Reading Questions for Oct. 10-17
These questions are intended to orient you in the reading. You do not need to have definite answers to them, but you should think about them.

For the lectures and discussions this week we will be going over Lynn White, Jr.’s book, *Medieval Technology and Social Change*. White’s book is a monograph: a scholarly study of a specific topic. In addition to learning about the technological revolutions of the Middle Ages, we will also be examining how professional historians argue and support their arguments.

Thurs. 10/10: Knights and monks: Europe in the early Middle Ages
Read: White, to p. 38 (preface and chapter 1).
Note: McClellan and Dorn, chapter 9, is assigned reading for next week. However, if you find White’s book difficult, you might consider reading McClellan and Dorn’s chapter first. Try White first, though.

1. Read the preface (v-vii). What are the three goals that White lists for his book?

2. Read pp. 1-13. What is the Brunner hypothesis? Does White agree with it? What is the major problem he sees with it?

3. Read pp. 13-28. What evidence does White offer that the stirrup appeared in Western Europe in the early eighth century? Why does White conclude that artistic representations of the stirrup are not useful in establishing the date of its appearance?

4. Was the stirrup invented in Western Europe? If not, where did it come from?

5. Finish reading chapter 1. What effects did the introduction of the stirrup have on the political and social organization of medieval Europe, according to White?

6. Is White a technological determinist?

7. What kinds of evidence does White use to support his argument? How do you know? Why do historians use footnotes? How many languages do you need to read to do medieval history?

8. The epigraph from St. Jerome (on p. viii), translated into English, reads: “We should not contemptuously dismiss little things if great things depend on them.” Why do you think White chose that quotation as the epigraph to his book?

Tues. 10/15: The medieval agrarian revolution
Read: White, 39-78 (chapter 2).

1. Read pp. 39-56. What are the advantages of the heavy plow over the scratch plow? Where did it come from?

2. What did Marc Bloch argue about the connection between the heavy plow, patterns of cultivation, and the organization of peasants in medieval Europe? Does White agree with Bloch?

3. Why does White claim that the allocation of land to peasants “in proportion to their contribution to the plough-team” indicates a fundamental reorientation of humans’ relation to nature (56)?

4. Read pp. 57-69. What advantages do horses have over oxen as draft animals? Why did horses require a different harness than oxen?

5. What changes in patterns of settlement and trade were made possible by the shift from oxen to horses?
6. Read pp. 69-78. What advantages does the three-field system of rotation have over the two-field system? Why would it be difficult to introduce three-field rotation into an established village?

7. How are the heavy plow, the horse collar, and three-field rotation connected, in White’s view, with the shift of economic and political importance from southern to northern Europe in the Middle Ages?

**Thurs. 10/17: The revitalization of Europe**

Read: McClellan/Dorn, 175-201 (chapter 9); White, 79-134 (chapter 3).

1. Read White, 79-103. What inorganic sources of power were exploited in the ancient Mediterranean world? For what were they used? What further inorganic sources of power were developed during the Middle Ages, and for what were they used?

2. Examine pp. 101-103. What was the main technological problem faced by Europeans who wanted to build a weight-driven clock? Why do you think they might have wanted to build one? (Does White ask this question?)

3. Read White, 103-129. How long did it take for artisans and engineers in Europe to discover the principle of the crank? What kind of evidence does White use to support his claim about the late discovery of the crank? Why, according to White, did the discovery take so long?

4. Look at p. 116. How, according to White, did the principle of the ball-and-chain governor emerge in Europe? What assumption about human inventiveness and cultural transmission does White make? More generally, in the book as a whole, does White tend to think that new technologies are invented multiple times in different places? Or does he tend to think that they are invented once and then diffused by travel and trade to new places?

5. Examine pp. 119-129. What devices were invented to solve the problem of the mechanical escapement?

6. Read White, 129-134. What does he see as the most significant transformation in the later Middle Ages in the way that human beings thought about the world? What view of nature is implied by thinking of the world as a set of powers to be harnessed?

7. Read McClellan and Dorn, 175-201. It is clear that they have drawn on White’s ideas in writing this chapter. Do they mention White by name? Is their any indication of the source of this idea? Why do you think that White’s monograph has footnotes but the textbook doesn’t?

8. Does the textbook chapter give any indication that some historians might disagree with what the authors say?