

History 1750: American Politics and Culture Since 1945

Fall Semester 2014 – Tues/Thurs. 2:30 – 3:50
Professor Robert Self (robert_self@brown.edu)

Office: Sharpe House 303
Office Hours: Wednesday 3:00 – 5:00

When the Second World War came to a close in 1945, the United States entered a period of extraordinary transformation. The U.S. emerged from the war as the dominant global industrial and military power and by 1947 had initiated major efforts to re-shape much of Western Europe, Japan, and East Asia. Its chief geopolitical rival, the Soviet Union, was equally determined to realize its vision of a postwar world order. The resulting Cold War framed both international relations and domestic U.S. politics for forty years. At home, Americans emphasized consumption, prosperity, and anti-radicalism, forging a centrist-liberal political culture and expanding the nation's middle class to an unprecedented size. More than ever, Americans embraced a culture of consumption, which by the 1960s was firmly grounded in homeownership, suburbanization, the automobile, and nuclear-family-centered leisure.

None of these developments went unchallenged, however, and in the 1960s and 1970s this world, as Ruth Rosen has put it, “split open” under the strain of new social and political movements. In those two decades, Americans wrestled in quite public ways with weighty political and personal questions. What was the place of African Americans and other non-white groups in national life? Was the nation an imperial power, as evidenced in Vietnam? Should it be? Were women the equal of men? If so, what did this mean for the workplace, the family, and the bedroom? How could different human sexualities be expressed, and should gay men, lesbians, and other sexual minorities have the same rights as straight people? These questions, and the movements behind them, called forth a cultural and political reaction that gained traction in the 1980s. A new, rightward-leaning political culture came to replace the centrist liberalism of the postwar decades.

The Cold War remained a salient international framework, but only through 1991. By the 1990s, with the nation's politics shifted to the right and the Cold War over, many Americans searched for a new synthesis – as did many around the world. The Cold War's end brought renewed expansion of nominally free markets throughout the globe, a process abetted by the deregulation of financial markets and the creation of new spheres of global economic power in the European Union, China, Brazil, India, and elsewhere. Yet the U.S. remained the world's only military superpower and deployed that power eccentrically: assisting in humanitarian efforts on one hand and undertaking massive wars in the Middle East on the other.

The course explores all this and more: the cultural and political history of the United States between the end of World War II and the turn of the recent century. We will follow the major cultural and political developments in modern U.S. history, paying special attention to the relationship between historical processes and the lives and experiences of people. Principal topics include the Cold War, the rise and fall of New Deal liberalism, race and civil rights, women's history and feminism, Vietnam and U.S. foreign policy, suburbanization and the urban crisis, the triumph of consumption and popular culture, the rise of the New Right, and the triumph of global neoliberalism.

Required Books

Robert McMahon, *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction*
 Glenn Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America*
 Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
 Nancy MacLean, *American Women's Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents*
 Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Society, Culture, and Politics*
 Donald Critchlow and Nancy MacLean, *Debating the American Conservative Movement*
 Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America*
 Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

The books are available at the Brown Bookstore and are on reserve in the Rockefeller Library. There are also required readings available in a reading packet at Allegra.

Films

In addition to regular class meetings, we will screen 5 films during the course of the semester. They will be shown on select Wednesday evenings, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm. Students should approach the films with the same rigor and intellectual engagement applied to reading assignments. The films should be read as cultural texts: as historical evidence, as discursive and ideological statements about the world that deserve critical attention and analysis. Students should take notes in preparation for class discussion and exam or paper questions pertaining to the films. Film screenings are the equivalent of a reading assignment. If a scheduling conflict prevents your attendance, the films will be available on reserve, and possibly on line.

Rebel without a Cause (1955), September 24, 7 PM
No Way Out (1950), October 1, 7 PM
Freedom on My Mind (1994), October 8, 7 PM
Kramer vs. Kramer (1979), October 22, 7 PM
Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (2005), November 12, 7 PM

Discussion Section

We will hold discussion sections every week *except two*, starting September 12. In the spirit of liberal arts education and analytical dialogue, discussion sections are an elemental part of the course. Section is where you develop and hone the arts of deeper analytical thinking, public speaking, and writing. Also, it is fun.

Discussion section participation accounts for 15% of your grade. Your attendance is mandatory, and more than 1 or 2 absences will affect your grade. Discussions are both structured and free-form, but you must come to section having completed the reading for that week. This is essential, because there will be (announced) quizzes on some reading.

Graded Requirements

In addition to discussion section, there are three major graded assignments in the course: 1) a 7-page paper in the first half of the semester based on a question that I will pose, 2) an open-book midterm taken over a weekend (November 1-2), and 3) Your option: a 10-page paper due after reading week on a topic chosen by the you (in consultation with professor) OR a comprehensive closed-book final exam.

Grade Distribution: Discussion Section: 15%
 First paper: 25%
 Midterm exam: 30%
 Second paper OR Final Exam: 30%

Exam and Paper Due Dates

First paper: October 16 (Due in Class)
 Midterm: Weekend of November 1-2
 Second paper: December 15
 Final Exam: December 19, 9:00 AM

You must complete all the assignments and exams to be eligible to pass the course.

Plagiarism, the representation as your own of writing done by someone else (including: other students, the internet, books, etc.), is unacceptable and a violation of Brown's academic code (http://brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/academic_code.php).

Requirements and Expectations

- Your success in the course depends directly and proportionately on the energy you invest. I will work hard, the T.A.s will work hard, and I expect students to do the same.
- Students are expected to attend all lectures and discussion section meetings, to complete all reading assignments, and to participate actively in discussions and other group activities.
- The lectures are not repetitions of the readings. Far from it. They represent the argumentative and intellectual architecture of the course.
- Exams will draw on all materials in the course: lectures, readings, and films.
- ** If you are found to be surfing the internet, emailing, texting on your phone, or otherwise distracting fellow students during class, you will be asked to leave. There are no exceptions.

