History of World Civilizations to 1500

If Justice Learned Hand was correct when he asserted that history is the cornerstone of a liberal education, the basic survey of World Civilization must certainly be one of the most essential studies which you undertake as an undergraduate. It will introduce you to the major ideas and events which have shaped human society, thereby helping you appreciate and evaluate your own life and culture. Studying world civilizations should also help you understand how humanity has interpreted its relationship with deity and the nature of its physical environment. It also has much to say about how social and political organizations emerged and why they underwent transformation.

Required books for the course, available at the Bookstore, include:


On Learning Suite, there are also a number of documents that we will read and discuss during the semester. I will try to integrate them into the syllabus over the next couple of weeks, but at present you will have to access them through “Content” on Learning Suite.

Classes will proceed through a combination of lecture and analysis/discussion of the primary texts. At times my lectures will accompany what you have read in the textbook; on other occasions I shall focus on a related topic. In other words, you cannot depend upon the lectures to replicate what you are assigned to read in the book. This makes it crucial that you stay current with the assigned reading. In particular we will not be able to analyze together the readings if you have not completed them.

Grades for the course will be calculated on the following basis:

- two mid-term exams 40%
- paper one 10
- paper two 20
- final examination 30

Examinations will have both a matching and/or multiple-choice component plus an essay section. You need to have a blue book or writing paper for the exams. The two short papers will be graded on the quality of both the historical analysis and its organization and writing. I also reserve the right to give unannounced reading quizzes if I perceive that you are not reading the assignments. If these become necessary, they will count 10% toward the final grade, with the other assignments and examinations reduced proportionately.
A word about attendance: I will not take roll, but let me forewarn you that I have found a very high correlation in my courses between those who do poorly and those whose attendance is irregular. I therefore encourage you to come to class, prepared.

The schedule below lists the dates when papers are due and when examinations will be given. Please respect those dates. Late papers will be penalized a grade for each day they are tardy. I will give make-up exams only under extraordinary circumstances. If a serious illness or accident should prevent you from taking a scheduled exam, please communicate your absence to me or the departmental secretary (422-4335) immediately.

The Study of History

The overall purpose of the study of history is to educate students in how human societies change over time: in daily lives; through commerce; in response to crisis; and in interaction with other cultures in order to prepare them to understand and appropriately analyze their world in a manner that spiritually strengthens each student.

Students successfully completing a history major should demonstrate a range of critical thinking skills and abilities. They should also possess a command of the key historical terms and have the ability to identify and solve fundamental historical problems through primary and secondary source research. By the end of the program, students should produce work that is clear, precise and well-written. Such skills and abilities will serve them well in their lives and future careers.

In terms of careers, the program is designed for the student who desires the broad educational background for entrance into professions such as law, government service, or business, or who wants a liberal arts education. History can also be valuable training for someone who plans to teach. Moreover, in recognition of the broad range of uses to which historical education can be put, the field of public history has emerged in recent years.

Expected Learning Outcomes

- Demonstrate a basic geographical knowledge of the world, and more importantly, develop the ability to discuss how geographical and environmental realities, as well as cross-regional interactions, have impacted historical development

- Be able to identify major societies of the pre-1500 C.E. era and make historical comparisons between them, in regard to political systems, trade and economics, social structures, religious beliefs, and gender roles

- Gain an appreciation of influential cultural works produced in a variety of pre-modern societies and through them come to a clearer understanding of the fundamental values held by past peoples—including, how they understood the natural world, what it meant to be human, and their relationship with the divine.

- Be able to analyze historical questions and issues clearly, assess historical information accurately, and distinguish between questionable and valid historical assertions
• Be able to read, analyze, and discuss both primary and secondary source documents dealing with world history (pre-1500 C.E.).

• Improve the clarity and grace of analytical writing.

• Recognize and be able to apply the tools necessary for a lifelong appreciation of the study of world history.

Other Matters

Of course, I also expect the course to proceed under the principles contained in the University Honor code, including its provisions regarding dress and grooming standards. Honesty is essential, and cheating and plagiarism are intolerable. While all students sign the honor code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See www.byu.edu/honorcode for specific examples of intentional and inadvertent plagiarism, fabrication, and falsification. In keeping with the Honor Code, we also need to treat each other and the cultures we are studying with the respect and dignity we would like to receive.

Sex Discrimination: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU’s policy against sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

Students with Disabilities: Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the Services for Students with Disabilities Office (422-2767). Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified documented disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895, D282 ASB.

