



**Core Knowledge**  
**World History I (to 1750)**  
**Syllabus**

This course is the first half of a two-part sequence. Successful completion of this course should be a prerequisite for enrollment in the second half.

The course is arranged for three hours of lecture/discussion a week, and allowing for two in-class hour examinations in the term, plus a two-hour final exam during examination week. For each week, pages in two new textbooks are suggested for background reading. [The Heritage of World Civilization](#) is a comprehensive world history text. Its general narratives of all major civilizations are ample and balanced, the work of highly-regarded area specialists. [The West in the World](#) views the past from the West and offers students more sophisticated understanding of critical Western institutions in their global context. History teachers and students, regardless of their backgrounds and interests, would do well to select judiciously from both books.

Teachers are also encouraged to give one or two writing assignments. A full-length research paper is not necessary for a survey course such as this one. Two shorter papers (5-8 pp.) might be more appropriate.

This syllabus was created by Paul Gagnon, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Massachusetts, as part of [What Elementary Teachers Need to Know](#), a teacher education initiative developed by the Core Knowledge Foundation. Although the syllabus is copyrighted by the foundation, and may not be marketed by third parties, anyone who wishes to use, reproduce, or adapt it for educational purposes is welcome to do so. However, we do ask individuals using this syllabus to notify us so we can assess the distribution and spread of the syllabi and serve as a repository of information about how they may be improved and more effectively used. Please contact Matthew Davis, Core Knowledge Foundation, 801 East High Street, Charlottesville, VA 22902. Phone: 434-977-7550, x. 224. E-mail: [mdavis@coreknowledge.org](mailto:mdavis@coreknowledge.org)

*WEEK ONE:***Topic 1: Introduction to World History**

- 1) Why study history; the uses of history to education's three distinct purposes: preparing people for working life, public citizenship, and private cultivation; the past as legacy.
- 2) History and geography as context of time and place, providing order and perspective to the study of humanities, natural science, and social science; seven spheres of human life and history: ideas and beliefs, politics, economics, technology, science, society, culture.
- 3) Limited time; guides to selection; world history essential to Americans; the past as legacy; why Western history occupies central ground: previews of topics and reasons.

**Topic 2: Human Origins and Early Settlements**

- 1) Archeological findings; African origins; geography and migration; climate, soil, water, plant and animal life; fishing, hunting, gathering; early pastoralism.
- 2) The Neolithic revolution; the technology of farming; rising food production; origins of town and city life; meanings of "civilization."
- 3) River valley settlements in the Middle East and Asia; the Tigris and Euphrates; the Fertile Crescent; the Nile and its delta; the Indus River; the Yellow River.

**Topic 3: The First Urban Civilizations**

- 1) Economic, military, and religious functions of cities; significance of literacy; Sumer, the epic of Gilgamesh; Babylonia, the Code of Hammurabi; invasions and migrations.
- 2) Egyptian politics and religion; pharaohs and priests; hieroglyphics, arts and beliefs; cycles of chaos and stability, weakness and empire.
- 3) Early urban centers of ancient India; Aryan invasions and the coming of Hinduism; social structure; significance of the caste system.
- 4) Urban life in ancient China; Shang dynasty arts; pictographic writing; calendar.

Readings: Albert M. Craig, William A. Graham, Donald Kagan, Steven Ozment, and Frank M. Turner, The Heritage of World Civilizations, Volume I: to 1650, fifth edition, Prentice Hall, 2000, pp. 1-35. (For later eras, Volume II: since 1500)  
 Dennis Sherman and Joyce Salisbury, The West in the World, Volume I: to 1715, McGraw-Hill, first edition, 2001, pp. 1-27. (For later eras, Volume II: from 1600)

*WEEK TWO:***Topic 4: Ancient Israel**

- 1) Historical significance to Western civilization of small, turbulent, changeable, and vulnerable societies: the ancient Jews and Greeks, rejecting fatalism and mystery.
- 2) The Bible as history and literature; Abraham, the Covenant; Moses, the Exodus; the Commandments; turmoil and subjugations; Hebrew Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos.
- 3) Ethical monotheism; beliefs and moral teachings of Judaism; individual free will and social responsibility; equality before God; the idea of ameliorating human life on earth.
- 4) The Judaic roots of Christianity and Islam; the Holy Land under the Roman Empire.

