

American Studies 228

The Contemporary American: America and the Middle East

“There are some that feel like if they attack us that we may decide to leave prematurely.
They don’t understand what they are talking about if that is the case. Let me finish.
There are some who feel like the conditions are such they can attack us there.
My answer is, bring ‘em on.”

--George W. Bush, when discussing the insurgency in Iraq, July 2, 2003

Fall Semester 2009, Index 24596
Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:55 to 5:15
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Complete syllabus is available on American Studies Website:
<http://amerstudies.rutgers.edu>

Course Synopsis

As we Americans learned from the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasion and occupation of Iraq, the politics and passions of the modern Middle East can no longer be regarded as somehow “over there.” Yet to many Americans that part of the world remains remote and mysterious, a source of fear and terrorism. In this course, we strive to offer a broad picture of the modern Middle East that will help students put the headlines in perspective.

By hearing from many different narrators, we will hopefully learn more about American culture in the period under discussion. We will read, watch, and listen to a variety of academic and popular sources in order to ask broader questions about what it means to be an American in today’s world. Moreover, we will do what intellectuals do: talk, think, and write.

Controversial Material

Some of our books and films deal with mature subject matter that may make some people uncomfortable. Some films may contain nudity, sexual situations, violence, profanity, substance abuse and disturbing images. Students who are able to deal with discomfort for the purpose of learning are welcome in this course. Our kind of college work dealing with contemporary matters frequently entails encounters with ideas that some may view as offensive in some way. We have strived to select materials that offer significant learning opportunities. You should strive to overcome whatever discomfort or confusion you might feel in order to learn as much as you can from the experience. Stretching your mind to make it stronger can be compared to stretching a muscle to make it stronger. Some materials have been included in this course not because I necessarily agree with them but because they offer good learning opportunities.

Course Requirements and Expectations

This is a reading-intensive course. There are required readings for every class meeting, and in most weeks the reading load will be in the range of 100 to 150 pages. Specific page numbers are assigned day by day. You are expected to do the reading for a given day before coming to class so as to be prepared to discuss that reading intelligently. Failure to do the readings will most likely lead to failure on exams and papers. Students who find this reading load excessive might want to seek out other academic pursuits.

There will be a midterm and a final exam. The exams will test your ability to identify key names, places, and phrases from the texts we have read and the documentary films that we have viewed. Regular attendance will be essential to your success in this course.

You are expected to have an active Rutgers email account @eden.rutgers.edu. You should have regular access to the internet. You will be expected to check Sakai several times a week.

Required Texts

The following books are available at the Co-Op Bookstore on the Douglass Campus and at New Jersey Books on Somerset Street on the College Avenue Campus:

1. Robert Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003.
2. Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*. New York: Random House, 2004.
3. John Updike, *Terrorist*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.
4. Noam Chomsky, *Imperialist Ambitions*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2005.
5. Melissa Rossi, *What Every American Should Know About the Middle East*. New York: Plume, 2008.

Film Study

We shall be screening a number of important nonfiction documentary films. We will discuss the cultural contexts for these films (why they were made and what they tell us about the social concerns of the period) and the theoretical questions they raise, including drawing the line between fiction and non-fiction. Most importantly, we will ask the question: Is there such a thing as unbiased presentation? Since the quality of your written work will crucially depend upon first-hand knowledge of each film, we encourage you to view each film twice--once in class and later at the media room of the Douglass Library where the films will be placed on reserve after being shown in class. In addition, use of videotapes or DVD's on your own is encouraged (insofar as the films are available in these formats). Some of these you may wish to purchase or to borrow from your local public library. You should always try to see a film twice, since you pick up many subtleties the second time. In most cases, we will prepare a take-home study guide that will be put online. These study guides may prove useful in preparing for the examinations. They will not be turned in or graded, but they should be answered completely.

Grading

There will be a midterm exam halfway through the course which counts for 40% of your grade and a final exam during the exam period, which counts for 60% of your grade. However, attendance is also a factor. If you need to be absent from class for a legitimate reason, notify me either in advance or with proper documentation after the fact. Beyond this, however, you miss class at your own risk. Note that "legitimate reasons" include medical problems, family emergencies and the like; they do not include broken vehicles, scheduling problems at work, or late trains. Life sometimes does get in the way of attending class, but if you think you may be absent more than two or three times during the semester then it would be better if you took a different course.

