

HI 205 Western Civilization Since 1400



General Description

Introduction

In academia there is an anecdote, repeated in various forms, about the puzzled Western Civilization student who, early in the semester, asks the professor: “So, when do we get to the cowboys and Indians?” History 205, of course, does not study the Western United States; rather it looks at the history of the West, the history of Europe, and the expansion of Europe’s influence beyond that continent.

Course Objectives

All parts of the world (including, to a much greater extent than traditionally acknowledged, Native America, Africa, and Asia) have influenced the United States, home of most students enrolled in this course. Since most of the United States population traces its ancestry to Europe, that continent has played a significant role in shaping American society. It is important for all who live in the United States to have an understanding of history, including that of Europe, in order to make sense of the society in which they find themselves. The goal of this course is to give you the “basic vocabulary” of the European experience after 1400 and to allow you to trace in broad terms how the West evolved to the present day.

Each unit in the course manual begins with one or more specific objectives. These objectives are by no means designed to tell all that you need to gain in a particular lesson; rather, they are meant to indicate only some of the most important learning goals in each. Such a selective list will, I believe, serve you better than would a broader, less specific one.

Textbooks

There are two textbooks for this course:

The Mainstream of Civilization, 6th edition, by Stanley Chodorow et al., vol. II.

A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present, vol. II, by Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser.

You can purchase both from the Textbook Department of UNC-CH Student Stores. A book order form is found in this manual.

The two texts are in some ways ideological opposites.

The Anderson and Zinsser book is an impressive pioneering attempt to synthesize the history of European women, but some might accuse the authors of a left-wing bias. For example, they do not even mention the conservative British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, though she was the first woman ever to hold that office and had completed about eight years in that position when the book went to press. At the same time, Anderson and Zinsser devote considerable space to female antinuclear protesters who were active while Thatcher was in office.

The Chodorow text, on the other hand, might be criticized for having a right-wing bias. Looking again to the coverage, or lack thereof, of Margaret Thatcher, one finds only a highly favorable discussion of the conservative prime minister in Chodorow. Members of the British Labour Party and of the Liberal Party, for example, hold a far less favorable view of her.

More than most other textbooks that might be used in this course, however, Chodorow does include a discussion of areas outside of Europe. Still, the book does not always do so with as much sensitivity as it should. One might even question the title of this text: *The Mainstream of Civilization*. People from non-European countries would likely take a different view as to what constitutes "the mainstream."

No textbook is perfect, and the ones selected for this course have both virtues and limitations. Because of their different approaches, they provide an effective complement to each other.

Study Suggestions

Learn as much of the material as possible as you move through each of the twelve lessons. Learning these blocks of information incrementally is a much better method than attempting to cram as you near the end of the course. Students who learn as they proceed and build on what they've learned will feel a greater sense of accomplishment, better understand subsequent chapters, permanently retain more information—and score higher on the final.

If you have good study habits, you will be well-prepared for the final exam by the time you reach the end of the course. I strongly suggest that you write out the questions as well as the answers for your written work. If you do this, the questions and answers will be together for convenient study. Another excellent self-help activity for each lesson is to prepare for your own use brief answers to those questions that you choose not to do as part of your written assignment.

As you study for the final, refer often to the tables of contents and, especially, the indexes of your texts. Can you identify all major entries? If so you will be well-prepared for the identification section of the exam and you will also acquire the “building blocks” needed to construct an effective essay.

Written Assignment

This section of the course will help assure that you are learning the basic information and will give me some idea as to whether you understand it. Remember that the task of **applying** this new knowledge awaits you on the essay portion of the final exam.

Notice that a few units ask you to answer three questions; most request that you do four. Typically, you will be given a choice of questions to answer.

Grading and Final Exam

The final exam will consist of two parts, each counting 50 percent. The identification section will test your mastery of the “basic vocabulary” of western civilization since 1400. This section not only will expect you to explain the item but also to indicate its impact and significance. The essay portion will test broader issues, requiring you to show that you

understand the material and can apply what you have learned.

What sort of final exam question would require you to **apply** what you have learned? Suppose this course dealt not with western civilization since 1400 but instead focused only on the life of Thomas Jefferson. You might get a final examination essay question like this:

Write a commentary on the following:

The Fourth of July speaker exclaimed, "On this great day remember Jefferson! He was surely the greatest, most thorough theorist and exemplar of liberty in our history."

A student sufficiently versed on the subject of Jefferson would be able to write much in response. The student could comment on to what degree Jefferson's ideas were original. While fully and fairly acknowledging Jefferson's contributions to liberty, including the Declaration of Independence, the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and Jefferson's attempt to keep slavery out of the western territories, the student might question how complete was Jefferson's commitment to civil liberties other than religious freedom. The essay could discuss Jefferson as a slaveholder, commenting on the conflict evident in Jefferson's own actions and beliefs.

In applying what you have learned to the questions you may encounter on the exam, you may stress some points more than others and may have a different point of view from other students. But each student is expected to raise and discuss the issues relevant to the question.

As you move through the course, try to imagine possible exam essay topics that would require you to apply your knowledge of western civilization. Perhaps you will even guess the final exam question!

In any case, I encourage you to study hard in order to gain the most benefit from the course. Please note that Self-paced Courses requires you to pass the final exam in order to pass the course. The final exam counts 40 percent of your course grade, while the written assignments count 60 percent.

A Final Word

I hope that this course will prove a beneficial and enjoyable experience for you. Good luck!