**Topic 5: Greek Civilization**

- 1) Geography and contrasting city-states; the evolution of Greek military and commercial power; classes and public life of Sparta and Athens.
- 2) The legacy of classical Greek culture: myth, epic, tragedy, comedy; literature as social and moral commentary; Homer, Aesop, Sophocles, Aristophanes.

- 3) Classicism's "golden mean" as central principle for the arts, architecture, and human behavior; again, history viewed as a people's legacy rather than its daily realities.
- 4) Philosophical inquiry, science, medicine; reason and the search for knowledge of nature and man; Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as teachers; Pythagoras, Hippocrates.

**Topic 6: The Legacy of Greek Politics**

- 1) The historical context of Athenian politics and thought; the Persian War; the Age of Pericles; the Peloponnesian War; trial of Socrates.
- 2) Athenian democracy: its practices and extent; ideal of the citizen as many-sided man; democratic statesmen and demagogues; the sources and consequences of imperialism.
- 3) The Greek historical tradition as school for citizens; Herodotus; Thucydides, "hubris."
- 4) Plato's politics; the "Cave," education, the ideal "philosopher king;" Aristotle's six forms of government; self-government by a moderate "middle" class vs. poverty and plutocracy.

Readings: Craig, pp. 36-38; 51-100. Sherman, pp. 27-32; 43-79.

*WEEK THREE:*

**Topic 7: India's Classical Age**

- 1) Central beliefs and teachings of Hinduism; *karma*, reincarnation, the Brahmins; epic literature; the *Upanishads*.
- 2) Origins and teachings of Buddhism as reform of Hinduism; Siddhartha, *nirvana*; aspirations of the Emperor Ashoka.
- 3) The expansion of Buddhism into Southeast Asia, China, Korea, and Japan.
- 4) Gupta Empire; Buddhism reabsorbed in Hinduism; nomadic invasions, eras of turmoil.

**Topic 8: China's Classical Age**

- 1) Cycles of dynastic unity, invasion, civil war, reunification; the Chou; the Mandate of Heaven; the Ch'in; the Great Wall; the Han empire's rise and fall contrasted to Rome's.
- 2) The Confucian tradition; the Analects as common core of values; virtue, moderation, reason; the centrality of family; respect for hierarchy of wise authority.
- 3) The teachings of Lao-tse; Taoism as spiritual complement to Confucian pragmatism.
- 4) Classical Chinese arts, crafts, trades; paper; the Silk Road across Asia to Rome.

**Topic 9: The Hellenistic Age**

- 1) Rival, divided Greek city-states overcome by Philip of Macedon.
- 2) Alexander the Great; geographical and military bases of empire; Greek cities, settlers, and ideas spread through the Near East; positive and down sides of cosmopolitanism.
- 3) Philosophical currents: Skeptics, Cynics, Epicureans, Stoics.
- 4) Alexandria as center and repository of Greek and Jewish learning; the great libraries; science and medicine: Euclid, Archimedes, Galen.

Readings: Craig, pp. 36-51; 100-111; 120-133; 198-219. Sherman, pp. 81-111.

*WEEK FOUR:*

**Topic 10: The Roman Republic: Society and Politics**

- 1) Origins, economy, and social classes of the Republic in Italy.
- 2) Geography and imperialism; spread of Roman power; Carthage, the Punic Wars.
- 3) The republican constitution; Senate, separation of powers, classes and factionalism.

4) Decline of the Republic; Cicero; fall to dictators; Julius Caesar in life and literature.

