

Jason Young's essay on black identities in the Atlantic world shares a problem with several of the other essays in the volume. Essays by Young, Jose Moya (on modernity), and to a lesser extent, Peter Coclanis (on the global rice trade) will prove difficult reading for undergraduates, particularly first and second year students, because of their sophisticated concepts and at times convoluted language. Patricia Seed's essay on Portuguese navigational technology is a bit too specialized to engage the interest of most student readers, while Claire Schen's comparison of piracy in the Atlantic and the Mediterranean never quite seems to come together. Claudio Saunt's essay on the Choctaw in the eighteenth century and Reed Ueda's essay on Hawai'i in the nineteenth century have the most direct relevance for United States history, as well as for current issues—proxy war and immigration—likely to be of interest to students.

The Atlantic in Global History will be a valuable addition to upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses in Atlantic history. By "pushing the Atlantic envelop," to use Reed Ueda's title, the book will encourage students to see Atlantic history in new and challenging ways. As a supplementary textbook in lower-level undergraduate world history courses, the difficulty and specialized nature of some of the essays in *The Atlantic in Global History* might prove problematic. Some individual essays might work well, however, and this is certainly a book that all teachers of world history will benefit from reading.

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James L. Gelvin. *The Modern Middle East: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. 338. Paper, \$34.95; ISBN 0-19-516789-9.

Due to recent events that are distressingly familiar to all, the Middle East currently occupies a more prominent place in American popular consciousness than ever before. As a result, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of academic positions, course offerings, and publications that take the "modern Middle East" (however defined) as their focus. Among the more significant of such recent publications is James Gelvin's *The Modern Middle East: A History*. Gelvin, Professor of History at UCLA, is both a prominent scholar of the region and the recipient of multiple teaching awards. Thus, he is more qualified than most to produce a textbook for undergraduate surveys of the subject.

As such a text, *The Modern Middle East* comprises a comprehensive, yet critical selective, synthesis of the relevant secondary literature. However, in structure, content, and style Gelvin's text represents a departure from previous approaches to the topic, most of which were structured around discrete temporal and geographic units and frequently contained sufficient detail to overwhelm and thus discourage students lacking basic knowledge of the subject matter. *The Modern Middle East* adopts a conventional geographic framework, roughly comprising Egypt, Turkey, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula. It nominally adheres to an equally conventional chronology by

locating the advent of the modern period in the eighteenth century. However, Gelvin is careful to situate the region's defining historical events and processes in global and long-term contexts. He thereby goes a long way toward accomplishing three difficult yet critical objectives: (1) the deconstruction of hoary and misleading dichotomies like East/West and Traditional/Modern; (2) the presentation of a clear, yet nuanced, definition of modernity as a collection of historical phenomena and experiences; and (3) the demystification of the processes by which modernity "arrived" in the Middle East.

In so doing, Gelvin is also admirably concise. By maintaining a thematic emphasis throughout, he avoids the aforementioned problem of excessive and extraneous detail, focusing on a select number of illustrative examples for each of his overarching themes, e.g., the emergence of a truly global economy, European/Western economic and political penetration of the region, modes and consequences of indigenous states' responses, the destruction of empires and the formation of nation-states, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the emergence of political ideologies and movements collectively designated (rightly or wrongly) "Islamist," among others.

Furthermore, this coherent and focused elucidation of the central events and processes of modern Middle East history is supplemented by a selection of maps, period photographs, primary-source documents, and "vignettes" (jokes, anecdotes, and topical asides) that help illustrate the aforementioned events and processes and render their human consequences concrete. It is also elegantly yet lucidly written, thus mercifully free of jargon and other linguistic "innovations" that so frequently plague academic prose and bewilder students.

Thus, my survey classes have benefitted from assigning *The Modern Middle East* as a required text. Its coherence and brevity permit the instructor to derive the structure and essential content of most lectures directly from the text, then emphasize or elaborate according to his or her expertise and interests, confident that the essential points have been covered. When used in conjunction with one of the many recently published primary-source readers or supplemented by a handful of such documents selected by the instructor, it is, in my opinion, the best text currently available.

Finally, I should note that a second, revised edition of *The Modern Middle East* that contains a new introduction further clarifying the authors' central arguments and updates the role of the United States in light of recent developments in Iraq, Palestine, and Iran, is scheduled for publication prior to August 2007.

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