PART I: Cold War Nation, 1945-1965

Sept. 4: Introduction

Sept. 9: World War II and the National Imagination

Reading: Eric Johnston, *America Unlimited* [RP=Reading Packet]

Sept. 11: Anticommunism Abroad: The Containment Consensus

Reading: McMahon, *The Cold War*, Chapters 1-4; Potsdam-to-Iron Curtain – foundational documents of the Cold War [RP]; NSC-68 [RP]

Sept. 16: Anticommunism at Home: Cold War Liberalism

Reading: McMahon, *The Cold War*, Chapter 6; Testimony before HUAC: Ronald Reagan, Walt Disney, Paul Robeson, Lillian Hellman [RP]; William O. Douglas, “The Black Silence of Fear” [RP]; Joseph McCarthy, speeches [RP]

Sept. 18: Growing up Absurd: Dissent and the Vital Center

Reading: Miller, *Death of a Salesman*, selections [RP]; David Riesman, “Abundance for What?” [RP]

Sept. 23: A Consumer’s Republic: Houses, Cars, and Children

Reading: Altschuler, *All Shook Up*, Chapters 1-3

* Film: *Rebel Without a Cause*, Wednesday, September 24, 7 PM

Sept. 25: Where the Boys and Girls Are: Gender and Popular Culture

Reading: Altschuler, *All Shook Up*, Chapters 4-6

PART II: The Second Reconstruction, 1954-1973

Sept. 30: The Postwar Fate of the New Deal Order

Reading: Beryl Satter, “The Noose Around Black Chicago” [RP]; Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*

* Film: *No Way Out*, Wednesday, October 1, 7:00 PM

Oct. 2: Freedom Land: Civil Rights and American Liberalism, 1945-1963

Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” [RP];
Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” [RP]

Oct. 7: LBJ took the IRT Down to Fourth Street USA: The Great Society in the 1960s

Reading: Lyndon Johnson, “Remarks at the University of Michigan” [RP];
Clark Kerr, “The Higher Education Master Plan for California,” [RP]

Film: *Freedom on My Mind* (1994), Wednesday, October 8, 7:00 PM

Oct. 9: The Politics of Black Liberation, 1966-1972

Reading: Ture and Hamilton, *Black Power* [RP]; King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* [RP]

Oct. 14: The Big Muddy: Vietnam, 1954-1975

Reading: Vietnam Documents [RP]; John Kerry, Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 1971 [RP]; James Fallows, “What Did You do in the Class War, Daddy?” [RP]

**** First Paper Due – In Class****

Oct. 16: Vietnam and the Collapse of the Vital Center: the New Left

Reading: Paul Potter, “The Incredible War” [RP]; letters to Doctor Spock about Vietnam from ordinary Americans [RP]

Oct. 21: The Politics of Gender: The Feminine Mystique and Double Jeopardy

Reading: MacLean, *American Women’s Movement, 1945-2000: A Brief History with Documents*, readings TBA

* Film: *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), Wednesday, October 22, 7 PM

Oct. 23: Richard Nixon and Silent Majority Politics

Reading: MacLean, TBA

PART III: Political and Cultural Realignment, 1972-2010

Oct. 28: Kermit the Frog vs. Clint Eastwood: Cultural Cross-Currents in the 1970s

Reading: Schulman, *The Seventies*, Chapters 1-2, 4

Oct. 30: Standing Athwart History: The Rise of the New Right

Reading: Schulman, *The Seventies*, Chapters 5-6, 7

NO DISCUSSION SECTION THIS WEEK – Midterm exam to be taken during the weekend (November 1-2). Schulman material will be on the exam.

Nov. 4: Government is the Problem: The Reagan Revolution, 1980-1988

Reading: Critchlow and MacLean, *Debating the American Conservative Movement*, pp. 1-57 and 123-173 (Critchlow and Maclean essays)

Nov. 6: Cultural Politics in the Age of Reagan

Reading: Critchlow and MacLean, *Debating the American Conservative Movement*, Critchlow documents 2, 3, 4; MacLean documents 2, 4, 5, 7

Nov. 11: Welcome to the Jungle: Culture Wars and Politics after Reagan, 1992-2008

Reading: Critchlow and MacLean, *Debating the American Conservative Movement*, Critchlow documents 5, 7; Pat Buchanan, 1992 RNC Speech [RP]

Film: *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*, 7:00 PM

Nov. 13: All Roads Lead to Neoliberalism: Political Economy After the Great Exception

Reading: Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, Introduction - Afterward

Nov. 18: End of the American Century: The U.S. and the World

Reading: Peter Andreas, "The Escalation of U.S. Immigration Control in the Post-NAFTA Era" [RP]

Nov. 20: The Long Middle East War, 1991-2014

Reading: Tony Judt, "What Have we Learned, If Anything?" [RP]; Lewis Lapham, "The Road to Babylon: Searching for Targets in Iraq" [RP]

NO DISCUSSION SECTION THIS WEEK – Continue reading *The New Jim Crow*, which we will discuss the following week.

Dec. 2: Wars: on Terror, Crime, and Drugs

Reading: Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, Introduction – Chapter 3

Dec. 4: Poverty and Progress: America's Second Gilded Age

Reading: *The New Jim Crow*, Chapters 4-6

Dec. 9 Making Sense of it All: History and a Useable Past

Dec. 15 Second paper due

Dec. 19 Final Exam, 9:00 AM