

Contemporary World

Syllabus Fall 2016

Required Texts

- Adiga, Aravind, *White Tiger*
- * Khadra, Yasmina, *The Attack*
- * Fletcher, Martin, *Breaking News*
- * Eire, Carlos, *Waiting for Snow in Havana*
- * Online and e-reserve readings to be identified in the individual lessons

Course Requirements and Procedures

Lessons

The course has eighteen lessons. You will be expected to read the text prepared for each lesson by the professors. The purpose of this text is to impart a basic narrative of events since World War II focusing on the non-Western world. The material is designed to fill in and to expand your knowledge of this important period in world history through a very general overview.

To begin your course work, click on “Lesson 1” from the navigation bar once you have read this home page and received all your materials. This will take you to the first lesson. You must complete the lessons in order. Each lesson will have instructions on how to proceed. You may also e-mail your instructor at any time with questions, comments, or problems.

Students often long for a text book. For obvious reasons, there are no ideal, up-to-date texts for this course. Three suggestions, however: T. E. Vladney, *The World Since 1945*, Michael Hunt, *The World Transformed* or Akira Iriye, ed., *Global Interdependence*. Iriye’s account is the most recent and the most innovative, but it is thematic, which means that much of the work is not directly relevant. However, appearing in 2014, it gives us recent thought on a vast array of topics.

Assignments

You will have an assignment to complete for most lessons. Some of these will be online discussions, and others will be short papers.

Discussions

There will be seven (formal) discussions during the course. The purpose of these discussions is primarily to reflect on the material contained in the lessons. Students will be divided into four groups.

Discussions: How to proceed

Each week one student in each group will be in charge of that group's discussion. To give some flexibility, each group is in charge of arranging who will lead each discussion. Some groups are small enough that one individual is obliged to lead more than once. Suggested questions will be posed in the Assignments section of the lesson under discussion.. Students should bear in mind how historical events reflect/modify/contradict our understanding of current happenings and how current happenings change our perception of historical events. The leader will summarize the discussion and post it on the General Discussion Board. Each student will post at least one comment based on the material assigned and at least one response to the postings by other students. The professor will read all comments, correct factual mistakes, and comment briefly on the cogency of the arguments presented. **DUE TO THE FLUID NATURE OF THESE ASSIGNMENTS, NO POSTINGS OR RESPONSES WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER THE DUE DATE.** This is imperative for two reasons: to keep the discussion truly reciprocal, and to allow the leader time to reflect on student comments before writing the summary.

Papers

There will be six short papers (three to five pages each) based primarily on additional reading assignments. The first paper involves a comparison of sources dealing with Truman's decision to drop the a-bomb on Japan. Because this event occurred several decades ago and occurred in the US, a wide range of sources, many of them official, are available. Your analysis, accordingly, is more like what historians typically do for events prior to "contemporary history."

Papers 2-6: How to Proceed

Papers 2-6 are more representative of contemporary history as it generally must be practiced. The object is to provide additional insights into the subject matter of the course and to hone your skills in evaluating sources. These sources include a variety of materials (investigative journalism, biography, memoirs/autobiography, novels, propaganda and what is called testimonio). As is typical with most of us most of the time, you will only have time to read one source in depth. Yet from this you are supposed, as a citizen, voter, intelligent observer and contemporary historian-in-training, to sort the grain from the chaff, the truth from the lies. How to do this without simply throwing up your hands and rejecting everything as a tissue of falsehood?

You should ask yourself the following questions with regard to each source:

- 1) What do I know about the author(s)? The internet, though not always reliable, is your quickest guide here.
- 2) What sort of account is this? (See above: journalism, biography, novel, etc. This establishes the contract the author makes with you the reader and gives you some idea about the degree of literal exactitude you are entitled to expect).
- 3) What is the author's purpose in writing? Or to put it less favorably, does the author have an agenda and if so, what is it?
- 4) What is the author's target audience?
- 5) Does the author's account agree or disagree with prior information you may have, including the lessons? (Remember, it is the prior information which may be slanted or false.) Does the account seem inherently plausible? (But remember Hitler's dictum that it is the big lies that are most readily swallowed.)
- 6) Finally, and most important, what can you learn from this account? As parents of small children will agree, fibs and tall tales can be as instructive as accurate, unvarnished reports, although we might approach them differently. Sometimes what you learn is what the author intended; sometimes it is not. You may go away with exactly the opposite impression; or something that seemed relatively unimportant to the author may strike you as key.

Be aware that, overall, no two people will give the same account of a major event. (Anyone who has been in a traffic accident knows that). Nonetheless, the event did happen one way and not another, and it is our job to come as close as we can to ascertaining what that was (history "as it actually happened.")

Your remarks should be organized around the points indicated above; book reviews or general essays are not acceptable. **LATE PAPERS WILL BE PENALIZED FIVE POINTS FOR EACH WEEK LATE.**

Grading

Your work will be evaluated as follows:

A = excellent performance overall

B = good overall, or excellent on some aspects tempered by flaws in others

C = unacceptable in a graduate course

Your work will be given the following weight:

6 unit papers worth 10 points each	60 points
7 discussions, 5 points each	35 points
Summary	5 points

Total

100 points

Citations

You are expected to draw on material from the course and the assigned course readings for the assignments and cite sources in your papers. Identify them in parenthesis in the text of the paper, like this: (Fussell, page 23). You need not provide a bibliography for assigned readings. If you draw on outside material, something you are welcome but not required to do, cite those sources in parentheses but also provide a bibliography. Cite an Internet source by giving the title of the Web page, the URL (Web address), and the date you visited the site. Provide a printed copy of the footnoted page. **Be careful not to plagiarize material by using someone else's argument, interpretation or specific words without citing that source. Plagiarism may be grounds for an F and immediate expulsion from the course.**