

*Modern History of the Middle East and North Africa*

**Professor:** Adey Almohsen, PhD  
**Location:** Humanities & Social Studies Center N2116  
**Meetings:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00–3:50 pm  
**Office hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 4:00–5:20 pm (N3158 HSSC)

**Course description:**

The region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is home to a diversity of peoples, ideas, cultures, religions, languages, literatures, and stories. The region as we know it today is the product of successive dynasties, empires, coups, and revolutions. This class offers a survey of the modern MENA

region, exploring aspects of its political history, social history, gender history, economic history, and intellectual history. Given that this is an introductory course taught over one semester, we will focus on the Arabic-speaking nations of the MENA region alongside major examples from Iran, Turkey, and Afghanistan. The course covers a period of two centuries and proceeds chronologically, beginning with the fissure of the Ottoman Empire along the nineteenth century and closing on the eve of the 9/11 attacks in New York. Along this chronology, we will inspect thematic concepts such as orientalism, imperialism, and nationalism among others. Moreover, we will learn how history is read and interpreted. We will read primary sources in the form of treaties, memoirs, or newspaper clippings alongside (or against) secondary sources and academic studies. Foreign sources from diplomats or imperial officers will be considered, however, the course will privilege sources by the women and men of the MENA region, examining their views on local events and developments.

**Course aims:**

- ✓ Understanding the political, social, and cultural forces and trends that shaped MENA history.
- ✓ Connecting historical knowledge to present-day issues and contexts in a critical manner.
- ✓ Appreciating the nuances of historical events through primary sources.
- ✓ Demonstrating the importance of interdisciplinary sources for historical study.
- ✓ Deconstructing narratives about MENA and its peoples through critical historical analyses.
- ✓ Learning how to work productively in small groups to develop an argument.
- ✓ Engaging meaningfully in the classroom with the instructor and with peers.
- ✓ Conducting sound historical analysis by deferring to a mix of primary and secondary sources.

**Grade breakdown:**

<i>Attendance and participation</i>	10%
<i>Map quiz</i>	5%
<i>Primary source exercise (in-class presentation + report of 500–800 words)</i>	15%
<i>Response to readings (600–1,000 words)</i>	20% (twice)
<i>Film review (600–1,000 words)</i>	10%
<i>Manifesto exercise (600–1,000 words)</i>	10%
<i>Final essay: Mini research paper OR long-form book review (2,000–3,000)</i>	30%

**Important dates:**

Sep. 8	Map quiz
Oct. 4	Primary source exercise presentation (Report due: Oct. 6, 10 pm)
Nov. 6	Deadline to choose topic of or book for final essay (10 pm)
Nov. 20	Manifesto due (10 pm)
Dec. 16	Final essay due (10 pm)

**Readings:**

Assigned readings at about a 100 pages per week (actual weekly load fluctuates and the total number of pages to be read per class session is indicated). You are required to prepare and study readings **highlighted in yellow**. Suggested readings are not mandatory, however, they will be discussed during the class’s lecture component. The course requires one text (Rogan, 2017) to cut down student costs. Other readings and sources could be found on the course’s [OneDrive](#) or hyperlinked in the syllabus.

**Anthologies and websites for MENA primary sources:**

- ✓ Amin et al., *The Modern Middle East: A Sourcebook for History* (Oxford, 2006).
- ✓ Clancy-Smith & Smith, *Modern Middle East and North Africa: History in Documents* (Oxford, 2013).
- ✓ Khater, *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East* (Boston, 2011).
- ✓ Lenssen et al., *Modern Art in the Arab World: Primary Documents* (New York, 2018).
- ✓ “[Internet Islamic History Sourcebook](#),” Fordham University.
- ✓ “[The Middle East 1916-2001: A Documentary Record](#),” Yale University Law Library.
- ✓ A comprehensive primary source guide prepared by the [University of Washington Libraries](#).

**Attendance and participation (10%):**

Attendance is the difference between failing a class and excelling in it. In the lectures, I will advance insights that go beyond assigned readings. I will also contextualize arguments raised by the different authors and relate them to the contemporary. In addition, student discussions advance perspectives that cannot be gained by a basic reading of assigned texts. I am aware that some students are less shy than others, therefore, this grade is geared more toward showing up to class, taking notes, and being attentive as opposed to mere verbal participation—although the latter is encouraged.

**Map quiz (5%):**

It is crucial to know where the different countries and capitals mentioned in this course are located geographically. Familiarize yourself with the map of the modern Middle East and North Africa and be sure to differentiate between Iraq and Iran, or between Libya’s Tripoli and Lebanon’s Tripoli.