**Topic 11: Imperial Rome: Institutions, Culture, and Legacies**

- 1) Shaping the imperial government and city; Caesar Augustus; Roman citizenship.
- 2) The Empire: geography, economy, governance, and peoples; the Pax Romana.
- 3) Roman law and civil service; architecture, engineering, and public works.
- 4) Rome's version of Greek culture; Latin writings; Virgil, Livy, Tacitus.

**Topic 12: Historians and Cause; the Decline and Fall of Rome**

- 1) Dissecting cause; the intersecting spheres of human activity.
- 2) Internal forces at work: ideas and morale; religion, technology, economy, class hatreds; mass amusements; political corruption, palace guards, the effects of individual actions.
- 3) External forces and problems: the limits to empire; military weaknesses; loss of trade and revenue; provincial disorder; migrations and invasions; the Empire divided.
- 4) Insights, debates, and "object lessons" by historians ever since.

Readings: Craig, pp. 134-171. Sherman, pp. 114-163.

*WEEK FIVE:*

**Class Session: First Hour Examination**

**Topic 13: The Spread of Christianity**

- 1) Jesus of Nazareth; continuities from Judaism; central beliefs and teachings; the Gospels; the Sermon on the Mount; the "new law" rooted in the old; the disturber of the peace.
- 2) Apostles, preachers, organizers; Sts. Peter and Paul; St. Augustine, City of God.
- 3) Early egalitarian communities; from persecution to state religion; Emperor Constantine.
- 4) Church structure, doctrine, and discipline; the Nicene Creed; the Church as successor to the Roman Empire in the West.

**Topic 14: The Byzantine Empire**

- 1) Geographic, economic and military bases of the Eastern Empire; Constantinople.
- 2) The preservation of ancient Greek, Hellenistic and Roman heritage; the arts: Hagia Sophia, mosaics, iconography; law: the Code of Justinian.
- 3) Founding of the Eastern Orthodox Church; conversion of the Slavs; caesaropapism.
- 4) Cycles of strength and weakness; ultimate fall of Constantinople to the Turks, 1453.

Readings: Craig, pp. 157-171; 314-324. Sherman, pp. 163-181; 196-204,

*WEEK SIX:*

**Topic 15: The Origins and Spread of Islam**

- 1) Mohammed; beliefs and moral teachings of Islam; relations to Judaism and Christianity.
- 2) The Koran; the Five Pillars of Islam; Mecca and Medina.
- 3) Islamic expansion to west, south, and east; religious toleration and its limits.
- 4) Islamic learning, arts, letters, science, mathematics, medicine; transmittal of ancient Greek and Indian works.

**Topic 16: Components of Early European Civilization: Roman, Christian, Invaders**

- 1) Political, economic conditions after the collapse of Roman authority in West Europe.

- 2) Invading Germanic peoples: Huns, Franks, Angles, Saxons.
- 3) Early medieval church; St. Martin of Tours, St. Patrick; monasticism; St. Benedict.
- 4) Muslim invasions; battle of Tours; Charlemagne; the Carolingian empire.
- 5) Viking invasions; the subsequent Norman Conquest (1066).

**Topic 17: Feudalism and Manorialism in Europe**

- 1) Manorialism: the manor/farm as self-sufficient unit of production; the manorial contract between lord and serf; the conditions of serfdom.
- 2) Feudalism: decentralization of political power and security; the feudal contract between lord and vassal; the fief; the code of chivalry; knighthood and its obligations.
- 3) The Roman church as lawmaker; parallel, sometimes conflicting, systems of justice: feudal lords and church courts.
- 4) The "corporate" society; three social estates: clergy, nobility, commoners.

Readings: Craig, pp. 294-337; 351-360; 375-395. Sherman, pp. 183-196; 204-209.

