with 11,518 Atlantic crossings taking nearly 3.3 million slaves from Africa to the Americas between 1750 and 1800 (compared to 2.1 million and 7,108 crossings between 1700 and 1750, according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database). Until around 1860, when France and England were initiating their colonial expansion toward Africa, northwestern Europe, the epicenter of the nascent industrial revolution, also began to assert its dominance over cultural exchanges in tandem with an emerging print Atlantic, whose full ascendancy would be seen in the next period.



Chart

Source: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database

A Steam-powered Atlantic (c. 1860-c. 1920)

A new phase began in the 1850s and 60s, and corresponds to what has been called the second globalization—following the first one in the 15^th and 16^th centuries. While not the only region to participate, the Atlantic remained the center of this transformation. The steam revolution erased the slowness of earlier centuries, contributing decisively to a compression of distances. Steam led not only to an unprecedented increase in international commerce and circulation of material goods, but also to the great migratory wave from Europe to new countries on the American continents (the United States, of course, but also Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and Chile), from the beginning of the 1870s until the end of the 1920s, interrupted only by the First World War. Europe's colonial stranglehold on Africa was at its height during this period. Transoceanic telegraph cables—initiated in 1858 by the link between Valentia Island (west of Ireland) and Trinity Bay (east of Newfoundland)—reached their maximum expansion during this period, before being progressively replaced by the wireless telegraph.

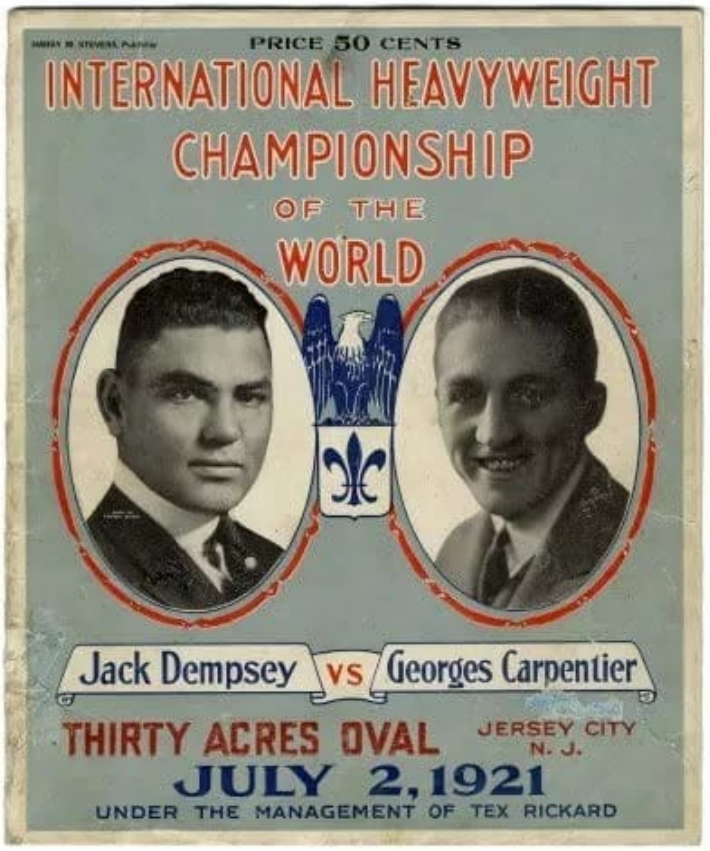


Carte des grandes communications télégraphiques

Source: Wikimedia

The Consolidation of Mass Culture (c. 1920-c.1960)

The Great War marked a break between periods in several ways. It created the groundwork for a kind of provincialization of Europe that coincided with the rise of cultural Americanization. The war also corresponded to a decisive moment in the process of mass-culture consolidation that, while occurring at different times in different places, added a radiophonic and cinematographic Atlantic to the existing print Atlantic. In the overall economy of transatlantic cultural exchange, this break is essential in that it opens the way for popular culture to be instantaneously transmitted. Jack Dempsey's knock-out of French boxer Georges Carpentier on July 2, 1921 in Thirty Acres Stadium in Jersey City is not only the first boxing match broadcast live on U.S. airwaves, but it also reached the ears of French listeners less than two minutes after their champion went down.

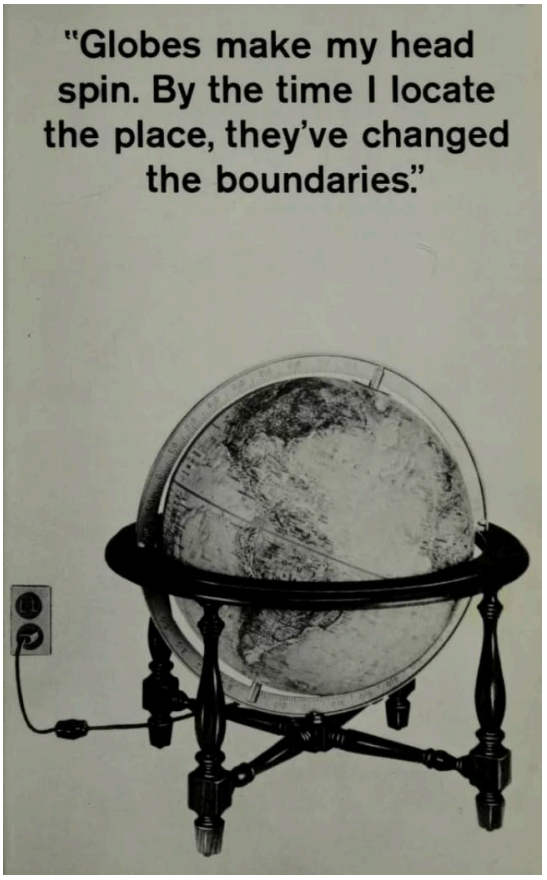


Poster of the World Heavyweight Championship between Jack Dempsey (6'1'', 187 lbs.) and Georges Carpentier (5'11'', 174 lbs.), July 2, 1921, in Jersey City, New Jersey

Source: Rights reserved/Droits réservés

The Atlantic Space and Globalization (c. 1960-21^st century)

Finally, the 1960s inaugurate the last period, the third globalization leading to the present. The double context of the Cold War and decolonization ratified new hegemonies and dependencies until the end of the 1980s, while the neo-liberalization of the world created more favorable conditions than ever for planetary exchange. Technical changes like the democratization of civil aviation (opening the way for mass tourism), the advent of television as a common product of consumption, and the digital revolution of the turn of the 21^st century, all serve to reduce circulation time while also revealing, starting in the 1960s, the foundations of a "global village" (to use Marshall McLuhan's expression) that has continued to consolidate since. In light of these changes, the relevance of the Atlantic world as an analytical framework for the last half-century of globalization should be reexamined.



Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *War and peace in the global village* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 2

Source: Archive.org