**Response to readings (2 x 10%):**

This is an individual assignment. In the first week, students will choose two class sessions ([a sign-up sheet](#) of eligible class sessions could be found on OneDrive) to respond to their readings in 600 to 1,000 words. Your response will try to synthesize the main theses of the different readings and offer a brief reflection on how they come together and complicate our understanding of the history of the modern Middle East and North Africa. Responses are due before their respective class session, that is 1:59 pm on the day of class. Late submissions will not be accepted.

**Primary source exercise (15%):**

This is a group assignment to take place on Oct. 4. Students will be divided into teams and tasked to read and analyze a set of primary source documents curated by the instructor. Teams will convert their reading and analysis of the sources into a class presentation (10–12 minutes), offering an overview of the reading, its author, its context, and its audience coupled with a thoughtful response to a question posed by the instructor related to the primary source. Team presentations are to be converted into a report (500–800 words), which summarizes their analysis of the source and responds to the instructor’s question. Team reports to be submitted Oct. 6, 10 pm.

**Manifesto (10%):**

This is an individual assignment. You will be tasked to take the position of a thinker, political party, or terrorist organization—real or imagined. You will produce a text of 600–1,000 words which lays out the thought of your chosen individual or group in a language that is historically accurate, ideologically coherent, and philosophically relevant to the worldview of your chosen individual or group.

**Film review (10%):**

This is an individual assignment. History is not simply tedious records. History is, equally, arts, literature, and music. And not unlike film, history is an attempt to register and narrate aspects of the human (and, for some historians, the non-human) experience in its creativity, arbitrariness, tragedy, and absurdity. With this in mind, students will choose to write a film review of 600–1,000 words. During the semester, we will view five films across four class sessions: 9/29, 11/3, 11/17, and 12/8. The review is not meant to summarize the film but rather to analyze it and make sense of how its plot and artistic elements relate to one or more of the themes/topics covered in class and in the readings. Although all five films will be viewed in-class, you need to pick *one* to review. Indicate your choice of film in this [sign-up sheet](#). The written assignment is due eight days after the film viewing. Thus, depending on your choice of film, deadlines are as follow: 10/7, 11/11, 11/25, or 12/16 by 10 pm.

**Final essay (30%):**

By Oct. 16, I will post to OneDrive a prompt for the final essay and a list of books. During the weeks of Oct. 24 and Oct. 31, students will meet the instructor during mandatory office hours to discuss a topic they would inspect more deeply in research, or a book or two they would review critically. Students will inform the instructor of their choice of topic or book(s) as well as of their main argument in an e-mail correspondence by Nov. 6, 10 pm. For the mini research paper option, students can choose a topic covered in class or from a specific reading and explore it farther by relying on a sample

of primary and secondary sources. For the book review option, students will choose a book or two they are interested in and review it thoughtfully and analytically akin to the style of the [New York Review of Books](#) or [London Review of Books](#). Final essays (1,800–3,000 words) are due on Dec. 16, 5 pm.

**Class decorum and absences:**

Deadlines are *final*. Failure to submit an assignment on time equals failure in the assignment (i.e., a grade of zero). Missing 4 sessions (of the total 26) without a legitimate excuse will result in a zero grade for attendance. Missing 5 or more sessions will result in failing the course altogether. Accommodations will be made for students' needs (cultural, personal, or otherwise) and for dire or special circumstances upon contacting and informing the instructor. Recurring episodes of lateness or unexcused absence, however, will not be tolerated. Note that an excused absence is usually one that you have arranged with me well in advance, not *post facto*.

**Communication:**

You can always contact me by e-mail, and I will try to respond within a reasonable timeframe. That said, I do not necessarily read e-mails after 5 pm or on weekends unless the matter is of legitimate urgency.

**Writing assistance:**

Instructors do not proofread papers, but they can teach you how to edit your work effectively. Grinnell College's [Writing, Reading, and Speaking Center](#) supports students working on papers, projects, and presentations, as well as job and internship applications. In one-on-one sessions, students work with professional instructors to interpret readings, talk through ideas, choose and analyze evidence, develop and organize arguments, craft introductions and conclusions, organize and revise whole drafts, plan presentations, and more.

**Academic difficulty and advising:**

College academics are demanding. Thus, it is normal to face some trouble from time to time. If you are experiencing difficulty—academic or personal—in this class or any class, I encourage you to get in touch with me or with your advisor. We can help you take advantage of the different support resources Grinnell has to resolve problems you may be experiencing during the semester.

**Honor policy:**

Grinnell College's academic honesty policy is to be found in the [Student Handbook](#). It is expected that students are aware of the tasks and demands expressed in this policy and adhere to them.