*WEEK SEVEN:*

**Topic 18: The Middle Empire in China**

- 1) Unbroken continuity of civilization; contrast with West Europe after Rome's fall.
- 2) The great dynasties: T'ang, Sung; technological advances; great age of arts and culture; painting, porcelain, poetry; Buddhism in China.
- 3) Rise of trade, domestic and foreign; the earliest "modern" market economy.
- 4) Mongol invasion; the Khanates, Marco Polo; founding of the Ming dynasty.

**Topic 19: Japan's Classical Age**

- 1) China's influence; Confucianism, Buddhism, writing, law, civil service, the arts.
- 2) Early feudalism; code of the *samurai*; Shinto, native Japanese religion.
- 3) Unification under the Kamakura; Mongol invasion fails; *kamikazi*, the "divine wind."
- 4) Japanese art, architecture, drama, literature; Noh plays; Lady Murasaki.

**Topic 20: Origins of Russia**

- 1) Kievan ruler adopts Eastern Orthodox Christianity; caesaropapism.
- 2) Peoples of Central Asia; Mongol conquest of Russia; the "Tartar Yoke."
- 3) Rise of Muscovy; Ivan the Great; autocracy and church; Moscow as the "third Rome."
- 4) Trans-Asiatic trade system; tenuous, often hostile, relations with Europe to the West.

Readings: Craig, pp. 224-277; 364-367. Sherman, pp. 307-315

*WEEK EIGHT:*

**Topic 21: Europe in the Later Middle Ages**

- 1) Growing commerce, towns; the new "middle" class of commoners; trade, craft guilds.
- 2) The Roman church; doctrine on war: Truce and Peace of God; on economics: the "just price" and "just wage;" popular religion; cult of the Virgin, mystery plays.
- 3) Arts and learning; the Gothic cathedral, Chartres; universities; Thomas Aquinas seeks commonalities between pagan Greco-Roman and Christian philosophy.
- 4) Relations with Islam; borrowing, coexistence, and conflict; the Crusades and their consequences; persecution of Jews and Gypsies; heresies and inquisitions.

**Topic 22: Development of European Nation States and Politics**

- 1) France: kingship, provincial Estates; Saint Louis IX as model monarch, lawgiver.
- 2) England: centralized kingship from Norman Conquest; Magna Carta as feudal contract reflecting the balance of power; Model Parliament; King's "power of the purse" is limited.
- 3) Medieval Germany: the Holy Roman Empire and multiple centers of political power.
- 4) Rising struggles between church and state; between church and business classes.

**Class Session: Second Hour Examination**

Readings: Craig, pp. 338-369; 424-433. Sherman, pp. 252-303.

*WEEK NINE:***Topic 23: The Italian Renaissance: Conditions for a Great Cultural Age**

- 1) Economic bases; rising agricultural productivity, crafts, and trade; positive economic effects of the Crusades; wealth of the Church and of Italian nobles and merchants.
- 2) Effects of geography; Italy on major trade routes, secure from rival states for a time; remains and memories of Ancient Rome; access to Byzantine and Muslim arts, letters.
- 3) Political, ecclesiastical, and private patronage: competitions among city-state rulers; among business magnates; massive Papal support of art, architecture, and scholarship.
- 4) The underside: urban and rural poverty; guilds crushed, manorial contracts nullified; mercenary soldiers suppress discontent in town and country.

**Topic 24: Works and Legacies of Renaissance artists and humanists**

- 1) Arts and literature: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo; Dante, Petrarch, Rabelais.
- 2) Machiavelli as historian and political reformer; *The Discourses*, *The Prince*.
- 3) Humanism's many facets: study of the ancients; aspirations to individualism and earthly immortality; artistic and literary innovation; Christian humanism; Erasmus, Thomas More.
- 4) The Elizabethan Renaissance; William Shakespeare and England's "Golden Age."

