Course Description and Goals
The goal of the course is to provide a thorough introduction to North African societies and politics. The Maghrib (the “farthest west” in Arabic)—encompassing Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya—has historically been a critical frontier zone linking Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. This crossroads region continues to remain strategically important with sub-Saharan and North African migration, political Islam, terrorism/counterterrorism, the Sahara question, Islam-West relations, climate, and Mediterranean trade relationships among the current pressing international concerns related to the Maghrib.

The course will three days a week (in classroom or on field trips), with each week exploring a prominent theme related to North African society and politics, including an overview of Maghrib history, the legacies of colonialism and nationalism, political systems and opposition, Islam in North Africa, and the Maghrib in the 21st century. To maximize interactions related to North Africa, the course will also include meetings with local experts, interaction with Moroccan university students, and virtual field trips to key sites in the region including Fez, Volubulis, Marrakesh, the Sahara desert, Algiers, Tunis, and Leptis Magna (in Libya).

Reading List:


All other readings including selected chapters and journal articles available electronically.
The course structure will combine lectures, which will help organize, summarize, and outline material into principal themes, and class discussions, allowing students to interact with, evaluate, and debate issues raised in the course and as these relate to current events.

Attendance and Participation 10%
Quizzes 20%
Weekly Reading Responses (posted to course blog) 40%
Research paper (from 8-12 pgs) 30%

Note on Academic Integrity
Students are expected to adhere to the standards prescribed in the Undergraduate Regulations publication regarding cheating, plagiarism, and documentation. Appropriately using and documenting sources is an integral component of developing necessary professional and academic skills. Students are encouraged to access the resources available through the Poorvu Center website when preparing writing assignments.

Course Calendar

WEEK 1: Panoramic Views of North African History

M 6/29

• Naylor, Philp. 2009. North Africa: a history from antiquity to the present. Austin: University of Texas. [Introduction]
• Wyrten, Introduction

W 7/1
Ancient North Africa: From Prehistory to the Byzantines

• Naylor, Chapter 1-2
VIRTUAL FIELD-TRIP: Volubulis, Lepits Megna, Moulay Idriss Zerhoun

F 7/3
Varieties of Islamic State Formation in North Africa

WEEK 2: Legacies of Colonialism and Nationalism

M 7/6 19-20 Century European Colonization: Penetration, Pacification, and State-Building
- Wyrtzen, Chapter 2

W 7/8 Colonial Logics of Legibility/Legitimization and Local Resistance and Accommodation
- Wyrtzen, 3-5

Optional readings:

F 7/10 Anti-Colonial Nationalism and Decolonization
- Wyrtzen, Chapter 8-9
- Watch Battle of Algiers

*QUIZ 2 – Key terms
M 7/13 Post-Colonial State Formation and Modes of Opposition (Islamist, Berber, Feminist)
  • Willis, Chapter 2, 45

W 7/15 Intra-Maghrib and International Relations (The Western Sahara issue, Algerian Civil War, Maghrib Union, European Union)
*Guest speakers, Michael Wills (Oxford University) and Nizar Messari (AUI)
  • Willis, Chapters 8-9

F 7/17 Family Codes, Gender, and Legal Reform
  • Wyrtzen, Chapter 7
  • Žvan-Eliot, Katja. 2015. Modernizing Patriarchy: The Politics of Women’s Rights in Morocco. Austin: University of Texas Press. (Chapter 4; Chapter 5)

VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP: Historic Fez Medina

WEEK 4: Religion, Ethnicity, and Race in the Maghrib

M 7/20 Islam in Society and Politics

W 7/22 The Jewish Question in North Africa
  • Wyrtzen, Chapter 6, Negotiating Morocco’s Jewish Question

VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP: Imperial Port of Essaouira, Imperial City of Marrakesh (Saadian Tombs, Mellah, Badia Saadian Palace, Bahia Palace)

Fri 7/24 Arab-Berber, Whiteness-Blackness and Ethno-Racial Boundaries
- El-Hamel, Chouki. Black Morocco, (selections)

WEEK 5: The Maghrib in the 21 Century


- Cofman Wittes. "Learning to Live With the Islamist Winter." Foreign Policy. 19 July 2012
- Country descriptions on this BBC site: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world12482309

* Virtual joint session with Al Akhawayn University students

W 7/29  Migration and Race in the Maghrib (Guest session with Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen and Karen Smith)

- Pinos, Jaume. (Working Paper). 'Building Fortress Europe? Schengen and the Cases of Ceuta and Melilla'

F 7/31  Energy, Environment, Security in North Africa
Final Project Presentations