

## MES 342: THE SHOCK OF MODERNITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST - SYLLABUS

**Professor:** Levi Thompson - [levi.thompson@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:levi.thompson@austin.utexas.edu)

**Classroom:** PAR 203

**Class Schedule:** 11:00AM-11:50AM MWF

**Office location and hours:** CAL 511; 12:00-1:00PM Wednesdays + 9:00-10:00AM Fridays ([click here to schedule a meeting during these times](#))

**TA:** Tyler Moser - [Tyler.moser@utexas.edu](mailto:Tyler.moser@utexas.edu)

**Office hours:** 1:00-3:00PM Tuesdays or by appt., all via Zoom: <https://utexas.zoom.us/my/tylermmoser>

### Course Description:

The Shock of Modernity in the Middle East focuses on cross cultural contacts between the East and the West during the modern period. The title comes from what Syro-Lebanese poet Adunis (b. 1930) describes as “the shock of modernity” that followed the Arab encounter with Europe over the past two centuries. Texts include selections from the Egyptian Rifa'ah al-Tahtawi's (d. 1873) travelogue about his time abroad during the mid-nineteenth century titled *An Imam in Paris*, the biting satire of West and East alike written by the traveler and journalist



Cairo University (formerly known as King Fuad I and the Egyptian University)

Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (d. 1887), and the didactic historical fiction of Muhammad al-Muwaylahi's (d. 1930) *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us...*, which addresses the British colonial period in Egypt as the Ottoman Empire's power waned. The course likewise addresses the work of Islamic reformers, including but not limited to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (d. 1897) and his followers Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashid Rida (d. 1935) as well as that of the Muslim Brotherhood, specifically the thought of Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, often cited as the most influential figure in the development of modern Islamic radicalism. As the course moves into the twentieth century, it pairs readings from these Islamist thinkers with those of significant cultural reformers such as Taha Hussein (d. 1973), the “Dean of Arabic Literature” who argued for the Europeanization of Egypt in his *The Future of Culture in Egypt*.

Throughout, students undertake serious analysis of Islamic civilization in the Middle East of the modern era by addressing the development of religion, law, government, and morality during and after the colonial period. Our discussions will give you the opportunity to think critically about living in a society made up of people from different backgrounds, what constitutes the basis of living a “good” life, and how conceptions of justice have been addressed historically versus how they are now.

This course carries both the Global Cultures and the Ethics flags. This means that we will be engaging not only with Islam as a global cultural phenomenon but also at length with how Islamic philosophy developed the moral foundations of its system of ethics, found in both Muslim practice and the legal systems of various governments in the Islamic world and throughout Islamic history.

All texts will be given in English; no knowledge of Arabic is required.

**By the end of the course, you will be able to:**

- Name and describe key people, texts, and moments in the history of Islamic philosophy and politics, with a particular focus on the development of Islamic ethics and morality during the modern period.
- Situate the following core texts within their historical, philosophical, political, and social contexts, as well as in relation to each other: Rifaah al-Tahtawi's *An Imam in Paris*; Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's *Leg over Leg*; Muhammad al-Muwaylahi's *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us...*; selections about Islamic reformers such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, Hasan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb as well as the liberal reformer Taha Hussein.
- Apply your readings of core texts to your own analyses of Islamic thought and ethics by completing critical analyses of core texts in relation to their political, social, and/or historical contexts.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING SCALE:**

- 1- Attendance (see note)
- 2- Participation (10%)
- 3- Short in-class reading quizzes (20%—# of quizzes TBD)
- 4- Discussion board posts (20%; 4 total posts, lowest grade automatically dropped)
- 5- “Five Minutes On....” mini-presentation and study guide (5%)
- 6- Midterm take-home essay exam (20%; ~1,500 words or less)
- 7- Final exam (25%)

**REGARDING RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS AND ATTENDANCE:**

If you plan to miss class due to observance of a religious holiday, please let me know at least two weeks in advance. You will not be penalized for this absence, although you will still be responsible for any work you will miss on that day, if applicable. (Two weeks is university policy. I'm a reasonable person, so if you inform me closer to the absence than that, we should be able to work things out.)

