

Hist 464 (01w) Africa/Mideast: Survey of Cultural History

Room DBH 113, 1:00-2:50 p.m. fall semester 2008

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The catalog description of this course is short and sweet – “a broad cultural history of Africa and the Middle East” – but probably needs some explaining. Back about 1991 the university began an experiment with an extensive six-semester-long Humanities general education sequence called Cultural Legacies. These six courses were truly interdisciplinary in that teachers from at least three Humanities disciplines taught each section (usually representing history, literature, and one of the fine arts). Half of the six courses were about the world beyond Europe and the U.S.; there was a semester each on Africa/Mideast, Monsoon Asia, and Latin America. There was some lecture, but emphasis was more on reading, discussion, and some hands-on activity. After experimenting with this sequence with roughly ten percent of five entering freshmen classes in a row, the sequence was replaced with the two modern Cultural Perspectives courses (for several reasons, not least of which is that Cultural Legacies students were still taking gen ed requirements through the spring of their junior year). But several faculty who were trained to teach those non-western Humanities courses thought that we had created something valuable that could still be taught as single courses in a given discipline such as history. The world is getting smaller, in terms of travel and communication, and is coming to all our doorsteps in ways both good and bad like it never did before. It seems to this instructor, at least, that it is more important for educated people to know something about it now than it ever was before.

So what you have left here is a course that is not truly interdisciplinary (in that there is just one teacher and he is a historian), but a course that still has for subject matter a broad range of “cultural” history. The subject matter is immense – over five thousand years of written records from the dawn of the first civilizations in Mesopotamia and Egypt, to almost a billion life histories of the people living in African/Mideastern countries today. So in this regional survey history a “leaping and lingering” treatment will sample cultural origins, cultural high points, and explain a little of present-day happenings by how it came to be this way historically.

Students are asked to do some readings for almost every class meeting, and there will be straightforward objective daily quizzes on such. The three exams will be half essay and half objective, with a bonus question on each that amounts to “what did you read (view, discuss, etc.) other than the assignments, and what did you learn from it?” This bonus question can easily raise exam scores a full letter, if substantial outside work is demonstrated.

Required paperbacks, now in the bookstore, are:

Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
Ba, *So Long a Letter*
Dawood (ed.), *The Koran (Qur'an)*
Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*
Niane (ed), *Sundiata: Epic of Old Mali*
Thomas, *The Harmless People*
Wiesel, *Dawn*

Other readings, as listed below, are to be found on the web, or will be in the form of handouts.

Date	Reading assignment	Tentative class and lecture topics
Mon. Aug. 25 – (none)		The Nile and immortality
Wed. Aug. 27 – Herodotus Book 2		Hieroglyphic exercise; more on Egypt
[Mon. Sept. 1 – Labor Day Holiday; no class]		
Wed. Sept. 3 – “Book of the Dead;” & “Black Athena” article		Introduction to Mesopotamia
Mon. Sept. 8 – <i>Enuma Elish</i>		Cuneiform exercise; more Mesopotamia
Wed. Sept. 10 – Law Code of Hammurabi		Introduction to Israel
Mon. Sept. 15 – Josephus TBA		Hebrew exercise; more on Israel
Wed. Sept. 17 – Josephus TBA		(<i>Masada</i> showing)
Mon. Sept. 22 – ONE HOUR EXAM		Introduction to Islam
Wed.. Sept. 24 – <i>Qur’an</i> TBA		Umayyad & Abbasid kingdoms
Mon.. Sept. 29 – <i>Qur’an</i> TBA		Arabic exercise; spread of Islam
Wed. Oct. 1 – <i>Qur’an</i> TBA		Safavid Persia & Ottoman Turkey
Mon. Oct. 6 – <i>Dawn</i>		European roots of Zionism
Wed. Oct. 8 – <i>Dawn</i>		Establishment of modern Israeli state
Mon. Oct. 13 – <i>The Iron Cage</i>		Levantine roots of Arab nationalism
Wed. Oct. 15 – <i>The Iron Cage</i>		Irresistible force vs. immoveable rock
[Mon. Oct. 20 – FALL BREAK, no classes Mon. Oct. 20 or Tues. Oct. 21]		
Wed. Oct. 22 – Mideastern biography presentations		
Mon. Oct. 27 – Mideastern biography presentations		
Wed. Oct. 29 – ONE HOUR EXAM		Introduction to Africa; “relict” populations
Mon. Nov. 3 – <i>Harmless People</i>		Pygmies of the Ituri Forest: Turnbull
Wed. Nov. 5 – <i>Harmless People</i>		Introduction to African epic
Mon. Nov. 10 – <i>Sundiata</i>		(<i>Keita</i> showing)
Wed. Nov. 12 – <i>Sundiata</i>		Introduction to African colonialism
Mon. Nov.17 – <i>Things Fall Apart</i>		African colonialism, independence
Wed. Nov. 19 – <i>Things Fall Apart</i>		(Art Museum visit)
Mon. Nov. 24 – <i>So Long a Letter</i>		African Independence II
[Wed. Nov. 26 – THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY, no classes Wed.. Nov. 26 – Fri. Nov. 28]		
Mon. Dec. 1 – African biography presentations		
Wed. Dec. 3 – African biography presentations		

Mon. Dec. 8 1:00-3:00 p.m.

FINAL EXAMINATION

Determination of overall grade:

20% – total daily reading quizzes, dropping the two lowest;

15% – first one-hour examination;

15% – second one-hour examination;

20% – final examination;

15% – interview with and life history of an older Mideasterner;

15% – interview with and life history of an older African.

Missing five classes will result in automatic grade of FA, as will cheating on individual daily quizzes or exams or plagiarizing in constructing your life history papers. Specifically, your research paper must in general be your work; you must attribute ideas to their sources; and you must present any verbatim wording from a source in quotation marks, showing it is not your language but that of the source.

Other semester dates of possible interest:

Aug. 29 – last day to drop/add a course without financial penalty

Oct. 10 – last day to withdraw from a course without academic penalty

Nov. 13 – last day to completely withdraw from all courses without academic penalty

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