Examinations

The midterm covers the first half of the course with a number of objective questions. The final covers the second half of the course. In addition to a number of objective (multiple choice) questions, the final will also give you a chance to write two essays to demonstrate your skill at handling ideas. Attendance at both the midterm and final examinations is mandatory and required. This obligation must have top priority if you expect to receive credit for the course. Be sure to arrange your work schedule and your personal schedule accordingly. If you do not take the

exams, you will not get credit for the course. The exams will be given at the scheduled time only. There are no alternate dates or make-ups. You may be excused only for illness that requires hospitalization or a documented death in your immediate family. Unless there is a drastic emergency of this nature that can be substantiated and documented, we expect you to attend and take the exams on schedule.

In the belief that proper crib preparation is indistinguishable from studying, I have institutionalized and legalized the crib sheet for *both the midterm and the final exams* in this course. You are allowed to use a legal crib sheet. My purpose is to reduce exam anxiety and to encourage good study habits. The rules are as follows:

- @ Both sides of a single 8 1/2" X 11" piece of paper may be used.
- @ Cribs must be written by hand--not typed--and signed.
- @ The crib sheet is to be turned in with the exam.

Extra Credit: Optional Term Paper

This optional extra-credit term paper will be due in class during the next-to-the-last week as indicated in our calendar of assignments. Since the assignment is entirely optional, there will be no need for extensions. If you do not have the paper, you will not be penalized in any way. Writing this paper can only help your final grade and cannot harm you at all.

Papers will be evaluated on their merit--extra credit is not given merely because papers were completed. Papers must be generated on the computer or typewritten. Use Times New Roman in 12-point type with one-inch margins all around. No cover sheet please. Simply type your name, the course name, the instructor's name, and the date, each item on its own line, single-spaced, in the upper right hand corner of page 1. Double space down to the paper's title. Double space thereafter. Follow either the MLA (Modern Language Association) or Chicago Manual of Style guidelines for the manuscript, citations, and works cited (bibliography). Grading will be based on content, organization, development, style, and correctness. Carefully proofread for spelling, typography, punctuation, and grammar.

Successful papers will earn bonus points to be applied to the score on the final exam, after the regular grades are computed. "A" papers get 9 points; "B" papers get 7 points; and "C" papers get 5 points. When bonus points are applied to the final exam, it can make a difference of an entire letter grade. Remember, it is up to you. No one has to do the assignment. However, those who carry it out should find the experience rewarding. We are looking for a 1750 word paper (about 7 typewritten pages) that meets the criteria below. Papers are due at the start of the very last class. Late papers will not be accepted. Papers will be graded and returned to you at the final exam. You have considerable choice of topic for your optional term paper. You may either conduct an interview or write up the results in a coherent essay or you may write a book review.

First Option: Identify someone who has served overseas in either the Afghanistan or Iraq conflicts from 2001 to the present. This person might be a military veteran, a civilian contractor, a translator, or a diplomat. Here you will try to capture recollections of life experiences and of memorable moments. We are interested not only in the veteran's wartime experiences but also in his or her impressions of the Middle East. How did they tell the good guys from the bad guys? Were there any opportunities to meet the people? To win hearts and minds? Or was the entire experience combat oriented? Would your veteran want to return to that country years later as a tourist if peace were to prevail? For additional questions and hints be sure to visit this website:

<http://www.loc.gov/vets/questions.html>

Second Option: Your paper will be a book review of one of the following books:

- Lt. William Keegan, Jr., *Closure: The Untold Story of the Ground Zero Recovery Mission*. New York: Touchstone, 2006.
- Ron Suskind, *The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of its Enemies Since 9/11*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.
- Peter W. Galbraith, *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006.

First paragraph. The first paragraph should mention the name of the author and the book title, and it should contain a brief summary of the book.

Main Body. The main body of your paper (1450 words, about 5 to 6 typewritten pages) should analyze the book. If possible, use one paragraph for each point you want to make about the book. It's a good way to emphasize the importance of the point. You may want to list the main points in your notes before you begin.