**EXPLANATIONS OF ASSIGNMENTS**

**ATTENDANCE:** You can miss class **three times** without it affecting your grade. If you have **four** unexcused absences, the *maximum grade* you can earn for the course is a “B”; **five** absences, the *maximum grade* you can earn for the course is a “C”; **six** absences, the *maximum grade* you can earn is a “D”; at **seven** absences, you will no longer be able to pass the class. If you have extenuating circumstances, please speak with me as soon as possible, because your presence in class is essential for your success. (*Excused absences* include illness [do not come to class with Covid!]; travel for University-sponsored events; and certain personal matters—you must talk to me *in office hours* or during an alternative pre-scheduled appointment to have an absence excused.) **Do not show up to class later than 5 past the hour**, or I might have already marked you absent!

**PARTICIPATION:** A course’s success also depends on the preparation and involvement of all its participants. At a minimum, you should have done the assigned readings for the day. Students who are ready to participate will have taken notes about questions and ideas they have while reading. Your participation is not only welcome but *necessary!* Here’s a general idea of what types of participation get what grade (of 10 total points): you say something in class or in group discussion *almost every class* = 10; you *sometimes* say something in class or group discussion = 9-8; you *rarely* say anything in class = 7-6; you clearly are not prepared for class or group discussion, but you *are in class* = 5. (Sometimes, just showing up counts for something.)

*Prof. Thompson’s general position on the above grade items:*

*I’m not here to police you. You’re all adults and your attendance and participation are up to you. Grades are not assigned, they are earned!*

**SHORT IN-CLASS READING QUIZZES:** Quizzes will usually be announced beforehand but sometimes they may not be. Quizzes will be cumulative, but they will focus on the reading we have done for class that day. The quizzes are meant to encourage you to keep up with the readings as we move through the semester. There will probably be 5 or 6 short quizzes. Quizzes will be brief: a few multiple choice, true-false, and/or short answer questions each. We will do quizzes at the beginning of class, so make sure to arrive on time. **I will not give make-up reading quizzes.** Don't expect to make up a reading quiz. If you have an excused absence, see me in office hours to discuss what to do about a missed quiz.

**DISCUSSION BOARD POSTS:** You will have four opportunities to write a discussion board post answering a prompt. Your post must be done *before* the class time in which it is due. **I won't accept late discussion board posts** because they are meant to foster in-class discussion on the days they are due. **Again, you will receive "0" points for any late discussion board posts—these do not fall under any general late assignment policy!**

**"FIVE MINUTES ON..." PRESENTATION AND STUDY GUIDE:** Early in the semester, I will circulate a sign-up sheet for you to choose a day of class and a topic on which *you* will present to your colleagues (covering a specific person, book, theme, place, etc., related to that day's material). I am happy to meet with you as you plan your ~three-to-five-minute long, in-class presentation. You will be evaluated on: your ability to distill and present the *most important* information about your presentation topic to your colleagues *as well as* the quality of the "study guide" document you prepare alongside your presentation (which will be posted to Canvas for your colleagues' reference). There will be days where we have 2 (or more) of these presentations. It is imperative that you keep them *under five minutes* long!

**MIDTERM ESSAY:** The midterm assignment is a take-home essay test. You will have *one week* to complete the midterm essay once it is assigned. The midterm is the only assignment in this class that you may submit late, as long as you realize that you will lose 10% of the overall grade for every 24-hour period past the due date that it is late. For example, if you turn in your midterm at 11:01AM and it was due at 11:00AM that same day, the *maximum grade* you can earn is a 90/100—as long as everything else is perfect; your grade might be lower than this maximum. If you turn in the midterm at 10:01AM the *day after* it was due, the *maximum grade* you can earn is 80/100, and so on. After ten days, you cannot earn any points for a late midterm essay.

