

World Civilizations II 104 008
Spring 2009
David W. Lee
History 104
Office Hours: TBA

Course Objectives: This course is intended to provide the student with an overview of the key persons, events, moments, etc. of world societies from 1000 to the 19th century. My hope is that the lectures, the text, and class discussions will enable you to have a general grasp on the people, events, and circumstances that helped shape early modern civilizations. We are not looking to uncover the so-called laws of history; there are none. History is not a hard science to be examined as one might study chemical reactions or white mice in a cage (although one might argue that humans are akin to rats in a cage). Actually history works at a level many find uncomfortable—above the specific and below the absolute. We need to realize that people make up this discipline called history... people who do both the unexpected and the inexplicable... people who are both ruled by passion and by reason... and people who have given us a mosaic of activities both Good, Bad, and Ugly. Specifically we will cover the period within these themes:

I. Cross Cultural Interaction

- Nomadic Empires and Eurasian Integration
- Peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa
- Western Europe

II. Origins of Global Interdependence

- The Americas and Oceania
- Cross-cultural Interactions
- Transoceanic Encounters
- Transformation of Europe

III. New and Old Worlds?

- New Worlds: The Americas and Oceania
- Africa and the Atlantic World
- Tradition and Change in East Asia
- Islamic Empires

Readings: Traditions and Encounters

CH. 18-21 = 1st Exam Feb. 10th
CH. 22-25 = 2nd Exam March 17th
CH. 26-29 = Final TBA

Class attendance and participation: I will take roll every class day. I do this for two reasons: 1) I want to know your name and not just your face—I don't like calling people "hey," 2) if you attend and participate on a regular basis it can enhance your final grade. I encourage everyone to come to class and add their two pennies, besides I don't want to train stenographers. I play a great Devil's Advocate, so on occasion I'll sprout horns, tail, and my pitchfork is sharp and nasty. With class participation we all might learn something.

Grading scale: A=100-90, B=89-80, C=70-70, D=69-60, F—Well, you get the picture.
At least 50% of your final grade will come from writing three essays and the 12 page paper.

Cheating and plagiarism: Any student caught cheating will go immediately to the lowest level in Malebolge, where falsifiers of metals, persons, coins, and words reside in perpetuity—well, maybe in the next life. But in this life I can promise falsifiers a bulging zero for their pernicious act.

Paper: A “counter-factual” history paper is required for this course. The paper must be 12 pages in length, typed, and double-spaced. The paper will be 25% of your final grade (Due date: April 21). Choose an event, person or people, idea, occurrence, etc. from the time frame of this course that plausibly could have happened. In other words, “what if?” Remember people make choices that are not always well-thought out as to their long-term consequences; nor do split-second decisions seem so momentous when one does not have historical hindsight. To borrow from an introduction by Robert Cowley...what if the Persians had beaten the rowers of Athens at Salamis in 480 b.c....or if the Spanish Armada had won and the Duke of Parma’s army had occupied London....or what if the Germans had beaten back the D Day landings...or what if the upswing of a battle-axe had not been interrupted and a twenty-one-year-old Alexander had been killed before he became “the Great”? Cowley goes on to state that “what ifs”...”can be a tool to enhance the understanding of history, to make it come alive. They can reveal, in startling detail, the essential stakes of a confrontation, as well as its potentially abiding consequences.” For the paper you need only the text, lecture notes, and a well-reasoned thoughtfulness about a plausible counter-factual scenario. If you have trouble getting started come by and see me and I’ll help with some mental jumper cables. The state of Tennessee pays me handsomely, so take advantage of my services.

The following passages, from the novel Waterland, express how I approach the study of history. Maybe if more people were sincerely concerned with the “whys” or the “ifs” of this discipline than slavishly following the leader-whomever it might be—then maybe, just maybe, we might think before we act. Albeit, lemmings are cute.

“And when you ask, as all history classes ask, as all history classes should ask, what is the point of history? Why history? Why the past? . . . So hard on the heels of the word Why comes the sly and wistful word If. If it had not been for...If only...Were if not...Those useless Ifs of history. And, constantly impeding, deflecting, distracting the backward searchings of the question why, looms this other form of retrogression: If only we could have it back. I always taught you that history has its uses, its serious purpose . I always taught you to accept the burden of our need to ask why. I taught you that there is never any end to that question, because, as I once defined it for you (yes, I confess a weakness for improvised definitions), history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account, with incomplete knowledge. So that it teaches us no shortcuts to Salvation, no recipe of a New World, only the dogged and patient art of making do. I taught you that by forever attempting to explain we may come, not to an Explanation, but to a knowledge of the limits of our power to explain. Yes, yes, the past gets in the way; it trips us up, bogs us down; it complicates, makes difficult. But to ignore this is folly, because, above all, what history teaches us is to avoid illusion and make-believe, to lay aside dreams, moonshine, cure-alls, wonder-workings, pie-in-the-sky—to be realistic.