

HIST 526: Readings in 20th Century United States Cultural/Social History
Western Kentucky University
Spring 2021

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This discussion seminar explores some of the major themes, problems, and historical interpretations of twentieth-century America. As a readings rather than a research-based class, our focus will be on reading and discussing key secondary historical works on significant 20th century events and struggles (although we will examine some primary sources as well). Key themes include debates over the nature of American society and who was entitled to fully participate in it, the rise of a powerful federal government in response to social and economic inequities and wars, the rise of the United States to a global superpower and its consequences, and the continuing struggle of workers, women, and ethnic and racial minorities to remake their lives and to ensure that the nation live up to its founding ideals of liberty and equality of opportunity for all its citizens.

As an online class, you will work as much, if not more, than you would in an “in-class” class. You will have to master the technology of Blackboard, and Blackboard discussion boards as well as posting written assignments to the website. You will also have to manage your time and participate—extensively—in online discussions related to the readings.

Each week, you will read several articles on Blackboard, and/or part of a monograph, and sometimes I will post primary documents (documents created in the time period we are studying) as well. This means you will need to be ready to take good notes and often pull together several scholars’ arguments and approaches to history at once.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to demonstrate in their written work their understanding of the following writing skills and historical knowledge:

Writing/Thinking Skills:

- 1) the difference between Primary and Secondary sources and how to use them in scholarship and the classroom
- 2) how to write effective historical arguments supported by well analyzed evidence in discussions and in longer work
- 3) How to write effective discussion questions/comments that expand and deepen historical understanding
- 4) how to think about and interpret History in complicated and sophisticated ways

Historical Understanding:

- 1) the growth of federal power across the century and its cultural and social implications

- 2) the reasons for the rise of the United States to a global superpower and its consequences for the country and the world
- 3) the changing nature of racial ideology, identity and socioeconomics across the course of the 20th century and its impact on modern America
- 4) changing conceptions and conditions of class and gender across the century
- 5) shifting definitions of culture from Victorianism to Mass to Popular and its implications

READINGS

The following required books are available through online retailers:

- Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2002) (ISBN: 978-0691102771)
- Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (W. W. Norton, 2020) ISBN-13 : 978-0393357622
- Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2011) ISBN: 9780195393132
- Robert Self, *All in the Family – The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (Hill & Wang, 2013) ISBN-13: 978-0809026746
- In addition, we will be reading a large number of articles and essays available either through electronic databases held by WKU Library or on Blackboard site.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Reading and Discussion: The heart of this graduate seminar and the key to making a successful, engaging and meaningful class will be probing discussions on the books and articles and other primary sources assigned for each week. Each week, I will either post one or two discussion questions to the Blackboard Discussion Board forums, or ask you to formulate your own initial posts. Discussion will **open Monday morning each week**, and you must upload your **initial** post by **Wednesday 10 pm CST**, and **all** your posts by **Saturday noon**. You are required to post **at minimum four times to the discussion board** each week: at least one original substantial post, at least two responses to other student posts (a substantial paragraph or more), and at least one response to another students' comments on your post). I will grade you on the quality of your postings (substantive, specific and historically-focused), the degree to which you incorporate the readings/documents and the degree to which you help move the discussion forward. Posts that say "I agree" will be graded as an "F". More guidelines are available on Blackboard site.

2. Reflection Essays (8 Total). To keep our online discussion at a high level, each student will submit a short (two page double-spaced) reflection essay to the week's readings to the link in **Blackboard by no later than Wednesday 10 pm** for that week's class. These short papers should lay out the book's or article's (or in some cases several related readings) argument(s) and key themes, and its main strengths and/or weaknesses in terms of evidence and analysis. Students will need to complete **8** of these papers over the semester. Students **must** complete the **first 2** papers and then **6 more** over the course

of the semester (see schedule below).

3. Critical Reviews. All students will also write four-page critical reviews on 2 of the full length books we read (Hartman and then Hale or Self). Of course, students will not be expected to submit the shorter reflection papers on the weeks they submit these longer papers. These need to be posted to the Blackboard link **by noon of the due date posted on Schedule.**

4. Cumulative Review essay. At the end of the semester, all students will submit one of the following:

1) an essay of 10-14 pages reviewing the major themes and interpretations we have examined. This sounds easy, but it is a challenging assignment. As you will see, review essays must both size up individual scholarly works on a given topic and explain how they have shaped their larger historical field.

OR

2) An essay of only 5-7 pages AND 2-3 lesson plans for middle- or high-school students derived from the readings and incorporating appropriate primary sources.

The assignment will be due in week 15 but you are encouraged to get started on it as soon as possible. I will be providing more information on this assignment later in the semester.

Here is a hopefully helpful table of all possible assignments and due dates:

ASSIGNMENT DUE DATES (REQ: Required; OPT: Optional) ALL Times are CST					
WEEK	Days (M-Sa)	Wkly Disc. Questions (ALL Required)	Reflective Essay (8 TOTAL)	Critical Review (2 TOTAL)	Cumul. Essay/ Lesson Plans
Wk 1	Jan. 19-23	1/23 12pm			
Wk 2	Jan. 25-30	1/30 12pm	REQ 1/27 10pm		
Wk 3	Feb. 1-6	2/6 12pm	REQ 2/3 10pm		
Wk 4	Feb. 8-13	2/13 12pm	OPT. 2/10 10pm		
Wk 5	Feb. 15-20	2/20 12pm	OPT. 2/17 10pm		
Wk 6	Feb. 22-27	2/27 12pm	OPT. 2/24 10pm	REQ 2/27 12pm	
Wk 7	Mar. 1-6	3/6 12pm	OPT. 3/3 10pm		
Wk 8	Mar. 8-13	NO DISCUSSION			
Wk 9	Mar. 15-20	3/20 12pm	OPT. 3/17 10 pm		
Wk 10	Mar. 22-27	3/27 12pm	OPT. 3/24 10 pm		
Wk 11	Mar. 29-Apr. 3	4/3 12pm	OPT. 3/31 10 pm	OPT 4/3 12pm	
Wk 12	Apr. 5-10	4/10 12pm	OPT. 4/7 10 pm		
Wk 13	Apr. 12-17	NO DISCUSSION		OPT 4/17 12pm	
Wk. 14	Apr. 19-24	4/24 12pm	No Reflect Essay		
Wk 15	April 28				4/28 end of day