**FINAL EXAM:** we will have a final exam during our regularly-scheduled exam time.

**GRADING SCALE:**

93-100 – A	74-76.9 – C
90-92.9 – A-	70-73.9 – C-
87-89.9 – B+	67-69.9 – D+
84-86.9 – B	64-66.9 – D
80-83.9 – B-	60-63.9 – D-
77-79.9 – C+	</=59.9 – F

**\*\*\*\*NOTE ON GRADE-GRUBBING\*\*\*\***

Please do not debase yourself by grade-grubbing over e-mail. I will ignore e-mails/Canvas messages with grade-grubs, and if a student persists, I will lower their overall final grade by 1% point for each additional grade grub message past the first. If you have a legitimate concern about a grade, come see me in office hours or schedule an appointment at an alternative time.

**The following University-wide syllabus statements change frequently. I abide by all required syllabus content as listed here by UT. These statements are standard across your classes, and some items you might note are:**

**Services for Students with Disabilities:**

The university is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive learning environment consistent with university policy and federal and state law. Please let me know if you experience any barriers to learning so I can work with you to ensure you have equal opportunity to participate fully in this course. If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Please refer to SSD's website for contact and more information: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with SSD, please deliver your Accommodation Letter to me as early as possible in the semester so we can discuss your approved accommodations and needs in this course.

**Personal Pronouns:**

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name, unless they have added a "preferred name" with the Gender and Sexuality Center, which you can do so here:

<http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/publications-and-resources/>. I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by your gender pronouns (she/he/they/ze, etc.). Please advise me of any changes early in the semester so that I may make appropriate updates to my records.

For instructions on how to add your pronouns to Canvas, visit

<https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/633028/pages/profile-pronouns>.

**Title IX Reporting:**

Beginning January 1, 2020, Texas Senate Bill 212 requires all employees of Texas universities, including faculty, to report any information to the Title IX Office regarding sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking that is disclosed to them. Texas law requires that all employees who witness or receive any information of this type (including, but not limited to, writing assignments, class discussions, or one-on-one conversations) must be reported. I am a Responsible Employee and must report any Title IX related incidents that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with me, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you would like to speak with someone who can provide support or remedies without making an official report to the university, please email [advocate@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:advocate@austin.utexas.edu). For more information about reporting options and resources, visit <http://www.titleix.utexas.edu/>, contact the Title IX Office via email at [titleix@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:titleix@austin.utexas.edu), or call 512-471-0419. Although graduate teaching and research assistants are not subject to Texas Senate Bill 212, they are still mandatory reporters under Federal Title IX laws and are required to report a wide range of behaviors we refer to as unprofessional or inappropriate conduct of a sexual nature, including the types of conduct covered under Texas Senate Bill 212. The Title IX office has developed supportive ways to respond to a survivor and compiled campus resources to support survivors.

**Academic Integrity**

Each student in the course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code: "As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity." Plagiarism is taken very seriously at UT. Therefore, if you use words or ideas that are not your own (or that you have used in previous class), you must cite your sources. Otherwise, you will be guilty of plagiarism and subject to academic disciplinary action, including failure of the course. You are responsible for understanding UT's Academic Honesty and the University Honor Code which can be found at the following web address:  
<https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/standardsofconduct.php>.

### **List of Texts (Available on Canvas in PDF):**

Ahmed, *The Last Nahdawi: Taha Hussein and Institution Building in Egypt*  
al-Muwaylahi, *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us*  
al-Shidyaq, *Leg Over Leg*  
al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris*  
Hussein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*  
Hussein, *The Days*  
Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn “al-Afghānī”*  
Mitchell, *The Society of Muslim Brothers*  
Qutb, *The Sayyid Qutb Reader: Selected Writings on Politics, Religion, and Society*  
Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh* (Makers of the Muslim World series)  
+ other articles in PDF on Canvas

### **Weekly Schedule of Readings and Assignments**

#### **Week 1 – August 21-25 – Introduction to the Class**

**August 21** - Introduction and outline of the course. Overview of the Islamic context. What do we mean when we talk about ethics?