**Topic 25: The Protestant Reformation**

- 1) Backgrounds of a revolution: the decline and troubles of the Papacy; conflict between religious and secular powers over lands and taxes; nascent nationalism; class conflict, and ideas traditional and new, spread in print; Gutenberg.
- 2) Effects of the Renaissance and precursors; Erasmus, Wyclif, Hus.
- 3) The spark: Martin Luther, religious ideas and political allies; salvation by faith; break with Rome; the German princes and the Lutheran church.
- 4) John Calvin; predestination, puritanism; austerity of Calvinist church and rites; the search for godly societies.

Readings: Craig, pp. 433-463. Sherman, pp. 303-306; 318-372.

*WEEK TEN:***Topic 26: The Reformation and Religious Conflict**

- 1) Protestantism spreads; the political, economic, social, and spiritual forces at work.
- 2) The English Reformation; Henry VIII, Elizabeth I's religious compromise.
- 3) The Catholic Reformation; Council of Trent; Ignatius Loyola; role of the Jesuits.
- 4) European Wars of Religion, complicated by political and economic interests; early ideas and acts of religious toleration.

**Topic 27: China under Ming and Manchu Dynasties**

- 1) Growth of commerce, cities, and merchant and artisan classes.
- 2) Ming naval expeditions and expansion of trade across Indian Ocean; followed by turn inward; restriction of expeditions, trade, and merchant influence.
- 3) Conquest of Ming by Manchu dynasty, 1644; survives until Revolution of 1911.
- 4) Traditional Chinese civilization under challenge; early European influences.

**Topic 28: Japan in the Early Modern Period**

- 1) Japan unified late in 16th under Tokugawa Shogunate, largely ending feudal disorder.
- 2) Hostility to Western presence; Japanese Christians persecuted; trade and travel cut; ban on seagoing vessels; single port is open to Dutch alone.
- 3) Rising internal production in agriculture; vigorous internal commercial activity.
- 4) Continued development of distinctive Japanese art and literature; kabuki theatre.

Readings: Craig, 463-487; in Volume II, pp. 544-583. Sherman, pp. 372-391.

*WEEK ELEVEN:***Topic 29: European Expansion and Exploration**

- 1) Early capitalism; the "commercial revolution;" business methods and leaders.
- 2) Expansion of international trade; mercantilism in theory and practice; the search for water routes to India and East Asia.
- 3) Borrowings and innovations: maps, compass, astrolabe, ship and sail design.
- 4) Routes and rivalries of exploration: Prince Henry to Africa; Vasco da Gama to India; Columbus to the "New World;" Magellan to Southeast Asian islands.

**Topic 30: Pre-Columbian Societies in the Americas**

- 1) The first North American peoples; geographical, political, economic, cultural contrasts.
- 2) Geography, climate, and early societies in the Caribbean, in Central and South America.
- 3) Comparisons and contrasts among the Mayan, Aztec, and Incan civilizations.
- 4) The first experiences of, and responses to, European explorers and military attack.

**Topic 31: African Civilizations**

- 1) Highly varied geography, economies, and societies; villages, city-states, empires.
- 2) West and Mediterranean Africa; Arab domination of slave trade; Ghana, Mali, Songhai; growth of trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt, and slaves.
- 3) East Africa; spread of Islamic religion; Christianity in Ethiopia.
- 4) Central Africa; Great Zimbabwe; Bantu settlement and languages.

Readings: Craig I, pp. 396-419; 449-452; 494-517. Sherman, pp. 393-401.

*WEEK TWELVE:***Topic 32: European Conquest, Trade, and Colonization**

- 1) Spain in the Americas; Cortes and Montezuma in Mexico; Pizarro in the Andes; the Spanish in California and Southwest; Spanish church; las Casas; the Jesuits.
- 2) England: the Atlantic colonies' diverse origins, motivations, leaders, and economies.
- 3) France: Canada, Mississippi valley; fur traders, merchants, missionaries.
- 4) Intercontinental exchange of plants, animals, technology, disease; the search for gold and

silver; the price revolution.

