

Hist 535/635
Becoming Modern: A Comparative Look at Europe and Asia

Spring Semester 2020
Tuesdays 7:20-10:00
Classroom: Robinson B118

Dr. Brian Platt (bplatt1@gmu.edu)
Office: Robinson B351
Office Hours: Tuesday, 5:30-6:30, and by
appointment

What does it mean to become modern? Does it simply mean, for example, the building of factories and the movement of people from farms into cities? Or does it necessarily entail, or perhaps even result from, some deeper transformation of things immaterial—our values, our identities, or the structure or content of our ideas? This course will explore the various ways in which historians have conceptualized the shift from early modernity to modernity. We will focus on two geographic regions: Western Europe, whose historical experience gave rise to most of the models of modernization, and East Asia—Japan, specifically—where many of those models have been applied in an attempt to test their universality. We will examine, in comparative fashion, the different ways in which historians have traced this shift—through economic and political systems, social structures, popular culture, intellectual life, religion, gender, and national identity.

Required Texts

Daniel Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as we Know It*
Gail Lee Bernstein, *Isami's House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family*
Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in Early Modern Japan*
Daniel Botsman, *Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan*
Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History*
Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*
Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*
Joan Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation and Revolution in 18th-century France*
Frederico Marcon, *The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan*
Robert Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*
Mark Ravina, *To Stand with the Nations of the World: Japan's Meiji Restoration in World History*
Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in 18th-Century England*
Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*

Grading

Reading Responses:	30%
Final Exam (Take-home):	40%
Class Participation:	15%
Discussion Questions:	10%
Oral Presentation:	5%

The **reading responses** are two- to three-page (700-800 words) written responses to the week's readings. The responses should summarize and analyze the author's argument and explore the implications of the work. The responses must be turned in **before the class period** for that week, via Blackboard. Late responses will be penalized one-half grade for each day after the due date.

The **final exam** will be take-home, and will consist of essays on topics chosen by the instructor. Successful essays will draw heavily from the course readings; students are not expected to do additional reading when preparing the exams.

The **class participation** grade is based on your involvement in class discussion. Your grade will reflect not how much you talk, but how constructively you contribute to the discussion. Generally speaking,

constructive comments always draw from a close and thoughtful reading of the course material. Obviously, you cannot participate in class discussion if you are absent; therefore, absences will negatively affect your participation grade.

Each week you will write three **discussion questions** based on the readings. You will post these on Blackboard *by noon each Tuesday*. I will set things up so that everyone in the class can see each other's questions. The questions can be narrow or broad, though if narrow, you should be prepared to explain how the question, if answered, might yield additional lines of inquiry. Keep these short—typically one sentence, and no more than two. You can ask questions about something in the readings that seems important but that you found unclear, about connections or contrasts with other readings, about potential flaws in the authors' arguments or blind spots in their approach, etc. These questions will help me guide our class discussion; periodically I might call on you to share one of your questions. I will grade these pass/fail. As long as I receive them, you will get full credit (the equivalent of an A).

Each week one or two students will be responsible for opening the class with an **oral presentation**. The presentation should be around 7-8 minutes. The content should resemble a book review: it should present the book's key arguments, provide some very brief summary of the material, and offer analysis of the book's contributions, its strengths and (perhaps) flaws, its connections to other relevant scholarship, and its implications for our understanding of the transition to modernity. It should, in other words, cover some of the same territory that your weekly reading responses will cover. A word-for-word reading of your reading response, however, would make for a poor presentation. Put thought into how you can present your insights about the book in question in a way that effectively engages the audience.

All of this week-to-week work in this class—the reading responses, the discussion questions, the oral presentations—requires you to engage in an active, analytical reading of the book assigned for each class period. While reading each book, you should be asking yourself, repeatedly, the following questions: 1. What is the book's main argument? 2. What methodology does the author use when investigating his or her topic? 3. What kinds of evidence does the author use to support the argument? 4. In what ways does the author's argument or methodology differ from, or challenge, that of other books you have read for this class? 5. How would you situate the author's arguments and methodology in historiographical context—that is, in relation to larger trends in the discipline? Formulating answers to these questions as you complete each week's readings will prepare you to do well in all the graded assignments for this class. For additional guidance about how to read history books, please consult the essay written by my colleague, Dr. Zach Schrag, "[How to Read a History Book](#)."

Class policies:

ADA: Any student who requires special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me at the beginning of the semester to make necessary accommodations. Students should present appropriate verification from the Disabilities Resource Center

Mason e-mail: Mason uses only e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their e-mail account, use it when communicating with faculty, and check it regularly for important university information, including messages related to this class.

Excuses: If you miss class or assignments due to an illness or a death in the family, please provide proper documentation.

Plagiarism and Cheating: By enrolling at George Mason University, you have agreed to abide by the university's Honor Code. If you violate that Honor Code by plagiarizing or cheating in any other way, I will automatically report the case to the university's [Office of Academic Integrity](#).

Concerning plagiarism: According to the Student Handbook, plagiarism encompasses the following: "1) Presenting as one's own the words, work or opinions of someone else without proper acknowledgment;

2) Borrowing the sequence of ideas, the arrangement of material, or the pattern of thought of someone else without proper acknowledgment.” While it is possible that I might not catch every case of plagiarism, please don’t risk it.

Three additional policies:

1. I do not prohibit laptops for grad classes, but I urge you to use them responsibly. Open laptops make it difficult for most people to devote full attention to class discussion. If this is true of you—as it is for me—please close your laptop and take notes by hand.
2. No food.
3. Cell phones must be turned off.

Administrative Deadlines:

Last day to add classes: January 28

Last day to drop (with 50% refund): February 11

Schedule

Jan. 21	Course Introduction
Jan. 28	Marks, <i>Origins of the Modern World</i> John Hall, “Changing Conceptions of the Modernization of Japan” Harry Harootunian, “America’s Japan/Japan’s Japan”
Feb. 4	Greenblatt, <i>The Swerve: How the World Became Modern</i>
Feb. 11	Wahrman, <i>The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in 18th-Century England</i>
Feb. 18	Ravina, <i>To Stand with the Nations of the World</i>
Feb. 25	Berry, <i>Japan in Print: Information and Nation in Early Modern Japan</i>
Mar. 3	Marcon, <i>The Knowledge of Nature and the Nature of Knowledge in Early Modern Japan</i>
Mar. 10	Spring Break—No class
Mar. 17	Landes, <i>Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation and Revolution in 18th-century France</i>
Mar. 24	Bell, <i>The First Total War</i>
Mar. 31	Botsman, <i>Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan</i>
Apr. 7	Fujitani, <i>Splendid Monarchy</i>
Apr. 14	Fritzsche, <i>Stranded in the Present</i>
Apr. 21	Weber, <i>Peasants into Frenchmen</i>
Apr. 28	Bernstein, <i>Isami’s House: Three Centuries of a Japanese Family</i>

The Final Exam will be due on Wednesday, May 6, at 5:00 p.m.