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Weekly Discussion Participation: (12) 20 pts/wk:	25%	240 pts.
Weekly 2 pg. Reflection Essays (8) 30 pts. each	25%	240 pts.
Critical Reviews – 4pg. (2) 100 pts. each	20%	200 pts
Cumulative Review Essay/Lesson Plans	30%	320 pts.
Total Points:		1000 pts.

A=900-1000 points; B=800-899 points; C=700-799 points; D=699 or less
(Sadly I don't have the option of offering + or – grade differentials)

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students need to scrupulously cite all sources they reference in their written work. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Students who cheat or plagiarize dishonestly will receive a failing grade for the course, regardless of the credit percentage of that assignment or how much of the course requirements they have completed. The university's policies on plagiarism are outlined in the student handbook and at:

<http://www.wku.edu/Dept/Support/StuAffairs/StuLife/handbook/PIPolicy/14AcademicOffenses.htm>

FINAL THOUGHTS

As is clear from the syllabus, this course requires a significant commitment of time and energy from all participants. I realize that as graduate students you are often making classes fit around full-time jobs and busy lives, and I am more than willing to try to accommodate your schedules where possible -- offer time extensions at times. That said, I am far more amenable to such requests if they come sooner rather than later and if they do not mount up over the course of the semester. I am always more than happy to set up zoom appointments to meet with you to discuss the class and your work, so take advantage of this opportunity!

SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

All readings not from monographs will be on class Blackboard site unless otherwise indicated. Schedule and readings are subject to change; any changes will be announced ahead of time.

Wk 1) Jan. 19-23: Introduction/ What is History? Why Study It?

Readings: Cronon, "Why the Past Matters"; Arnold, "The killing of cats" and "The Telling of Truth"; Avila, "The Stories of American History and Why they Matter"

Wk 2) Jan. 25-30: TR, Race and Turn of the Century Urbanizing America

Readings: Gerstle: Introduction - Ch. 1; Avila, "The Age of the City, 1860-1900";
Primary: Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life"

Wk 3) Feb. 1-6: The Progressive Era from the Bottom Up

Readings: Gerstle, ch. 2; Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, Books 1-2 (1-214)
Primary: Jacob Riis, "The Color Line in New York"

Wk 4) Feb. 8-13: From the War to End all Wars through the Roaring Twenties

Readings: Gerstle, ch. 3; Hartman, Book 3-end
Primary: Bessie Smith Blues Songs

Wk 5) Feb. 15-20: Popular Culture in Depression America

Readings: Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark*, p. 1-11, ch. 3 (50-55, 70-91), chs 13-15 (464-506); Harkins, *Hillbilly*, Intro, ch. 4
Primary: 1930s popular culture

Wk 6) Feb. 22-27: The New Deal Order in Depression and War

Readings: Gerstle, ch. 4-5; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, excerpts
Primary: WWII Ads

Critical Review 1: *Wayward Lives* Due 2/27 10 pm

Wk 7) Mar. 1-6: Cold War Culture

Readings: Gerstle, ch. 6; Henriksen, "The unhinged moral universe of Cold War America"; Cuordileone, "Anti-Communism on the Right"
Primary: Joseph McCarthy, "Wheeling, WV Speech" (Feb. 9, 1950)
Report: "Employment of Homosexuals in Government" (1950)

Wk 8) Mar. 8-13: NO Class Discussion (get ahead on Hale and Self books)

Wk 9) Mar. 15-20: The Affluent Society and its Discontents

Readings: Hale, Part 1 (1-159);
Primary: video: "In the Suburbs," other TBA

Wk 10) Mar. 22-27: **Civil Rights and the Freedom Struggle and its Repercussions**

Readings: Gerstle, ch. 7; Hale, Part II (163-308);
Primary: King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"; SNCC Founding Statement, Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

Wk 11) Mar. 29-Apr. 3: **Gender Sex and Family Redefined 1: mid 60s to mid 70s**

Readings: Gerstle, ch. 8; Self, Parts 1 and 2 (3-185)
Primary: TBA

Crit. Review 2: *A Nation of Outsiders* Due 4/3

Wk 12) Apr. 5-10: **Gender Sex and Family Redefined 2: 1968 onward**

Readings: Self, Parts 3 and 4 (188-425)
Primary: TBA

Wk 13) Apr. 12-17: **No Class Discussion:**

Work on Critical Review & Final Paper/Lesson Plans

Crit. Review 3: *All in the Family* Paper Due 4/17

Wk 14) Apr. 19-24: **Summing Up: Looking Backward, Looking Forward**

Readings: Gerstle, Epilogue; Ribuffo, "Contrarian Thoughts on Change and Continuity in American Political Culture"

Wk 15) April : **Final Cumulative Paper OR Paper and Lesson Plans Due 4/28**