

THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD COURSE DESCRIPTION

The Making of the Modern World is a six-quarter sequence required of all Eleanor Roosevelt College students. It is designed to encourage students to think historically, comparatively, and in an interdisciplinary manner about the Western and non-Western cultures covered in MMW. Disciplinary perspectives include those from literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, political science, and the fine arts. Students examine and interpret primary documents and artifacts from diverse eras and cultures, and enhance their understanding with information gained from secondary sources.

1. Prehistory and the Birth of Civilization

This quarter introduces students to what is known about early humans, including the evolution of the human body and the characteristics of Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures. It examines contemporary hunter-gatherer and tribal societies, illuminating the complexity of such cultures with respect to mythology and oral tradition, interpersonal relations, and ecological practices. The course concludes with an analysis of the emergence of large agrarian societies and the earliest great settled communities and civilizations.

2. The Great Classical Traditions

This quarter constitutes an introduction to five major classical civilizations of the ancient world, all of whose legacies live on in the present. Equal attention will be given to the ancient Near East (including Mesopotamia, Egypt and the ancient Hebrews), classical Greece, Republican Rome, India and China. The course covers the great early systems of religious and social thought, using an approach that combines history and social science perspectives. This course includes intensive instruction in writing expository, argumentative prose.

3. The Medieval Heritage

A survey of the period from roughly 100 BCE to 1200 CE, this quarter concentrates on: the development of China from the late Han to the Song dynasties; imperial Rome and the emergence of a Christian Mediterranean civilization; and the origins and spread of Islam. The course will emphasize cross-cultural contacts, developments in Buddhism both within and outside of India, and the dynamism of medieval societies in contrast to the image of static or “dark” ages. Specific topics include the rise of towns, the growth of commerce, the rise (and fall) of empires, and the development of universal religions. This course includes intensive instruction in university-level writing.

4. New Ideas and the Clash of Cultures

An examination of the world from 1200 to 1750, the course focuses on the transition from medieval to modern by addressing philosophical, social, political, economic and technological changes in Asia, Europe and Islamic territories. Topics may include: the Mongol invasions and

their impact; the European Renaissance, Reformation and Scientific Revolution; Islamic and Chinese empires; exploration and trade; and European expansion into the Americas.

5. Revolution, Industry and Empire

This quarter examines the great changes in European society occurring from the late seventeenth century to the time of the Russian Revolution, and considers the impact of those changes on the non-Western world. Topics include absolutist states and the Enlightenment, the French and American revolutions, industrialization, the rise of nationalism and the nation-state, mass politics, Western imperialism, and the colonial experience. Developments in non-Western countries during this period will be examined from their own internal perspective.

6. Twentieth Century and Beyond

The course begins with a consideration of the causes and consequences of World War I, and then looks at the post-war crisis of liberal values and institutions. It addresses the deepening of crisis in the thirties, especially evident in the emergence of ideological politics and extreme nationalism in the context of world-wide depression. This period of crisis provides the background for understanding World War II. Attention is then devoted to the Cold War, the competition between capitalism and communism, and the process of decolonization. The course ends with a discussion of the collapse of communism and the emerging world order (or disorder).

5/9/02