Homework (for *next class* on Aug. 23; *homework for the following class* is listed *directly before* the day that homework *is due*): read the SYLLABUS (posted on CANVAS under “Files”). Your first **reading quiz** will be on Wednesday, and it will be about the syllabus.

**August 23** – Housekeeping and review of syllabus. **Reading Quiz #1** (covering material on the syllabus)

Homework (for *next class* on Aug. 25): read pp. 17-30 of *An Imam in Paris* titled “The ‘Egyptian’ Mission to Europe” – be ready to answer: who was Rifaah al-Tahtawi? Why did he travel to Paris? (**READING “01”** ← this is the file number of the PDF on CANVAS)

**August 25** – “The ‘Egyptian’ Mission to Europe”

Homework (due Aug. 30): read pp. 31-71 of *An Imam in Paris*. What was the context of al-Tahtawi’s life like? (**READING 02**)

#### **Week 2 – August 28 - Sept. 1 - Encountering the West: An Egyptian in France**

**August 28** – Sign up for “Five Minutes On...” Presentations; discussion of al-Tahtawi’s life and the broader context of the “Mission to Europe”

Homework (due August 30): read pp. 276-305 of *An Imam in Paris*. What was al-Tahtawi’s education in Paris like? What other observations does he make? Who did he correspond with? (**READING 03**)

**August 30** – Discussion of al-Tahtawi’s studies in Paris

Homework (due Sept. 1): read pp. 19-52 of *Trials of Arab Modernity*, “Fantasy of the Imam,” focusing on pp. 19-23, 28-38, and 50-52 (**READING 04**)

**Sept. 1** – “Fantasy of the Imam”

Discussion board post #1 DUE ON MONDAY SEPT. 6 BY CLASS TIME: imagine that you are Rifaah al-Tahtawi, but you have traveled to contemporary Austin, TX instead of Paris. Write a 200- to 300-word post addressing what you find *in the style of al-Tahtawi*. Make sure to address the morals and ethics of the Austinites!

Homework (due Sept. 8): read pp. ix-xxx of *Leg Over Leg*, **(READING 05)**

**Week 3 – Sept. 4- Sept. 8 – Two Arab Travelers in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe: al-Tahtawi and al-Shidyaq**

**Sept. 4** – Labor Day! No Class!

**Sept. 6** – Sharing and discussing our Discussion Board posts + Introduction to *Leg Over Leg*

Homework (due Sept. 8): read pp. 37-63 + *all notes!* (pp. 323-330; *notes* will always be at the end of the PDF scans – you have to read the notes also) **(READING 06)**

**Sept. 8** – Discussion of “Raising a Storm” from *Leg Over Leg*

Homework (due Sept. 11): read pp. 297-319 + all notes (pp. 347-350) **(READING 07)**

**Week 4 – Sept. 11- Sept. 15 - Al-Shidyaq between Europe and the Middle East**

**Sept. 11** - Discussion of “Memorandum” and “The Difference Between Market-Men and Bag-Men”

Homework (due Sept. 13): read pp. 73-83 + all notes (pp. 509-510) **(READING 08)**

**Sept. 13** – Discussion of “The Superiority of Women” and “A Description of London”

Homework (due Sept. 15): read “On Nothing and Everything” chapter by Kamran Rastegar, pp. 101-125 of *Literary Modernity Between the Middle East and Europe* **(READING 09)**

**Sept. 15** - Discussion of “On Nothing and Everything”

Discussion board post #2 (due by class time Sept. 18): imagine you are the Fariyaq from *Leg Over Leg*, but instead of traveling through the Mediterranean and Europe of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, you find yourself in a modern city in the United States (your choice which one exactly). Emulate al-Shidyaq’s style of writing as you compose your own 200- to 300-word “chapter” (that is, DB post) on the ways and customs of the people in the city you’ve found yourself in.