**Accommodations:**

I strive to create an inclusive classroom. Thus, I invite students to approach me about their learning needs and I encourage students with disabilities to talk to me and disclose what accommodations would be necessary. Students with disabilities should likewise approach and discuss their needs with Grinnell College's [Accessibility and Disability Services](#).

## Week I: Introduction

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**Thu. Aug. 25, 2022**

(6 pages)

- Clancy-Smith and Smith, *The Modern Middle East and North Africa: A History in Documents* (Oxford, 2013): viii-xi.
- Worksheet on primary and secondary sources.

## Week II: So, What Exactly is the Middle East?

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*The course opens with a ‘pre-history’ of the modern MENA region, surveying the region’s past since antiquity into the rise of Christianity and later Islam and its successive dynasties. We will also consider the following question: how did the geographic neighbors of the Middle East and North Africa conceive of them in civilizational terms? Was the MENA region—in its complexity—reduced to the ‘other’ of a European self?*

**Tue. Aug. 30, 2022**

(37 pages)

- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 1–17.
- Gasper, “Why Can’t You Find the Middle East on a Map?” in *Understanding and Teaching the Modern Middle East*, ed. El Shakry (Madison, 2020): 15–34.
- [Suggested] Khalidi, “The ‘Middle East’ as a Framework for Analysis: Re-Mapping a Region in the Era of Globalization,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 18 (1998): 74–80.

**Thu. Sep. 1, 2022**

(49 pages)

- Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism* (Cambridge, 2009): 8-37.
- Anjum, “The Legacy of Islam in the Modern Middle East,” ed. El Shakry: 49–67.

## Week III: The ‘Orient’ as a Subject and Object of Knowledge

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*This week we will critically explore the history of orientalism, i.e., the academic field dedicated to the study of the MENA region, its cultures, literatures, and religions. We will do so through a focus on the theorizations of Palestinian-American academic Edward Said and assess the debates his 1978 book stirred on either side of the Atlantic.*

**Tue. Sep. 6, 2022**

(65 pages)

- Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978): 1–28.
- Lewis, “The Question of Orientalism,” *The New York Review of Books* (Jun. 1982).
- Hourani, “The Road to Morocco,” *The New York Review of Books* (Mar. 1979).
- al-‘Azm, “Orientalism and Orientalism in Reverse [1981],” in *Orientalism: A Reader*, ed. Macfie (Edinburgh, 2000): 217–22, 230–8.
- [Suggested] Lewis and Said, “The MESA Debate: The Scholars, the Media, and the Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16 (1987): 85–104.

**Thu. Sep. 8, 2022**

(47 pages)

**Map quiz (5%)**

- Halliday, “Orientalism and its Critics,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20 (1993): 145–63.
- Chibber, “Orientalism and Its Afterlives,” *Catalyst: A Journal of Theory and Strategy* 4 (2020).
- Hafez, “Edward Said’s Intellectual Legacy in the Arab World,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33 (2004): 76–90.
- [Suggested] Brennan, “The Making of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Mar. 2021).
- [Suggested] Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” *American Anthropologist* 104 (2002): 783–90.
- [Suggested] Amel, “Is the Heart for the East and Reason for the West? On Marx in Edward Said’s *Orientalism*,” *Critical Times* 4 (2021): 481–500.

## **Week IV: Modernities**

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*Here, our historical survey resumes, picking up around the late nineteenth century, where we will see how different parts of the MENA region responded to the challenges posed by European (colonial) modernity.*

**Tue. Sep. 13, 2022**

(46 pages)

- Pursley, “Colonialism, Empire, and Nationalist Movements,” ed. El Shakry: 68–84.
- Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (Basic Books, 2017): 61–83.
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 24–29 [primary source: *Napoleon versus ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Jabartī*].

**Thu. Sep. 15, 2022**

(60 pages)

- Rogan: 85–108.
- Keddie and Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven, 2006): 22–57.

Sep. 18: Prompts for the film review assignment and primary source exercise uploaded to OneDrive

## **Week V: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Indigenous Thought**

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*We will discuss the legacy of European colonial rule in North Africa and the Middle East into the early twentieth century, studying indigenous reactions and the budding of nationalist thought and anti-colonial movements.*

**Tue. Sep. 20, 2022**

(53 pages)

- Rogan: 109–46.
- Keddie and Richard: 58–72.

