

Contemporary World

Syllabus

Required Texts

- Hayslip, *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places*
- Ngugi, *Matigari*
- Menchu and Burgos-Debray, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*
- Hammond Atlas
- E-reserve and online readings to be identified in the individual lessons

Optional Text

- Hunt, *The World Transformed: 1945 to the Present*

Web Resources

You will visit a number of Web sites as you work on your assignments in the course. Links are provided in connect with some of the lesson pages. There is also an outside website which you can use as a resources as needed: www.ungc.edu/~jwjones/world. We encourage you to find additional Web resources as you work on the course.

Course Requirements and Procedures

The course has sixteen lessons. You will be required to read roughly a chapter of text for each lesson. As a complement to this reading, there will be some original source material and some Web sites for you to visit and study. A number of resources have been developed for the classroom version of this course and you have access to these same materials. Links will be provided throughout the lesson pages to this material, which will supplement your text and coursepack readings.

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 any time with questions, comments, or problems.

Assignments

You will have an assignment to complete for most lessons. Some of these will be online discussions, and others will be short papers for you to email to the professor. There will also be some internet assignments.

All essays and assignments will be graded on the basis of the following criteria:

1. **Level of analysis/argumentation.** You must present a thoughtful argument and interpretation, not a mere summary of facts. (Note: it does not matter which side of an issue you argue, only how well or how poorly you make the argument.)
2. **Use of evidence.** The material you select to support your thesis must be relevant and must clearly back up your argument.
3. **Clarity of communication.** You must present the evidence and express your argument in a clear, comprehensible manner.

You should also read **Guidelines for Paper Assignments** give you an idea how to approach the paper assignments and discussion questions. Read through this page before doing the first paper assignment. You should also refer to it as you work on each of your assignments.

Grading and Papers

Your work will be evaluated as follows:

- A = excellent performance overall
- B = above average overall, or excellent on some aspects tempered by flaws in others
- C = average across the board, or above average in part but with significant flaws
- D = below average overall performance.

Your grades will be given the following weight:

3 unit papers worth 15 points each	45 points
3 internet assignments worth 5 points each	15 points
13 discussion prompts, 2 points each, up to a total of:	20 points
1 final paper	20 points
Total	100 points

Final Paper

This is a preview of the final paper assignment. Use it to guide your thinking throughout the Contemporary World course.

6–8 pages, double-spaced

Choose 1 of the following topics:

- We have examined the contemporary world with a number of general themes in mind, including the Cold War; the rise and fall of communism; nationalism; de-colonization/neo-colonialism; the rise of terrorism; the international economy; racial, ethnic, and religious conflict; gender; class; and environmental issues. Which of these themes do you think has been most important in the shaping the contemporary

world and why? Which of these themes do you think is likely to be most important in the future? Defend your choice(s) against some of the other themes and use at least three readings from the course to support your argument.

- In your opinion, why has the so-called “third world” been the site of most of the world’s conflicts since 1945? Use at least three readings from the course to support your argument.
- One scholar has argued that the history of the post-World War II era shows that “Western” ideas of democracy, human rights, and capitalism have triumphed around the world. Do you agree? Why or why not? Provide specific examples from at least three course readings to support your argument.

Guidelines for Paper Assignments

This brief set of guidelines explains how to approach the essay assignments for the course. First, always keep in mind that the study of history is a matter of interpretation. The old saying about history being merely the memorization of facts and dates is very mistaken. It is the *interpretation* of the past; any two people can take the same set of facts and dates and come up with entirely different conclusions.

On the paper assignments for this course, you should be the historian: take the information given to you in the notes and the readings and shape your own interpretation of the history of the world since 1945. Carrying out this task requires skills that no one is born with but that everyone can master. It involves synthesizing broad amounts of material, deciding which is the most important, using it to develop your own interpretation, and presenting that point of view in a clearly written form.

In the opening paragraph, tell the topic you will be discussing and spell out your point of view on that issue in a clear thesis statement. Think of this crucial part of your essay as the answer to the question being asked. For the first paper, a thesis statement might read:

“In this essay, I will discuss the main factors behind President Truman’s decision to bomb Japan and show that this was the right decision to make.”

OR

“In this essay, I will discuss the main factors behind President Truman’s decision to bomb Japan and show that it was unnecessary and thus the wrong decision.”

These are very different approaches to the same question, and neither is right or wrong, but both thesis statements show how you intend to approach the question and what argument you will make in the paper. Each point you raise in the body of the paper should support your thesis statement. This is a key part of being an historian: choosing from the evidence at hand to support an interpretation of an issue. Also, **keep the counter arguments in mind, responding when appropriate to strengthen your assertions.**

The conclusion should briefly summarize the argument made in the essay, but should also

go one step further and consider the implications of what your essay shows. This may not be entirely clear, so think about it again with the first assignment in mind. The decision to use atomic weapons began the nuclear arms race and the issue of nuclear proliferation that remains a problem to this day. The bomb also ushered in a new scientific era with peaceful uses of nuclear technology, and many have argued that the use of the bomb assured a period of relative peace between the superpowers because neither side was likely to unleash such a destructive force again. On an entirely different note, you could address the broader debate of whether the bomb was the first shot of the Cold War. You might also approach the issue of the bomb from a moral point of view, considering, as have many, whether its use against Japan was racially motivated. There are, in short, a number of broader implications one could touch on in a conclusion, depending upon which way the argument in the essay develops.

Writing

It is an important skill to be able to develop a concise logical argument. Consider the difference between these sentences:

1. The Japanese, weary and exhausted as a nation after four years of brutal fighting with the Western allies, were on the brink of complete and total collapse by August 1945.
2. By August 1945, the Japanese were ready for surrender.

Though well written, the first sentence is wordy. Avoid such constructions in your essays because you need the space. Every word of the paper should contribute to the argument being developed. The best way to weed out wordy phrases is to do multiple drafts, tightening up the writing each time. Have someone read the second draft and point out anything unclear. Read a subsequent draft aloud to catch awkward sentences. Plan ahead so you can do several drafts, setting the essay aside for a while between readings.

Citations

You are expected to draw on material from the course 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 parenthesis also but 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 or interpretation without citing that source.**

Summary

Give some thought to the question or topic and answer it in an argumentative, interpretive, analytical thesis statement. Choose two or three pieces of evidence from the course material to support your argument, citing all sources, and develop each in

separate, concisely written paragraphs that refer back to your thesis. Conclude with a brief summary and the broader implications of your argument. Your grade will depend on how well you accomplish these tasks. Refer back to these guidelines.

Samples for the first paper assignment

1. Introductory paragraph (thesis statement): “In this essay, I will discuss the main factors behind President Truman’s decision to drop the bombs and show that this was the right decision to make.”
2. Japan was unlikely to surrender.
3. Truman’s decision saved lives.
4. Conclusion: This was the only moral choice.

OR

1. Introductory paragraph (thesis statement): “In this essay, I will discuss the main factors behind President Truman’s decision to drop the bombs and show that this was unnecessary and wrong.”
2. Japan was on the brink of surrender.
3. The goal was to keep the USSR out of Japan (Zinn).
4. Conclusion: Truman made a racist decision.