Conclusion. Your final paragraph (up to 200 words) should discuss some of the kinds of meanings conveyed by the book. Make sure your review explains how you feel about the book and why, not just what the book is about. A good review should express the reviewer's opinion and persuade the reader to share it, to read the book, or to avoid reading it.

Format. Papers should be word-processed, double spaced, in Times New Roman, 12-point font, and have one-inch margins. Your name and the name of the book you are analyzing should be placed in the upper right-hand corner of your first page. Be sure to place page numbers on each page. Please staple all pages together. Please do not use folders or binders, since they are too bulky.

Sources and Plagiarism. The paper should reflect your own analysis of the film in your own words. I do not expect you to use any outside sources. If you do use any sources for words or ideas, you must give them full credit in footnotes or endnotes. Plagiarism is a serious offense in this course and according to Rutgers University regulations. If you appropriate another person's ideas or words in any manner whether by restatement or direct quotation without acknowledging your source, you will commit plagiarism. The penalties for plagiarism in this course are as follows: a zero on any plagiarized writing, which may result in failure of the course and a report to the dean.

Classroom Etiquette

You should be considerate of your instructors and classmates. For your own benefit you should try to arrive on time for each class. If you are unavoidably late, please enter by the rear door so as not to disrupt everyone else's viewing. Again for your own benefit you should stay for the complete screening of each film. If something comes up such that you must leave early, speak to me about the situation beforehand, and leave by the rear entrance. Please turn off all cell phones, watch alarms and pagers and put them away during class. Please do not use cell phones to send or receive text messages during class. You may use a laptop computer during class only for taking notes in this course. Please do not use your laptop to work on other courses, check your email, or engages in other distracting activities. I reserve the right to forbid laptop usage if it is abused or if it distracts me or other students.

Advising

I will do my best to keep an eye on you and to call you out if I think you look like you need help, but there are a lot of you and just one of me. It is therefore really up to you to come to me if you need help--on anything. I come to class early not just to take attendance but also to be available to talk. I have brief office hours during the break, but we can set up appointments then for longer meetings at mutually convenient times. If you have course conflicts, I can arrange alternate meeting times, just ask. And don't be shy. Advising is part of my job! I am happy to help you with course materials, paper and exam preparation, with planning your future, internships, picking a graduate school, and with navigating the Rutgers bureaucracy. Perhaps, most important, I'm a fairly good listener if you need someone safe to talk to, and I can help you find help if you need it.

Course Schedule

Wed Sept 02	Course Introduction and Review of Geography Introduction to the Middle East Part One, PP Lecture by AKG
Tues Sept 08	Introduction to the Middle East Part Two, PP Lecture by AKG Complete and fill in outline map of the Middle East before class. Read <i>The Crisis of Islam</i> , maps, introduction, pp. 3-63 before class. Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter One, pp. 1-24
Wed Sept 09	History of the Modern Middle East Part One, PP Lecture by AKG Read <i>The Crisis of Islam</i> , pp. 64-112 before class. Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Two Visit Website “Middle East” from Sakai Watch “Inside Islam” on your own before class.
Mon Sept 14	History of the Modern Middle East Part Two, PP Lecture by AKG Read <i>The Crisis of Islam</i> , pp. 113-169 before class. Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Three Visit Website “Understanding Islam” from Sakai
Wed Sept 16	World War I and the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918 Watch “Lawrence of Arabia” (1962) on your own before class. Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Four, pp. 67-113.
Mon Sept 21	Islamic Fundamentalism Part One, Lecture by AKG Read <i>Sleeping with the Devil</i> , prologue and pp. 1-105 before class Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Eight
Wed Sept 23	Islamic Fundamentalism, Part Two, Lecture by AKG Read <i>Sleeping with the Devil</i> , pp. 107-223 before class. Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Nine
Mon Sept 28	Understanding Saudi Arabia, Lecture by AKG Visit Website “Saudi Arabia” from Sakai Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Seven
Wed Sept 30	Understanding Iran, Lecture by AKG Visit Website “Iran” from Sakai Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Six
Mon Oct 05	Understanding Iraq, Lecture by AKG Visit Website “Iraq” from Sakai Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Five
Wed Oct 07	The World Trade Center, Part One In class screening “The World Trade Center: Rise and Fall of an American Icon” Read “Destruction” on Sakai Resources, from Gillespie’s <i>Twin Towers</i> . Read <i>What Every American Should Know</i> , Chapter Ten
Mon Oct 12	The World Trade Center, Part Two In class screening “The World Trade Center: Rise and Fall of an American Icon” Read “Keegan” Chapters 1 and 2 on Sakai Resources from Keegan’s <i>Closure</i> . Watch “Osama Bin Laden: In the Name of Allah” on your own before class.

