Course description: This course examines the histories, cultures and societies of the Middle East, a loosely defined term designating a large area of North Africa and West Asia. It starts by questioning the usefulness and origins of the very term “Middle East”. It then raises questions of how historical and anthropological knowledge, western media and travel writing, and academic scholarship have traditionally defined the Middle East. It then offers a brief historical perspective of Islam, how it rose in 7th-century Arabia, how it spread rapidly through the region, and how Islamic orthodoxy was established. The course then offers a brief historical overview of the Ottoman past, i.e. the period from the sixteenth century onwards, passing through the colonial period in the nineteenth century to the present post-colonial period in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The course will then shift to discussing some important contemporary issues affecting Middle Eastern societies. These include women and their position in Middle Eastern societies; the Arab-Israeli conflict; the politics of oil in the region; religion and politics; and Gulf War and the war in Iraq. We will use a wide range of materials including diplomatic documents, short stories, scholarly texts, photographs and videos, to explore the many different ways people in the Middle East have come to define and shape their world and also how outsiders have also attempted to control and shape this world.

Course format: The course consists of two lectures followed by one recitation (discussion group) per week. A list of the weekly topics is given below. The lectures are meant to introduce the weekly topics and will be related to, but not a repetition of, the assigned readings. During the recitations students will discuss with their preceptors issues covered by the lectures and/or discussed in the assigned readings in greater detail and will be encouraged to raise questions and issues for further explorations. Occasionally, we will be showing video clips and slides during the lecture.

Required books: available for purchase at the NYU Book Center and also put on reserve in the Reserve Room at Bobst Library (on A Level):

- Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict.*

There is also a coursepack of required reading which is available for sale.
Course Requirements:

- regular attendance at lectures, completion of all assigned reading on time, and active participation in recitations (20%)
- a map exercise due on January 27 in addition to randomly, unannounced pop quizzes (10%)
- two midterm exams on February 17 and March 29 (40%)
- a final exam given during exam week (30%)

Weekly Topics:

N.B. Items marked with one asterisk (*) are included in the coursepack. Those marked with two asterisks (**) could be accessed by clicking on the URL link from the course’s webpage on Blackboard.

Week 1 (January 18th and 20th): Introduction to the course

Week 2 (January 25th and 27th): What, When and Where is the Middle East

- *Daniel Bates and Amal Rassam, Peoples and Cultures of the Middle East, pp. 10-16.

Week 3 (February 1st and 3rd): Representing, picturing and imagining the Middle East


Week 4 (February 8th and 10th): Islam: dogma, faith and practice


Week 5 (February 15th): The Ottoman heritage

- *Donald Quataert, The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922, pp. 89-109, 140-171.

!!! February 17th: 1st Midterm Exam !!!

Week 6 (February 22nd and 24th): European Colonialism and its impact

- William Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, pp. 103-117.
- Charles Smith, Palestine and the Arab Israeli Conflict, pp. 20-54.

Week 7 (March 1st and 3rd): WW1 and redrawing the map of the Middle East

- William Cleveland, A History of the Modern Middle East, pp. 149-170.
- Charles Smith, Palestine and the Arab Israeli Conflict, pp. 55-104
Week 8 (March 8th and 10th): The Middle East in the Interwar period

- Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab Israeli Conflict*, pp. 105-162.

Midterm Break: March 15th and 17th

Week 9 (March 22nd and 4th): Women and gender

- *Alifa Rifaat, “Distant view of a minaret”.

!!! March 29th: 2nd Midterm exam !!!

Week 10 (March 31st): Palestine, Zionism and Israel I


Week 11 (April 5th and 7th): Palestine, Zionism and Israel II

- *Ghassan Kanafani, “Men in the Sun”.

Week 12 (April 12th and 14th): Problems of democracy and human rights


Week 13 (April 19th and 21st): Iraq, The US and the Middle East

Week 14 (April 26th and 28th): Challenges to the future