**Thu. Sep. 22, 2022**

(69 pages)

- Di-Capua, “Nahda: The Arab Project of Enlightenment,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Arab Culture*, ed. Reynolds (Cambridge, 2015): 54–74.
- Fleischmann, “The Other ‘Awakening:’ The Emergence of Women’s Movements in the Modern Middle East 1900–40,” in *Globalizing Feminisms 1789–1945*, ed. Offen (London, 2010): 89–122.
- Auji, “Neither Good, Fast, Nor Cheap: Challenges of Early Arabic Letterpress Printing.” *American Printing History Association* (Oct. 2017).
- [Suggested] Bashkin, “The Colonized Semites and the Infectious Disease: Theorizing and Narrativizing Anti-Semitism in the Levant 1870–1914,” *Critical Inquiry* 47 (2021): 189–217.
- [Suggested] Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London, 2013): 279–314.

**Weeks VI, VII, and VIII: Creating Borders ... Displacing Peoples**

*These three weeks will focus on the precursors and causes of the First World War as well as its brutal outcomes in the MENA region: from genocide in Anatolia to the formation of the British and French mandates.*

**Tue. Sep. 27, 2022**

(68 pages)

**Class trip to Grinnell College Archives, Burling Library**

- Shirinian, “The Background to the Late Ottoman Genocides,” in *Genocide in the Ottoman Empire: Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks 1913–23*, ed. Shirinian (New York, 2017): 19–81.
- Kaiser, “Grinnell’s Connection to the Armenian Genocide,” *Grinnell Stories*, August 4, 2015.
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 109–113 [primary source: *The Armenian Question*].
- [Suggested] Bloxham, “Determinants of the Armenian Genocide,” in *Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, 2003): 23–50.
- [Suggested] Dolbee, “The Desert at the End of Empire: An Environmental History of the Armenian Genocide,” *Past and Present* 247 (2020): 197–233.

**Thu. Sep. 29, 2022**

- [Film viewing] Abu Nowar, *Theeb*, Jordan (2014).

**Tue. Oct. 4, 2022**

(~12 pages per team)

**In-class teamwork primary source exercise (15%)**

- Selections from the works of: Rifā‘ah aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī (1801–73), Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq (1805–87), Muḥammad ‘Abdū (1849–1905), Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (1854–1902), Esther Moyal al-Azhari (1874–1948), and May Zyādeh (1886–1941).

**Thu. Oct. 6, 2022**

(47 pages)

- Rogan: 147–74.
- Keddie and Richard: 73–88.
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 54–6 [primary source: *Iranian oil concessions*].

**Tue. Oct. 11, 2022**

(82 pages)

- Rogan, 175–210.
- Arsan, “Versailles: Arab Desires, Arab Futures,” *Public Books* (Jan. 2021).
- Makdisi, “Ottoman Cosmopolitanism and the Myth of the Sectarian Middle East,” *Aeon* (Oct. 2019).
- Clancy-Smith and Smith: 113–20 [*primary source: ‘Promises, Promises’*].
- Anderson, “The Egyptian Labor Corps: Workers, Peasants, and the State in World War I,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017): 5–24.

**Thu. Oct. 13, 2022**

- No class meeting

Oct. 16: Prompt for final essay uploaded to OneDrive

## **Week IX: Fall Break**

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**Tue. Oct 18, 2022**

- No class meeting

**Thu. Oct. 20, 2022**

- No class meeting

## **Weeks X and XI: Before and After the Second World War**

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*These two weeks investigate the interwar years in the Middle East and North Africa, trace the origins of the conflict between Arab and Jew in British Palestine, and explore how the Second World War played out across the region.*

**Tue. Oct. 25, 2022**

(57 pages)

- Rogan, 211–246.
- Kozma, “Women’s Migration for Prostitution in the Interwar Middle East and North Africa,” *Journal of Women’s History* 28 (2016): 93–113.

**Thu. Oct. 27, 2022**

(55 pages)

- Rogan: 247–76.
- Wildangel, “More than the Mufti: Other Arab-Palestinian Voices on Nazi Germany, 1933–45, and their Postwar Narrations,” in *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion*, ed. Gershoni (Austin, 2014): 101–25.
- [Suggested] Schroeter, “Philo-Sephardism, Antisemitism, and Arab Nationalism: Muslims and Jews in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco during the Period of the Third Reich,” in *Nazism, the Holocaust, and the Middle East*, eds. Nicosia & Ergene (New York, 2018): 179-215.

Oct. 30: Prompt for manifesto assignment uploaded to OneDrive



**Tue. Nov. 1, 2022**

(86 pages)

- Rogan: 277–318.
- Keddie and Richard: 88–131.

**Thu. Nov. 3, 2022**

- [Film viewing] Pontecorvo, *The Battle of Algiers*, Italy (1966).