- Wed Oct 14 Conspiracy Theories, Part One
In class screening “Loose Change: Final Cut” (2007)
Read “Conspiracy Theories” on Sakai Resources from *Time Magazine*.
- Mon Oct 19 Conspiracy Theories, Part Two
In class screening “Loose Change: Final Cut” (2007)
Visit Website “Debunking Myths” from Sakai
- Wed Oct 21 Study Day, No Class Meeting
- Mon Oct 26 Midterm Exam
- Wed Oct 28 Twin Towers, Lecture by AKG
Visit Website “The Faces of 9/11” from Sakai
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter Eleven
- Mon Nov 2 The Events of September 11, 2001
In class screening of “Countdown to Ground Zero” Part One
Read *Imperial Ambitions*, introduction and pp. 1-64 before class.
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter Twelve
Visit Website “Stop War” from Sakai
- Wed Nov 4 The Events of September 11, 2001
In class screening of “Countdown to Ground Zero” Part Two
Read *Imperial Ambitions*, pp. 65-138 before class.
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter Thirteen, pp. 303-322.
Visit Website “Veterans Group” from Sakai
- Mon Nov 09 Chomsky on U.S. Foreign and Domestic Policy, Lecture by AKG
Read *Imperial Ambitions*, pp. 139-201 before class.
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter Fourteen
Visit Website “Noam Chomsky” from Sakai
- Wed Nov 11 United States Foreign Policy
In class screening of “Why We Fight” Part One
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter Fifteen
Visit “Official Army Site” from Sakai
- Mon Nov 16 United States Foreign Policy
In class screening of “Why We Fight” Part Two
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter Sixteen
Visit “Marine Corps Site” from Sakai
- Wed Nov 18 Oil, Terrorism, Money, and Power
Watch “Uncovered: The Whole Truth about the Iraq War” (2004) before class.
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter Seventeen
Watch “Syriana” (2005) on your own before class.
Read John Updike’s *Terrorist*, pp. 3-48 before class
- Mon Nov 23 Al Jazeera and the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM)
In class screening of “Control Room” (2004)
Read John Updike’s *Terrorist*, pp. 49-119 before class
Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter 18
Visit Website “Al Jazeera” from Sakai

- Mon Nov 30 Weapon of Terror
 In class screening of “The Cult of the Suicide Bomber” Part One
 Read John Updike’s *Terrorist*, pp. 120-194
 Read *What Every American Should Know*, Chapter 19
 Visit Website “Suicide Bombing” from Sakai
- Wed Dec 02 Weapon of Terror
 In class screening of “The Cult of the Suicide Bomber” Part Two
 Read John Updike’s *Terrorist*, pp. 195-254
- Mon Dec 07 Understanding John Updike’s Novel, Lecture by AKG
 Read John Updike’s *Terrorist*, pp. 255-310
 Course Evaluations Completed In Class
- Wed Dec 09 Summing Things Up: Where do we go from here? Final Lecture by AKG
 Review for Final Examination. Optional Extra Credit Term Papers Due.

Final Examination is on Tuesday, December 22, from 1:00 to 3:00 pm

Fall Semester Advisory

It is characteristic of life at Rutgers that there are many competing demands for your time and attention. However, you should bear in mind that you and you alone are responsible for keeping up with the assigned work in this course. When the semester ends with the final examination, work for this course is *complete*. Therefore, please be advised that once the course has ended, there will be absolutely, positively no further opportunities for “make up” exams or “extra credit” work to improve your grade. You may not rewrite your papers or take an exam over. Such after-the-fact activities are manifestly unfair to those in the course who have done the work all along. The time to work on this course is *now*, not after the class has been brought to a conclusion.