

20th century - Bloodiest Century in Human History

Course Objective:

The very first decade of the 21st century has witnessed the world's sole superpower involving itself in two seemingly endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The wars were retribution for the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre towers in New York. From the American perspective the attacks were a geo-political disaster as they destroyed the American self perception of impregnability. Five centuries of new world insularity were shattered when the conflicts of the old world disembarked on the same coast where the Pilgrim Fathers arrived four centuries ago.

The present course seeks to comprehend the evolving relationship between the wars of the 21st century and those of the 20th.

The 20th is a remarkable century in the history of mankind. It went down into history as the century in which man delved the deepest into himself (double helical structure of DNA) and the universe around him (Lunar landing, space travel). Remedies for several ancient mortal diseases were perfected and were affordably available. Yet newer, fatal and incurable diseases like AIDS surfaced. The computer evolved from its initial football field size to that of the human palm. The scope of human liberty, democracy, empowerment and entitlement increased. Persistent and rigorous efforts made by women to assert their humanity seemed to be bringing forth a more egalitarian social order. It was also the century of mass and inexpensive production of goods and services, of their speedier distribution; mass simultaneous and comparably inexpensive consumption. This enabled more human beings to live longer and healthier lives as compared to their ancestors.

Yet mankind was vulnerable to epidemics, natural disasters and to the effects of their actions. One threat that loomed large and seemed to be more real was the insatiable and overpowering urge to annihilate fellow humans for any “real (?)” or imagined cause. Wars for national, ideological, creedal, sub or supra national reasons dot the chronology of this century making it like any other before it despite all claims of phenomenal technological and material advancement.

Wars the world over are seen as acts that are ennobling and invigorating that bring forth the best in the “male” of the human species. Yet an actual engagement is never as poetically exciting as described by subsequent non-combatants as poets, politicians, authors of fiction, experts, analysts and historians of war.

Course Outline:

The present course seeks to comprehend the violent nature of the century by **focusing on some important wars**:

1. The 1st and 2nd World Wars – high noon of European nationalisms.
2. Spanish Civil Wars – preparing for bigger conflicts and beyond.
3. The Cold War – sizzling hot superpower rivalry.
4. Arab-Israeli Wars – conflict of Biblical proportions.
5. The Vietnam War – paddy peasants' triumph over a superpower.
6. The Yugoslav Wars – Tito's dream fades.
7. The Rwandan Civil War – ethnic conflict spills over embroiling a continent.

The course seeks to place the conflicts of the 20th century in their due **political, economic, social and historical contexts** by focusing on:

1. Causes and consequences of the conflict
2. The geopolitical, economic and societal aspects of the conflict
3. Memorializing and representation of the conflict
4. Gendering of the conflict
5. The influences on the events of the 21st century

Scheme of assessment:

- 10 marks-Physical attendance
- 15 marks-Written assignment
- 15 marks-Classroom presentation
- 20 marks-Book / Film review
- 40 marks-Term paper

Total=100 Marks.