Tentative class schedule and reading assignments:

Aug.  27:   Introduction

29:   The Neolithic Revolution and Civilization

*Earth and Its Peoples*, chapter 1

Questions for discussion:

• What is a civilization?
• Where and why did the first civilizations evolve?
• What is the relationship between creation myths and the historical past?
• What was the Neolithic or agricultural revolution?

31: Why did civilization develop more rapidly in some regions?
Diamond, article on Learning Suite

Sept. 5: First River-Valley Civilizations: Mesopotamia
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 2
Learning Suite: “Epic of Gilgamesh” and “Code of Hammurabi”
Questions for discussion:
• What was the impact of geography on Mesopotamian civilization?
• What does the “Epic of Gilgamesh” tell us about that society’s perception of the gods?
• What are the basic assumptions and principles underlying the “Code of Hammurabi?”
• What were the most important achievements of ancient Mesopotamia?

7: First River Valley Civilizations: Egypt, Indus River
Learning Suite: “Hymn to the Nile” and “Lansing Papyrus”
Questions for discussion:
• How does the “Hymn to the Nile” differ from what an inhabitant of ancient Sumer might have written about the Tigris or Euphrates?
• How did the Egyptians’ view of the world as a series of recurrent cycles affect their beliefs about human life?
• What were the differences between the Egyptian pharaoh and the Mesopotamian king?

10: Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Hemisphere: Early China
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 3
Learning Suite: “Mandate of Heaven”
Questions for discussion:
• How did the geographic regions of China affect the civilization that evolved there?
• Which dynasty, Shang or Zhou, had the greater impact on later Chinese civilization?
• What was the Mandate of Heaven?
• How did the concept of yin and yang reflect Chinese understanding of social relationships?

12: Late Bronze Age in the Eastern Hemisphere: The Middle East and Aegean
Learning Suite: Book of the Dead
Questions for discussion:
• Why is the late Bronze Age in the Middle East referred to as a “cosmopolitan” era?
• What was the lasting importance of Amenhotep IV (also called Akhenaten)?
• Judging from the “Book of the Dead,” how had Egyptian religion changed?
• Why was iron smelting a significant development?
• Which seems preferable for the evolution of a civilization: isolation or cosmopolitanism?

14: Early Iron Age in Western Eurasia: Assyria
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 4
Questions for discussion:
• How did their conquests benefit the Assyrians? Hurt them?
• How did the Assyrians integrate conquered peoples into the empire and with what success?
• Why was there so much conflict and warfare in the ancient Middle East?

17: Early Iron Age in Western Eurasia: Israel, Phoenecia
Reading: browse Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus
Questions for discussion:
• What were the key events in Israelite history?
• Was nomadism or settled existence preferable for the Israelites?
• Why did the Israelites organize themselves under a monarch?
• What were the achievements and liabilities of David and Solomon?
• How did Phoenecia influence the eastern Mediterranean?

PAPER 1: Both the Code of Hammurabi and the excerpts from the Old Testament give laws and commandments regarding how people should live in society, yet the laws, rewards, and punishments are often quite different. In a short essay of two or three double-spaced pages, compare and contrast the two law codes and explain the reasons for the similarities and differences between them. Base your essay on information contained in The Earth and Its Peoples, the Code of Hammurabi; and from Old Testament, particularly Exodus 19-21 and Leviticus.

19: Persia
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 5
Questions for discussion:
• How did the organization of the Persian empire contribute to its success?
• How did Zoroastrianism differ from Christianity, Judaism, or Islam?

21: Rise of the Greeks
Learning Suite: *Theogony*, by Hesiod
Questions for discussion:
• How did Greek religion differ from Zoroastrianism?
• What was Greek society like?
• Why was Odysseus a hero to the Greeks?
• What types of behavior did the Greeks admire?

24: Greeks
Learning Suite: Sparta by Lycurgus
Learning Suite: Plato, excerpts concerning the death of Socrates
Questions for discussion:
• What were major differences between Sparta and Athens? Similarities?
• What advantages and liabilities did slavery impose on Greek culture?
• What were the advantages and drawbacks to Athenian democracy?
• Why did Persia invade Greece?
• Why is Herodotus considered the father of history?
• What is the difference between history and chronicle?
• Why was the navy key to Athens’s power?

26: Greeks
Questions for discussion:
• How did Greek interest in the natural world lead to philosophical inquiry into social and political ethics?
• What does the “Allegory of the Cave” mean?
• What does it tell us about Plato’s view of humanity?
• What did Plato think should be the best form of social and political organization?