**Topic 33: Expanding Commerce and Slavery**

- 1) Holland: Dutch East India and West India Companies; early settlers in New York.
- 2) Portuguese trading stations in Africa; Europeans enter the African slave trade.
- 3) The Atlantic slave trade; American demands for slave labor; the "middle passage" between two captivities; internal warfare in Africa as source of slaves.
- 4) North and South American slavery compared; extent of world slavery at the time.

**Topic 34: Europe: Absolute Monarchies**

- 1) Technological change, new scale of armies, tax collection, and commerce call for centralized administrations.
- 2) Theory and practice of divine-right monarchy: Louis XIV and Versailles.
- 3) Extension of Russian autocracy and serfdom; Peter the Great; quasi-Westernization of bureaucracy and army; founding of St. Petersburg as "Window on the West."
- 4) Rise of the military Prussian kingdom to dominant power in Central Europe.

Readings: Craig I, pp. 518-543; in Volume II, pp. 584-611. Sherman, pp. 401-445.

*WEEK THIRTEEN:*

**Topic 35: The English Revolution**

- 1) Backgrounds; Tudor politics of Elizabeth I; defeat of Spanish Armada.
- 2) The Stuart kings vs. Parliament; advantages and disadvantages of each side; quarrels over religious, economic, and political issues.
- 3) Civil War; execution of Charles I; Oliver Cromwell's rule in England and Ireland; the Restoration; the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688-89; the Bill of Rights.
- 4) Political commonalities among England, the Dutch Republic, and American colonies; conditions supporting representative government; inner balances of power necessary to limited, constitutional politics.

**Topic 36: The Troubled Eighteenth Century**

- 1) 18th century centers of economic and military power; the first "world war."
- 2) Most societies experiencing inner crises: China, India, and Africa; the Ottoman Empire, France, Russia, Central Europe, the North and South American colonies.
- 3) Ideas and expectations, political and societal, arising from the English and Scientific Revolutions and the Enlightenment; visions of a different future.

**Topic 37: Conclusions and Review**

Readings: Craig II, pp. 584-635; 658-683. Sherman, Volume II, pp. 445-496.

### **Suggested Bibliography**

The following list is not intended to be taken exhaustive. These are "favorite" books of members of the National Council for History Education, all of them teachers of history in schools and universities. In most cases, the dates cited below are those of the latest edition or re-publication.

#### *GENERAL SURVEYS AND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIES*

- William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West*, 1991  
John Keegan, *The History of Warfare*, 1993  
Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years*, 1995  
Albert Hourani, *History of the Arab Peoples*, 1991  
John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 1972  
A. L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 1963

Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 1991  
 J. D. Fage, *A History of Africa*, 1978  
 Philip D. Curtin et al., *African History*, 1995  
 Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 1984  
 John King Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, 1989  
 Crane Brinton, *Ideas and Men: The Story of Western Thought*, 1963

*WORKS RELEVANT TO WORLD HISTORY I (TO 1750)*

Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition*, 1993  
 Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews*, 1998  
 Arthur Waley, *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, 1956  
 Charles Freeman, *Egypt, Greece, and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean*, 1996  
 Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way to Western Civilization*, 1963  
 Michael Grant, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1990  
 Christopher Dawson, *The Making of Europe*, 1958  
 Joseph P. Strayer, *Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 1955  
 J. C. Holt, *Magna Carta*, 1992  
 Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, 1997  
 William H. McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*, 1976  
 Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, 1979  
 Brian Fagan, *Kingdoms of Gold, Kingdoms of Jade: The Americans before Columbus*, 1991  
 John H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance*, 1981  
 Myron P. Gilmore, *The World of Humanism, 1453-1517*, 1983  
 Russell Major, *The Age of the Renaissance and Reformation: A Short History*, 1970  
 L. B. Smith, *The Elizabethan Age*, 1966  
 B. H. Sumner, *Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia*, 1962

