

History 3369 (3 hours)

**The World in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

Spring 2018

Program in Ethics, Western Civilization, and Traditions

CRN 21195

AB4 205, MWF 10-10:50

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It was almost a comfort to write “2018” up there—that’s well clear of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You know that century—world wars, Holocausts, totalitarianism, the trenches, genocides, Great Depressions, atom bombs, famines. Quite a comfort. But wait, there were other things going on in that century, plain as day, of a different, far better stripe—mass prosperity, civil rights, the renaissance of popular music, Moon landings, the computer, the next generation doing better than the last (that thing we pine for today).

The 20<sup>th</sup> century; yes. What was it—a jumble of contradictions in titanic scale? We shall begin to find out—together.

This is a “EWCAT” class (see above to spell it out), where we few (and we are deliberately a few) huddle together and put this history together from pieces. We get the pieces somewhat from lecture – the professor going on. But almost just as much, we put it together ourselves, interactively. We do close readings – which yield discussions – together. We role play, to *put ourselves in the place* of historical persons faced with so often extraordinary circumstances in that 20<sup>th</sup> century (what sociologist Max Weber [d. 1919] called “empathetic understanding”). And we do other activities, such as spinning alternative histories and counter-narratives.

To begin, the professor will soak up time and fill the space with lecture. But soon we shall branch out, into a world of activities that should make us almost touch, and perhaps even understand more than a bit, the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The specific activities, and historical subjects, are not wholly determined beforehand. The flow of the class will determine quite a bit. To keep us grounded, there will be two conventional assignments. There will be a final exam in exam time, worth 25% of the grade. And there will be a review essay of historical sources, worth 20% of the grade, due **April 6**. The remainder of the assignments, and the grade, will be taken up by the activities we devise for ourselves. Let us imagine 4 smaller written exercises, worth 10% each, and participation (valued at 15%) will be

essential. Deadlines are important, but we can work out any circumstances that make one or two of them difficult. Attendance should be regular—this is a discussion-based class.

Topics we aspire to cover include:

The state of the world in 1900  
The crisis of 1914  
The Great War  
The Russian Revolution  
The Roaring (?) '20s  
The Great Depression  
Japan  
Stalin  
Franco  
Picasso  
Hitler  
Poland  
World War II  
Sun Yat Sen, Chaing Kai Shek, Mao Tse Tung  
The gold standard  
*Wirtschaftswunder*  
Peron  
Castro  
Fela  
Israel  
Stagflation  
Population  
Thatcher  
Gorbachev  
Korea  
Islam  
*Fin de siècle*

For now, there is one required text. This is Richard Pipes, *Communism: A History*. Please acquire and read this short, rich book. I (the professor) feel that Pipes is the greatest historian the 20<sup>th</sup> century produced, his *Russian Revolution* (not required) the greatest narrative of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history ever written.

I, furthermore, once wrote a book on the history of the twentieth century. It was a reflection of 300 pages on a 1-hour lecture called “A Reconsideration of the Twentieth Century” by one Robert Mundell, this talk being the last Nobel Prize lecture given in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in December 1999, when Professor (at Columbia University) Mundell received the Nobel in economics in Sweden. Please watch this stunning

lecture, here:

<https://www.nobelprize.org/mediaplayer/index.php?id=1347>

Do not be daunted by its forbiddingness and economic specificity—remember, I had to write a 300-page book to explain it. It is a bewildering entrance to our theme, an entrance to many questions, of much discussion, of building community in talking about history, and a step toward our goal of enrichment and being civilized—like Cicero who said that to be ignorant of history is to remain ever a child.

Fine print: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>