28: Alexander the Great
Learning Suite: Plutarch on Alexander the Great
Questions for discussion:
• What made Alexander a great military leader?
• What legacy did he leave?

Oct. 1: The Hellenistic Synthesis
• What were the similarities and differences between stoicism, Epicureanism, skepticism, and cynicism?
• What happened to the Hellenic world to produce such philosophies?
• What were the main differences between Hellenic and Hellenistic culture?
• What was the legacy of Persia? Greece? Macedonia?

3: Examination

5: Rise of Rome
   *Earth and Its Peoples*, chapter 6
   Questions for discussion:
   • What was the nature of the Roman Republic?
   • Compare Roman and Chinese views regarding the family.
   • Who were the Carthaginians and why did they threaten Rome?

8: Imperial Rome
   Learning Suite: excerpts from Polybius and Suetonius
   Questions for discussion:
   • Describe Julius Caesar
   • What crucial role did Octavian play in Roman history?

10: Imperial Rome
   Learning Suite: excerpt from Juvenal
   Learning Suite: Epictetus
   Questions for discussion:
   • What factors contributed to Rome’s decline?
   • In what ways did the traits that led to Roman grandeur also lead to its fall?
   • How effective were Diocletian’s efforts to strengthen the empire?
   • What effect did Christianity have on Rome?

12: No Class

15: Origins of Imperial China
   Learning Suite: excerpts from the Analects of Confucius
   Learning Suite: excerpts from Tao Te Ching
   Learning Suite: Lessons for Chinese Women
   Questions to discuss?
   • In what ways did the Roman and Chinese empires grow?
   • What traits did the empires share?
   • Which do you think was the most successful of the empires?
   • In what ways did these early empires affect later civilization?
   • What were some of the advantages and disadvantages of being ruled by the dominating cultures of the Romans and Chinese?

17: Foundations of Indian Civilization
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 7
Learning Suite: excerpt from Rig Veda
Questions for discussion:
- How did the geography of the Indian sub-continent affect the region’s culture and history?
- How did India establish its political and social systems?

19: India
Learning Suite: excerpts from Laws of Manu and Bhagavad Gita
Questions for discussion:
- What were the main characteristics of Vedic religion?
- What was the role of women during the Vedic period?
- How did trade routes influence India’s society and its economic system?
- What were varnas?
- Given their religious views, how important was history to Indians?

22: Rise of Buddhism
Learning Suite: Enlightenment of the Buddha
Learning Suite: excerpts from Foundation of the Kingdom of Righteousness and Dhammapada
Questions for discussion:
- How did Buddhism emerge from Vedic religion?
- What were the principal tenets of Buddhism, and how did it differ from Vedic religion?
- What sort of individual would have found Jainism or Buddhism attractive?

24: Rise of Buddhism and the Mauryan Empire
Diamond, “Part Four: Around the World in Five Chapters”
Learning Suite: Rock and Pillar Edicts of Ashoka
Questions for discussion:
- Who was Ashoka?
- How practical is it to use religion as a basis for government?
- What are the advantages of religious government? The disadvantages?

26: Expanding Networks of Communication and Exchange: Asia and the Sahara
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 8
Questions for discussion:
- Where was the Silk Road? Why was it important?
- Why was it necessary to breed hybrid camels?
- How were traders in the Indian Ocean different from those in the Mediterranean?
• How did northern Saharan traders differ from those south of the Sahara?

29: The spread of Christianity and Buddhism
Learning Suite: Josephus on Jesus
Questions for discussion:
• In what ways was the Silk Road more than a commercial route?
• How did commercial networks influence the spread of Buddhism and Christianity?
• What characteristics of a religion make it exportable?

31: The Emergence of Christian Europe
Questions for discussion:
• In what ways was Christianity like Zoroastrianism and Mithraism? Different?
• What accounts for the successful spread of Christianity in the Mediterranean world?
• Who were the early Church fathers and what did the contribute?

Nov. 2: Byzantine Empire and the Western Church
Learning Suite: excerpt from St. Augustine, *The Enchiridion*; and from *Rule of St. Benedict*
Questions for discussion:
• In what ways did the Byzantine empire continue the legacy of Rome?
• How did Augustine understand conversion?
• What are the implications of that understanding?