**Week 5 – Sept. 18 - Sept. 22 – From Europe to Egypt Again**

**Sept. 18** - Sharing and discussing our Discussion Board posts.

Homework (due Sept. 20): read pp. ix-xxvii of *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* **(READING 10)**

**Sept. 20** – Introduction to *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us*

Homework (due Sept. 22): read pp. 35-77 + notes pp. 462-463 of *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* **(READING 11)**

**Sept. 22** - Discussion of *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us*

Homework (due Sept. 25): read pp. 79-117 + notes pp. 463-464 of *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* **(READING 12)**

**Week 6 - Sept. 25 – Sept. 29 – Al-Muwaylahi’s *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* as a Didactic Text**

**Sept. 25** - Discussion of *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us*

Homework (due Sept. 27): read pp. 365-419 + notes 470-471 of *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us* **(READING 13)**

**Sept. 27** - Discussion of *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us*

Homework (due Sept. 29): read “Anxious Advocacy: The Novel, the Law, and Extrajudicial Appeals in Egypt,” by Elliott Colla, *Public Culture* 17, no. 3: pp. 417-443 (**READING 14**)

**Sept. 29** – Discussion of Colla article.

Homework (due Oct. 2): read pp. 3-35 of Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (**READING 15**)

**Week 7 - Oct. 2 – Oct. 6 – Anti-Imperialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Middle East**

**Oct. 2** – Discussion of *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*

\*\*Midterm paper assigned in class\*\*

Homework (due Oct. 4): read pp. 123-129 of Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism* (**READING 16**)

**Oct. 4** – Discussion of *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*

Homework (due Oct. 6): read pp. 97-99 of *The Middle East and Islamic World Reader* (**READING 17**)

**Oct. 6** – Discussion of “Plan for Islamic Unity”

Homework (due Oct. 9): work on your midterms.

**Week 8 - Oct. 9 – Oct. 13 – Muhammad Abduh and Islamic Reform in Egypt (I)**

**Oct. 9** – Catch up day and review of material to this point in class.

\*\*Midterm Paper Due In Class Today (Oct. 9)!\*\*

Homework (due Oct. 11): read pp. 1-27 of *Muhammad Abduh* by Sedgwick (**READING 18**)

**Oct. 11** – Discussion of *Muhammad Abduh* by Sedgwick

Homework (due Oct. 13): read pp. 57-81 of *Muhammad Abduh* by Sedgwick (**READING 19**)

**Oct. 13** – Discussion of *Muhammad Abduh* by Sedgwick

Homework (due Oct. 16): read pp. 103-128 of *Muhammad Abduh* by Sedgwick (**READING 20**)

**Week 9 Oct. 16 – Oct 20 – Muhammad Abduh and Islamic Reform in Egypt (II)**

**Oct. 16** – Discussion of *Muhammad Abduh* by Sedgwick

Discussion board post #3 (due by class time Oct. 18): We have now finished reading Mark Sedgwick’s treatment of the life and work of Muhammad Abduh. Consider Abduh’s position on the role of *taqlid* (sometimes translated as “blind imitation”) in Islamic legal reasoning for this week’s discussion board post. In around 300 words, reflect on the role of *taqlid* in Islamic law prior to Abduh’s reforms. Why was *taqlid* a prominent practice? Is *taqlid* necessarily irrational? Why/why not? I would also like you to reflect on what you think might happen in the Islamic reform movement following Abduh’s dismissal of *taqlid* and the return of *ijtihad* (“the independent reasoning of the jurist”). What implications might this significant change have for the development of Islamic law in the twentieth century?