Nov. 6, 10 pm: Confirm choice of book(s) or topic for final essay + main argument in e-mail

**Weeks XII and XIII: An Intellectual History of the Long Sixties**

*These two weeks will examine the three-decade period between 1945 and 1975—or the so-called ‘long sixties’—in the MENA region through the lens of intellectual history. The end of the Second World War and the establishment of Israel unleashed a wave of social, political, and cultural critiques. Many thinkers hoped for liberation from both the bonds of imperial legacy and the tyrannies of the present. Likewise, Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War stirred major intellectual and political strife, giving rise to a new left as well as a defiant Palestinian national movement.*

**Tue. Nov. 8, 2022:**

(68 pages)

- Rogan: 319–54.
- Takriti, “Colonial Coups and the War on Popular Sovereignty,” *AHR* 124: 878–909.
- [Suggested] al-Rashoud, “From Muscat to the Maghreb: Pan-Arab Networks, Anti-Colonial Groups, and Kuwait’s Arab Scholarships 1953-61,” *Arabian Humanities* (2019): 1–20.
- [Suggested] Chalcraft, “National Independence, Guerrilla War, and Social Revolution 1952–76,” in *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge, 2016): 312–92.

**Thu. Nov. 10, 2022:**

(52 pages)

- Di-Capua, “Palestine Comes to Paris: The Global Sixties and the Making of a Universal Cause,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 50 (2020): 19–37.
- [primary source] Malhas, *Arab Women: Liars, Hypocrites, Losers* (Beirut, 1966).
- [primary source] Kanafani, “Thoughts on Change and the ‘Blind Language,’” tr. Harlow and Yaziji, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (1990): 137–57.
- Said, “The Arab Portrayed,” in *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective*, ed. Abu-Lughod, (Evanston, 1970): 1–9.

**Tue. Nov. 15, 2022**

(74 pages)

- Takriti, “The Arab Left: From Rumbling Ocean to Revolutionary Gulf,” in *The Arab Lefts: Histories and Legacies 1950s-1970s*, ed. Guirguis (Edinburgh, 2020): 259–82.
- Kattar, “Are We the Last Byzantium? The Evolution of Antoine Najm’s Thought and the Radicalization of Christian Conservatism in Wartime Lebanon 1952–82,” *Arab Studies Journal* 30 (2022): 6–36.
- Sharabi, “Critics of Contemporary Arab Society,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 9 (1987): 1–19.
- [Suggested] Kallander, “Miniskirts and ‘Beatniks’: Gender Roles, National Development, and Morals in 1960s Tunisia,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50 (2018): 291–313.

**Thu. Nov. 17, 2022**

(60 pages)

- Rogan: 355–396.
- Goffman, “Sa‘id Ahmad al-Jinahi’s *I Was in Dhufar*: Gendered Militarization and Modern Space in Revolutionary Oman,” *Women’s History Review* 27 (2018): 819–36.
- [Film viewing] Srour, *The Hour of Liberation Has Arrived*, Lebanon/France, 1974.

**Nov. 20, 10 pm: Manifesto due (10%)**

## **Week XIV: Thanksgiving Break**

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**Tue. Nov. 22, 2022**

- No class meeting

**Thu. Nov. 24, 2022**

- No class meeting (Thanksgiving)

## **Week XV and XVI: Civil Wars, Revolutions, and Political Islam**

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*These two weeks span the late 1970s to the early 2000s in the MENA region. Four crucial events define this turbulent period: the Lebanese Civil War, the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet-Afghan War, and the 1990–1 Gulf War. Likewise, this period saw the growth of Islamist movements—both violent and non-violent—across the region as a form of protest against the increasingly corrupt and increasingly autocratic MENA states.*

**Tue. Nov. 29, 2022**

(86 pages)

- Rogan: 397–482.

**Thu. Dec. 01, 2022**

- No class meeting

**Tue. Dec. 06, 2022**

(89 pages)

- Keddie and Richard: 214–39.
- Crews, “Revolutionary Dreams,” in *Afghan Modern* (Cambridge, MA, 2015): 229–67.
- [primary source] Qutb, “Milestones [1964],” in *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society*, ed. Bergesen (London, 2008): 35–42.
- [primary source] Azzam, “Join the Caravan [1987],” in *Al Qaeda in Its Own Words*, ed. Kepel and Milelli (Cambridge, MA, 2008): 110–25.

**Thu. Dec. 08, 2022**

- [Film viewing] Agahbanaei, *Rites of Spring*, Iran (1979).
- [Film viewing] Stanley, *Voice of the Moon*, South Africa/Afghanistan (1990).

**Dec. 16, 10 pm: Final essay due (30%)**