Islamic Spain: A culture and history course about the Moors in Iberia

Fries Center for Global Studies
Winter session proposal 2021/22
Wesleyan University

Course & Contact Information:

Modality: In-person (open to online, if need be)
Meeting time: M-F: 10:00 -12 pm and 1:00-3:00pm
Classroom: TBD
Instructor: Abderrahman Aissa
Office location and Tel: Rm 306, Tel: 860-685-2553

Course description:
Islamic Spain is a history and culture course that deals with Muslims in and in relation to the Iberian Peninsula. The course will not only be limited to the first period spanning roughly over nine centuries (711-1614 CE) but will also cover the area in question from the 17th century to present. In Menocal’s *The Ornament of The World*, we will explore the many ways in which Muslims, Jews and Christians, whether they were rulers or ruled, were able to cohabitate peacefully and create a culture of tolerance amongst them. The course will be conducted in English but will additionally draw on sources written in other languages which the instructor will translate into English and provide to students for class purposes (mainly French, Spanish, Arabic and German).

Throughout the course, we will look at historical events in and around the Iberian Peninsula from the storied date of 711 CE to the Conquest of Granada in 1492 CE, as detailed in *Moorish Spain* (Richard Fletcher’s book). Additionally, we will take an analytical approach that will enable us raise questions and discuss what happened, how it happened, why it happened, and what repercussions – immediate and remote – it had both on the people and the area. We will connect the dots in order for us to understand how the once imposing, invading/conquering Muslims from North Africa have morphed into disadvantaged solicitors of political then later economic refuge. Indeed, we will look at the new African "invasion," the reasons behind it, its characteristics, and also its consequences for the host country (Spain: train bombing of 03/11/04 and subsequent change of government, heightened xenophobia of the locals such as the wave of attacks in the southern region of Murcia in 2018, Terrorist attack on 08/17/17 etc.).

In the same respect, we will attempt to shed some light on the current tensions between Spain and its historical Muslim enemy from the South (La última frontera. Marruecos, el vecino inquietante: The last frontier. Morocco, the disturbing neighbor). Could we here draw some kind of parallel with Mexico's *Azatlán*, a legendary homeland long ago lost to the USA?

From another perspective, we will study what culture was taken back to North Africa and beyond, following the expulsion of the Andalusis/Moriscos/Jews from the peninsula (starting in 1492 and culminating in 1609-1614). We will have an opportunity to discuss an array of topics ranging from Mudéjar Art to North African Immigrant women’s issues in Spain to the events of El Ejido in 2000 to the legacy of the Moors in the Iberian peninsula (language, food, music etc).

**Texts**

3. Articles for further reading and videos about the topic for class discussions provided by Instructor.

**Recommended Texts for further Reading and Research:**

**Evaluation:**

**Exams:** 35% (three exams: 15% each)
Will cover class the chapters being studied and class discussions.

**Chapter Presentation:** 15%
This will be done in pairs based on the chapter readings. Each group will make a presentation of the chapter assigned in power point format (Typically eight to Slides) for discussion with classmates.

**Course project:** 25%
On the first day, students will be given a list of topics to choose from, which have to do with the subject matter, and present it on the last day of classes. Additionally, a one-page synopsis of the project will be turned in to the instructor and an informative Hand-out will be provided to the classmates.

**Final Exam:** 25%
Will be based on the general review of the course and class discussions.

**Grading Scale:** (also Student option)

A: 94-100
A-: 90-93
B+: 88-89
B: 84-87
Schedule:

**1st week**: the 1st book that we will be working with: Moorish Spain: from 01/04 to 01/07: Historical Aspect of the Course

**2nd and 3rd week**: the second book that we will be working with: Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of tolerance in Medieval Spain: from 01/10 to 01/17

**Reading Day**: 01/18

**Final Exam Day**: 01/19

**1st Week:**

**01/04**: Moorish Spain: Historical Aspect of the Course

1. Intro to course.
2. Assignment of student chapter presentations and group projects
3. Discussion of reading due for 1st day of class: Chp I, II & III

**10/05:**
Discussion: Chp IV: The Caliphate of Cordoba (929-1031) & Chp V: The Taifas (The Party Kings)

Student chapter presentation

**01/06:**
Discussion: Chp VI & VII (The Morrocan fundamentalists: The Almoravids & the Almohads. and Convivencia)
Student chapter presentation

**01/07:**

**Exm 1:** 1 hour

Chp Discussion: VIII & IX (Nasrid Granada & An August Pomgranate)

Discussion of Islamic Spain videos series.

Student chapter presentation

**2nd week:**

**01/10:** The Ornament of The World: Historical, political and Social Aspect of the Course

Chp Discussion: A Brief History of a First Rate place (Pages 5-13) & (Pages 17-49)

Chp Discussion: The Mosque and the Palm Tree (Pages 53-65)

Chp Discussion: Mother Tongues (Pages 66-78)

Chp Discussion: A Grand Visir, a Grand City (Pges 79-90)

Student chapter presentation

**01/11:**

Chp Discussion: Assignment: Reading: The Gardens of Memory (Pages 91-100)

Chp Discussion: Victorious in Exile (101-111)

Chp Discussion: Love and Its Songs (112-129)

Student chapter presentation

**01/12:**

**Exam 2:** 1 hour

Chp Discussion: The Church at the Top of The Hill (130-146)

Chp Discussion: An Andalusian in London (147-157)

Chp Discussion: Sailing Away, Riding Away (158-173)
01/13:
Chp Discussion: The Abbot and the Quran (174-188)
Chp Discussion: Gifts (189- 200)
Chp Discussion: Banned in Paris (201-215)
Chp Discussion : Visions of Other Worlds (216- 228)
Student chapter presentation

01/14:
Chp Discussion: Foreign dignitaries at the Courts of Castile (229-243)
Chp Discussion: In the Alhambra
Chp Discussion: Somewhere in La Mancha
Student chapter presentation
Discussion of the geopolitical, economic and social aspect of the Course: General overview of area: Tensions between Morocco/North Africa and Spain/Europe, Immigration issues, Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Spain (Events of 03/11) and what's next?

01/17:
Exam 3: 1 hour
General Review for Final
Group Project Presentations:
Muslim Spain videos series Discussion
Discussion of the geopolitical, economic and social aspect of the Course: General overview of area: Tensions between Morocco/North Africa and Spain/Europe, Immigration issues, Rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Spain (Events of 03/11) and what's next? (Continued).

01/18:
Reading Day

01/19:
Final Exam