**Oct. 18** – Sharing and discussing our Discussion Board posts.

**Homework (due Oct. 20): read pp. 209-231 of *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (**READING 21**)**

**Oct. 20 – Discussion of *The Society of Muslim Brothers***

**Homework (due Oct. 23): read pp. 232-259 of *The Society of Muslim Brothers* (**READING 22**)**

**Week 10 - Oct. 23 – Oct 27 - Islamism in Egypt (I)**

**Oct. 23 – Discussion of *The Society of Muslim Brothers***

**Homework (due Oct. 25): read pp. 1-13 + notes pp. 166-168 and pp. 33-42 + notes p. 170 of *The Sayyid Qutb Reader* (**READING 23**)**

**Oct. 25 – Discussion of *The Sayyid Qutb Reader***

**Homework (due Oct. 27): read pp. 61-90 + notes pp. 217-222 of *Sayyid Qutb: An Intellectual Biography*, chapter titled “Our Own Brand of Modernity” (**READING 24**)**

**Oct. 27 - Discussion of “Our Own Brand of Modernity”**

**Homework (due Oct. 30): read Sayyid Qutb, *The America I Have Seen* (**READING 25**)**

**Week 11 - Oct. 30 – Nov. 3 - Islamism in Egypt (II) and Liberal Reform in Egypt (I)**

**Oct. 30 – Discussion of *The America I Have Seen***

**Homework (due Nov. 1): read pp. 1-25 of *The Days* (**READING 26**)**

**Nov. 1 – Discussion of *The Days***

**Homework (due Nov. 6): read pp. 25-52 of *The Days* (**READING 27**)**

**Nov. 3 – Prof. Thompson in Montreal for Middle Eastern Studies Association Annual Meeting!**

**Week 12 - Nov. 6 – Nov. 10 – Liberal Reform in Egypt (II)**

**Nov. 6 – Discussion of *The Days***

**Homework (due Nov. 8): read pp. 52-69 of *The Days* (**READING 28**)**

**Nov. 8 – Discussion of *The Days***

**Homework (due Nov. 10): read pp. 69-93 of *The Days* (**READING 29**)**

**Nov. 10 – Discussion of *The Days***

**Homework (due Nov. 13): read pp. 95-113 of *The Days* (Book II) ) (**READING 30**)**

**Week 13 - Nov. 13 – Nov. 17 – Liberal Reform in Egypt (III)**

**Nov. 13 – Discussion of *The Days***

**Homework (due Nov. 15): read pp. 203-225 of *The Days* (Book II) (**READING 31**)**

**Nov. 15 – Discussion of *The Days***

**Homework (due Nov. 17): read pp. 104-135 + notes pp. 235-242 of *The Last Nahdawi* (**READING 32**)**

**Nov. 17 - Discussion of *The Last Nahdawi***

**Homework: write the final DB post.**

Discussion board post #4 (due by class time Nov. 27): Consider your own experiences during childhood and with your education. Write a chapter in the style of Taha Hussein in *The Days* addressing an important episode from your own life that makes a broader commentary (whether implicit or explicit) about the educational situation that produced *you* as a student and ethical thinker.

**Week 14 – Nov. 20 – Nov. 24 – *FALL BREAK! NO CLASS!***

**Week 15 - Nov. 27 – Dec. 1 - Liberal Reform in Egypt (IV)**

**Nov. 27 – Sharing and discussing our Discussion Board posts.**

**Homework (due Nov. 29): read pp. 1-27 of *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (**READING 33**)**

**Nov. 29 – Discussion of *The Future of Culture in Egypt***

**Homework (due Dec. 1): read pp. 83-93 of *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (**READING 34**)**

**Dec. 1 – Discussion of *The Future of Culture in Egypt***

**Homework (due Dec. 4): none!**

**Week 16 – Dec. 4 – Review Day**

**Dec. 4 – Review of material for final exam.**

**I will announce the date and time of the final exam once the University sets them.**