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New DWC Syllabus Using Nonwestern Sources

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**Independent DWC Project
New Course Syllabus Using Nonwestern Sources**

Course Description

The purpose of this DWC course is to gain a better understanding of western society while looking at topics through a nonwestern perspective. The topics discussed in this class will be similar to that of first and second semester sophomore DWC but instead use almost all nonwestern sources for course material. The purpose for this is to still learn about western civilization but from an unfamiliar perspectives looking in. It is difficult to gain an understanding for something which one is apart of. One cannot always look objectively at a world to which they are in, where as an outside prospective can enlighten topics in new ways. A major theme for the course would be ideas and the clash of differing ideology in hopes of promoting debate in class and gaining new insights on the perspectives of others. The main goals of this class is to gain a better understanding of western civilization while providing a new alternative to how people learn about the society they live in. By reading sources from other cultures I want to gain not only a more well rounded view of the west but develop an understanding for the thoughts of other societies also. Students will learn about putting historical events into a broader context and allow for the formulation of well thought out and informed interpretations.

Course Introduction: What is the West?

- ***Miner's "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema"***

This text will be used in the first class as an introduction to the course. A basic summary of this work is that it is a description of an unknown society called Nacirema. The society is explained in such a way that many of the things done in the society seem ridiculous and strange but the society being described is actually western society, Nacirema being America backwards. But reading about America in such a way, we cannot even recognize our own culture. The reason this is so important to the course that it would be chosen first is because it manifests how we cannot fully understand our society because we live in it. Being brought up in western society makes people overlook many important aspects of it, not realizing their significance because they are too close to the subject. This will get students thinking about the need to look at the west from many angles.

- ***Peter's Map***

The Peter's Map is simple a map but drawn to more accurate proportions. This map looks drastically different from the one generally used and furthers the idea of not recognizing one's own world. This map characterizes a different view of the globe and gives a better representation of what the continents actually look like. Comparing this map to the conventional Mercator Map shows how the Mercator Map makes the west seem far larger than it actually. One example is that Greenland is represented as the same size as Africa on the Mercator Map when it is really fourteen times smaller. Size is generally associated with importance and the traditional map used gives a false idea of the importance of western society in the world.

- ***World Map from the East***

This map is another important image to use to introduce the theme of new perspectives to the course. This map is a reverse of the “normal” map, placing the east in the west and the west in the east. Begging the question what is west?

The Social Contract

- ***Mencius, The Works of Mencius***

Mencius was one of the most influential Chinese philosophers, living approximately around 300 BCE. Mencius can be related to the philosophers of western civilization, holding many of the same views. He, like Locke, believed that people are innately good. And he held strong views on how he thought society should be, discussing the importance of common citizens. Even justifying the overthrow of rulers, similar to Rousseau. While Mencius directs his justification towards King Zhou of Shang and Rousseau at the French Revolution much insight can be gained on both events by having students compare their similar thoughts on the social contract and the Mandate of Heaven. Mencius provides a strong bridge between eastern and western philosophy and much can be learned about both from his teachings.

- ***Mo Tzu, Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsün Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu, Ready Reference to Philosophy East and West***

Mo Tzu is another Chinese philosopher who had focused on the idea of the social contract. He discussed much about Divine Right, or rather as referred to in Chinese philosophy, the Mandate of Heaven. He rejected this idea that power was given by God, believing that a ruler should be chosen on merit. This parallels the change in western society from absolute monarchs to democracies and constitutional monarchies.

- **Shahrough Akhavi** “*Sunni Modernist Theories of Social Contract in Contemporary Egypt*”

This journal article provides yet another view on the social contract. Akhavi brings a modern perspective to the subject, having written the article in 2003. Much of what is discussed can be applied to current events such as the Arab Spring and related back to the philosophers traditionally taught in civ, comparing their ideals and beliefs.

Colonialism

- **Paula Gunn Allen**, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*

The Sacred Hoop is a classic text for feminist and Native American studies. Written by Paula Gunn Allen, of Native American and Lebanese decent. She was a poet, writer and lesbian activist, making her perspective very different to what is generally taught; bring up new issues and ideas to the course. The text discusses controversial topics such as the idea that Europeans in their writing of Native Americans reduced the role of women to fit their own patriarchal society. This work gives a more accurate understanding of their culture and the effects of colonization on the role of women.

- **Vine Deloria**, *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*

This text is a collection of essays, which discusses the treatment of Native Americans. Deloria talks about the stereotypes of Native Americans and difficulties they faced, not only by the government but the by churches as well. He also compares their struggles to that of African Americans. Deloria wanted to alert people to these problems in society in order for change to happen. This is very important to civ because although colonization is always focused on, what happened later is usually forgotten.

The West Meets the Rest

- ***Various, “Latin American perspectives on globalization”***

Various writers wrote this text and each chapter focuses on different aspects of globalization. The topics range from discussion about imperialism to feminism to philosophy. Each author delivers a unique perspective on the continually globalizing world and influence of western society on the Latin American world.