5: Mohammed and the Rise of Islam
*Earth and Its Peoples*, chapter 9
Questions for discussion:
• How did Islam emerge?
• How did its emergence affect the Arabian peninsula?
• Why is Mecca so important to Islam?
• What happened during Mohammed’s “Night of Power and Excellence”?
• What are the five pillars of Islam?

7: The Spread of Islam
Learning Suite: Hadith on Jihad
Questions for discussion:
• What is the *umma*?
• How did the *umma* grow?
• What are the backgrounds of the Shi’ites, Sunnis, and Kharijites?
• Why did Islam become politically fragmented? Was that fragmentation positive or negative in religious terms?
• What did Muhammed teach about holy war? In what ways was jihad similar to the Christian crusade? Different?

9:  Examination

12:  Feudalism and Europe

   *Earth and Its Peoples*, chapter 10

   Learning Suite: excerpts from Einhard; Magna Carta

   Questions for discussion:
   • How did Catholicism influence Western European civilization?
   • Did Charlemagne play a pivotal role in European history?
   • How did technological developments influence Europe?
   • How did feudalism and manorialism answer the challenges faced by early medieval Europe?
   • How did feudal society change once Western European society began to revive and grow?
   • Why did feudal manors become obsolete?
   • What was the Magna Carta and what political principles did it establish?

14:  T’ang and Song China

   *Earth and Its Peoples*, chapter 11

   Questions for discussion:
   • How did China flourish under a restored empire?
   • Which achievements of the T’ang and/or Song empires were most long-lasting?
   • What was the structure of Chinese society?
   • How did Chinese culture influence Korea and Japan?
   • In what ways did Japan develop independently of Chinese influence?
   • How did footbinding reflect Chinese culture?

16:  Peoples of the Americas: Olmecs and Mayas

   *Earth and Its Peoples*, section of chapter 3, chapter 12

   Questions for discussion:
   • What were the main geographic and cultural regions of indigenous America?
   • By what measures were the Mayas “civilized”?
   • Why was time-keeping so important to the Mayas?

19:  Rise of the Aztecs

   Learning Suite: “The Birth of Huitzilopochtli”
Questions for discussion:
- How did religion influence the emergence of Aztec power?
- How does the myth of about the birth of Huitzilopochtli help us understand the warlike nature of the Aztecs?
- Did the Aztecs perform human sacrifice for political or religious reasons?
- PAPER 2 due: Write a five-page, doubled spaced research paper on a topic that is cross cultural. In other words, pose a question that pertains to at least two different pre-1500 c.e. civilizations (i.e., Aztec and Chinese, or European and Muslim). Attempt to use at least one primary source for each civilization. It should include footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography. Make sure to include a strong thesis statement that will present the argument you are going to make in your paper.

20: No Class

26: Peoples of the Americas: Incas
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 13
Questions for discussion:
- How did Andean geography affect agricultural and social developments there?
- How did the mit’a form of labor organization work?
- Why was Andean culture so communitarian rather than individualistic?

28: Eurasia, 1200-1500: Muslims and Mongols
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 14
Learning Suite: Foot-binding
Questions for discussion:
- To what extent can destroyers also be builders?
- What effect did the horse have on Mongol culture?
- In what ways was the year 1241 crucial to both Europeans and Mongols?
- In what ways were the Mongols a “civilizing” agent?
- In what ways did the Mongols transform China?
- How did the Mongols handle technological innovations, compared with the successors, the Ming dynasty?
- What led to the downfall of Mongol rule in China?
- Why were the Mongols more successful in attacking China than Japan?
- Why did foot-binding become a cultural norm in China?

30: Western Europe in Crisis: the Black Death
Questions for discussion:

- What were the causes of conflict between the European monarchs and the papacy?
- What impact did the bubonic plague have on Europe? Was it similar to or different from other virgin-soil epidemics?
- What were the most important technological innovations of the late Middle Ages?

3: Cultural Achievement of the Late Medieval West
Learning Suite: excerpt from Aquinas
Questions for discussion:

- Which is a superior guide: faith or reason?
- In dealing with other cultures and religions, what was the record of Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians?
- What social and political effects did the increase in trade have on Europe?

5: Rise of the New European Monarchies
Earth and Its Peoples, chapter 17
Questions for discussion:

- What drove Ming, Islamic, and European expansion?
- What cultural assumptions and attitudes characterized such expansionism?
- In what ways was Columbus simply adding to a process of globalization that was already under way?
- What were Columbus’s objectives?
- Is it possible to talk about globalization before 1492?

Final Examination: will be taken in the Testing Center anytime during finals week