

The Middle East: Past, Present, Future

Course Description

An understanding of the history and cultures of the Middle East is crucial to comprehension of both world history and contemporary affairs. This course will examine the geography, history, cultures, religions, and economics that have created the present day Middle East. We will consider how oil, Islam, Zionism, diaspora, right of return, fundamentalism, imperialism, occupation, and nuclear proliferation have shaped the region and our world today. Iraq, Afghanistan, the Gulf states, Iran, Israel and Palestine are examples of key nations to be examined. Recent and on-going conflicts and issues will be analyzed in depth from the viewpoints of differing groups, along with all their various proposed solutions.

Course Outline

The Geography of the Middle East

The Religion and Culture of Islam

Imperialism: from the Ottomans to the Cold War

Nationalist and Pan-Arab Movements: Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and the Kurds

Oil and the US Presence

Judaism, Zionism and Israel

Israel/Palestine, to the present

The Kingdoms: Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States

Iran: from Mossadegh to Khomeini to the present

Iraq: from the Iran-Iraq War to the present

Afghanistan: from the Soviet invasion to the present

Conclusions

Student Presentations,

Review for Final Exam

Material and Assignments

You will need to keep a section of a binder specifically for just this course. A three ring binder is best. This should be used for collecting and organizing the numerous handouts, for note taking, in class writing and accumulating your current events. Our central text will be: The State of the Middle East by Dan Smith; University of California Press, published in 2008 (141 heavily

illustrated pages). We will read most of this book along with copious handouts from many different sources. We will probably read Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict by Phyllis Bennis, Olive Branch Press, 2007 (184 small pages). Numerous films will also be watched, discussed and written about. There will be mid-term and final exams, a few quizzes, weekly current events, and a large research project on a related topic of your choice followed by a presentation of your research. Classroom discussion is a central element in this course. To share your astute insights and ask important questions is of crucial value in the class. Patience and listening skills are vital. This is a new course, and as such many changes may occur as we go. You will have a role in shaping this course through your engagement and feedback.

Evaluation

Your final grade will come from:

10% In-class participation, projects and discussion

25% Journal/Notebook: Expository writing to prompts both in class and as homework in addition to notes taken in class. Assessed twice during the semester.

30% Independent research:

One major project (8+ pages: 20%),

Current events (10% in total)

15% Mid-term exam plus any quizzes

20% Final exam