- ***Film: Even The Rain***

This film is a great representation of the effect imperialism still has on indigenous people today. It has two story lines happening at once. One about an indigenous girl and her family in Bolivia during riots on the privatization of water, which would cause many people to be unable to have enough to drink. And the discrimination faced by people of indigenous decent. The other story line takes place in a movie the girl is acting in which shows the treatment of the natives when Europeans came to colonize. This movie is an extremely powerful example of the effect of colonization, not just in the past but now as well. This movie will definitely bring up debate on morals and give a visual to western imperialism.

Slavery/Imperialism

- ***Ako-Adjei, “Imperialism and Spiritual Freedom: An African View”***

Ako-Adjei is considered to be one of the “Big Six,” an influential leader in the fight to get the British out of Ghana. He wrote about the Imperialism of the British on his culture and how he felt that the development of missions was an act of aggression. He noted the contradiction of Christian teachings and that of their actions in Ghana. In civ there are texts read about the lives of people effected by

imperialism in Africa but it is important to learn about what it was like from someone who actually went through it rather than by a historian.

- **Alex Haley, *Roots***

Roots is a famous book about an African American family. It discusses the life of a slave who was captured in Africa and the passing down of his story to his decedents. This novel not only gives a good explanation of the African slave trade and the struggles they dealt with but also an account of the difficulties after slavery had ended. In civ we focus on the large events in history but never follow up with the impact the events had year and years later, which is an important element that needs to be added to the class.

Revolutions

- ***The Orange Revolution Documentary***

The Orange Revolution was a movement in the Ukraine in 2004-2005. It was caused by corruption in the election, which in sighted much outrage. The revolution was successful in that it brought about a revote. This documentary explains the main events of the revolution, which gives a good bases for students understanding, allowing them to be able to compare this recent revolution to those in the past and the many other revolutions of today.

- **Marina Nemat, *Prisoner of Tehran: One Women's Story of Survival Inside a Torture Jail***

This novel is a memoir a women who stood up during the Iranian revolution. It depicts her experiences standing up for what she believed at a very young age and the struggles she went though in jail and afterwards. A

reason I felt it important to read about the Iranian Revolution is because it is different from all of the revolutions usually discussed in that instead of moving things in what we would considered a more western direction, it does the very opposite. It would be interesting to discuss what people thought of a revolution that goes against many of the values we tend to believe in, in western society.

- ***“Liberation Square: Inside the Egyptian Revolution and the Rebirth of a Nation”***

Another revolution that is important to understand is the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring not only relates to the ideas of the French and American Revolutions but it is what is happening now in the world. Of course it is important to learn about history but it is equally important for students to be informed about the world today. It would be my plan to learn about all of these modern revolutions in order to compare and contrast them all bringing about much discussion and debate.

The Industrial Revolution and the Marxist Critique

- ***Mao, Quotations from Chairman Mao***

This text is very import to this course because it is about one of the major ideas of the 20th century, communism. Instead of reading about the subject from a Russian perspective students will learn about it from the Chinese. Mao’s communism is not the same as Marx so it will be a great example to use as a comparison.

- ***Film: Earth (1930)***

The famous Ukrainian director, Alexander Dovzhenko, directed this film. It offers an ambiguous view of communism causing students to defend what they believe his political intentions were with the film. It is much more thought provoking than the simple communism is good or bad plot which usually characterizes films about the subject.

Critiques of the Industrial Revolution

- **Leslie Chang, *Factory Girls: from Village to City in a Changing China***

Factory Girls is an interesting book about migrant factory workers in China. This text parallels the events of the industrial revolution in the west. And also brings up the debate over sweatshops and the west's consumerist nature which drives these factories.

Clash of Cultures

- **Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake***

The Namesake is an incredible story about an Indian family living in America and the culture clash faced by the characters. Characters struggle to stay connected to their culture while assimilating into American life, especially the son, Gogol, who was named after a Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol. It is about his journey to discover where he fits in, in this globalized world. It would be beneficial to read this novel because it represents the difficulties of immigration and the struggle between the cultural difference of the east and west.

- **Asne Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul***

The *Bookseller of Kabul* is an amazing story of a Norwegian writer living with a family in Kabul, documenting their lives. This novel is not just an emotional story but also very informative about the culture in Afghanistan, often stopping to explain laws and costumes. There is a cultural clash when it comes to the father in the novel who is very liberal and westernized when it comes to his job of being a bookseller but very traditional when it came to his family. It is very interesting to read how he and his family dealt with the differing ideologies.

Religion

- **Osho, *The Mustard Seed***

This book, by an influential Indian Guru, explains a different view on Christianity. Osho tries to explain what happened to Jesus in the middle of his life, portraying him as a radical. This book would be an interesting read to be compared to the many traditional texts read in freshmen DWC.

- **Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible***

Although this source is not from a nonwestern author, it is written by a missionary, Barbara Kingsolver, who attempts to write from the perspective of Congolese women. It follows the lives of five women in the post-colonial Congo. One of the main themes in this novel is religion and it discusses the use of Christianity as an imperialistic tactic of the west. Also it brings up the interesting concept of pantheism, which is the idea that God is in everything in nature, although this God is not a personal God. Religion is always a good topic to spark debate

in class especially when traditional ways of thought are questioned. And I believe it is important to question those ways of thought because if not how can one know what they really believe?

Modernist Literature

- **Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude***

Marques uses a modernist style to portray the life of a Columbian family and their emigration. The story takes place over seven generations of the Buendía Family and depicts important events in Columbian history. Through their journeys many important civ themes are brought up such as immigration, imperialism, communism, national identity and many more. This novel is extremely relevant because it goes over so much of the time covered in sophomore civ, following many of the ideas usually discussed.

A Nuclear age

- ***Film: Planet of the Apes (1968)***

Although this is not a non-western source, I found it appropriate to include it in the course list because it depicts the west from an “other” standpoint. This film is an entertaining commentary on American society in the 1960’s. It satirizes topics such as race, religion, censorship, patriarchal society, and evolution. And of course the end sends a powerful message about the dangers of nuclear war. This movie will give the class much to discuss, hopefully bringing up many debates on the several topics portrayed.

Existentialism in Philosophy and Theology

- **Haridas Chaudhuri, “*Existentialism and Vedānta*”**

An Indian philosopher, Haridas Chauduri, wrote this text and he compares the ideas of western existentialism to the very similar philosophies in the Indian culture. He explains about the ideas of Indian philosophy and gives a great understanding of the comparison of the two cultures' thoughts. This work would be key to the understanding of the idea of existentialism. It is already a very difficult topic to grasp and learning about it from both an eastern and western way of thought may help solidify the difficult concepts in this subject.

Why:

There are several reasons that there is a need for a change in the DWC curriculum. It is difficult to perceive one's own culture in an unbiased manner and living in that culture makes it difficult to grasp the culture as a whole. Also the way the class is set up now, it does not include many voices in the discussion of western society. This is increasingly becoming a problem in this globalized world.

A philosophical reason for the need to look at one's culture through outside perspectives comes from Husserl's explanation in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. He explains that it is impossible to understand the world one lives in because they are apart of that world or rather that culture. He clarifies some of the preventions to the comprehension of the life-world/one's culture, with one of the main factors being the paradox of subjectivity. A quick explanation given in the text about the paradox is that people are acting as both "a subject of the world and at the same time being an object in the world" (Husserl 178) This means that a person in the life-world or society cannot accurately try and explain the world in which they live, that an objective third-person observer is needed to see and understand. Third-person observers coming from other cultures around the world can be used to gain a better understanding. Authors in the west are both the observers of the west and the subjects,

and Husserl asks, “How can a component part of the world, its human subjectivity, constitute the whole world?”(Husserl 179) Additionally, people take for granted things in their own culture since they are naïve to things that are so familiar. We do not think about everything, but exclude many familiar things from our thoughts since our perception gives us much more than we can account for.

Moreover, I strongly believe we need to discuss a broader range of idea in DWC. Many students feel as if civ is a one sided view of history, only representing the elite, white, Christian male. As important of a point of view that is, it is not the only way to look at the world, or the west. There have been many great authors from other backgrounds and societies that can bring a different light to the idea of what western society is. It is not only necessary from a scholarly point of view to learn from a diverse group of authors but also from a social one. Students many times feel as if one perspective is being forced onto them, especially when it comes to the religious aspects of the class (more so in freshmen civ). Obviously Providence College is a catholic school, but there are many other dominant religions that have had an impact on society and those need to be addressed, if not from a religious stand point but at least from a historical one. I believe that civ as it is now takes a very ethnocentric look at the west. And as much as Providence College talks about wanting to make the school more diverse in the student body, they need to extend that to the curriculum as well. Many students complain about not being able to gain a full understanding by only learning about one side of things, one student I asked said that she “wonders where the other half of society went,” -15 referring to the lack of women authors. Even though women make up fifty percent of the population, they represented exactly zero percent of the authors read this semester in class. How can students expect to understand western society when half of the voices are missing from class? With this new syllabus, students will be able to learn from many perspectives and decide what they think for themselves. Allowing students to think independently.

Additionally, the world is becoming an increasingly globalized place to live. The world is getting smaller and students need to have a strong understanding of the world around them. This syllabus will not only teach the students about western society but also about many other parts of the world, hopefully giving them an improved grasp of other societies. It is impractical for students to not also learn about the world around them especially today. Through the global market and technology such as the Internet, the world has never been more interconnected. It is not only important to be well informed in this globalized world but it is easier than ever to get information about places all over the world and students should take advantage of this access to knowledge. Reading from authors with different perspectives will allow students think more globally about the different subjects, putting ideas into a larger context.

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