

HIST 526: Readings in 20th Century United States Cultural/Social History
Western Kentucky University
Fall 2024

Instructor: Dr. Anthony Harkins

E-mail: anthony.harkins@wku.edu

Office Hours: email if you want to meet and we can set time that works

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 (we will regularly consider 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 ongoing reimagining of what it meant to be an American, 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 (Ultra), 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 a large part of a monograph and/or several articles on Blackboard; many weeks I will also post representative primary documents in the time period we are focusing on. 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

READINGS

The following required books which we will read in their entirety are available through WKU Store and online retailers. I prefer you read print editions (easier to cite directly) but e-books are acceptable as well:

- Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2017) (ISBN-13: 978-0691173276)
- Mia Bay, *Travelling Black: A Story of Race and Resistance* (Belknap Press, 2021) (ISBN-13: 978-0674278622)
- Andrew McKevitt, *Gun Country: Gun Capitalism, Culture, and Control in Cold War America* (U North Carolina Press, 2023) (ISBN-13: 978-1469677248)
- Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders: How the White Middle Class Fell in Love with Rebellion in Postwar America* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2014) (ISBN-13: 978-0199314584)
- 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 online or through the Blackboard site.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Reading and Discussion Posts: 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 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 – Course Documents.

2. Reflective Essays (8 Total). To keep our online discussion at a high level, each student will submit a short (two page double-spaced, c. 600 words) reflective essay on 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 reflective essays and then 6 more over the course of the semester (**see schedule below**).

3. Critical Reviews. All students will also write more in-depth four-page (1200 words) critical reviews on **TWO** of the full length books we read (Bay, McKivett, Hale, and 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	Aug. 19-24	8/24 12pm			
Wk 2	Aug. 26-31	8/31 12pm	REQ 8/28 10pm		
Wk 3	Sep. 2-7	9/7 12pm	REQ 9/4 10pm		
Wk 4	Sep. 9-14	9/14 12pm	OPT. 9/16 10pm		
Wk 5	Sep. 16-21	9/21 12pm	OPT. 9/18 10pm	OPT. 9/21 12pm	
Wk 6	Sep. 23-28	9/28 12pm	OPT. 9/25 10pm		
Wk 7	Sep. 30-Oct. 5	10/5 12pm	OPT. 10/2 10pm		
Wk 8	Oct. 7-12	NO DISCUSSION			
Wk 9	Oct. 14-19	10/19 12pm	OPT. 10/16 10pm		
Wk 10	Oct. 21-26	10/26 12pm	OPT. 10/23 10pm	OPT 10/26 12pm	
Wk 11	Oct. 28-Nov. 2	11/2 12pm	OPT. 10/30 10pm		
Wk 12	Nov. 4-9	11/9 12pm	OPT. 11/6 10pm	OPT 11/9 12pm	
Wk 13	Nov. 11-16	11/16 12pm	OPT. 11/13 10pm		
Wk 14	Nov. 18-23	11/23 12pm		OPT 11/23 12pm	
Wk 15	TBD				TBD

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

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: <https://www.wku.edu/studentconduct/process-for-academic-dishonesty.php>

Use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) Generators

As my goal in this class is to help you develop the skills to read and write (AI) generators such as ChatGPT are not permitted for any type of work in this class. If you choose to use these tools, with or without acknowledgement, your actions will be considered academically dishonest and a violation of the WKU Student Code of Conduct.

For information on other university policies regarding Inclusion, ADA, Title IX/ Discrimination & Harassment, Student Code of Conduct, Academic Integrity, Student Complaint/Student Grievance, Safe Space, Active Shooter, and other helpful information, please go to this link: <https://www.wku.edu/syllabusinfo/>. The policies outlined there are the policies of this course.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As is clear from the syllabus, this course requires a significant commitment of time and energy from all participants (including myself!). 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 – and even 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 don't hesitate to reach out!

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. (P)=primary sources

Wk 1) Aug. 19-24: **Introduction/ What is History? Why Study It?**

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

Wk 2) Aug. 26-31: **Race and early 20th Century Urbanizing America**

Readings: Gerstle: Introduction - Ch. 2; Goodman, "Defining American";
(P): Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life"

Wk 3) Sep. 2-7: **African Americans on the Road in Jim Crow America**

Readings: Gerstle: ch. 3; Bay, *Traveling Black*, chs. 1-4; (P): Green Book

Wk 4) Sep. 9-14: **Fighting for the Right to Travel in Post War America**

Readings: Bay, chs. 5-end; (P): Black Busses and Freedom Rides articles

Wk 5) Sep. 16-21: **The New Deal Order in Depression and War**

Readings: Gerstle, chs. 4-5; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear* excerpts; Dickinson, excerpts; (P): WWII Posters and Ads

Critical Review 1: *Traveling Black* Due 9/21 12 pm

Wk 6) Sep. 23-28: **Cold War Culture**

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

Wk 7) Sep. 30-Oct. 5: **The making of Postwar Gun Country**

Readings: McKivett, chs. 1-5; (P): TBA

Wk 8) Oct. 7-12: **NO Class Discussion**

(finish McKivett and get ahead on Hale and Self books)

Wk 9) Oct. 14-19: **Gun Country: post 1960s Gun Movements**

Readings: McKivett, chs. 6-end; (P): TBA

Wk 10) Oct. 21-26: **The Affluent Society and its Discontents**

Readings: Hale, Part 1 (1-159); (P): "In the Suburbs," "Little Boxes"

Crit. Review 3: *Gun Country* Due 10/26 12pm

Wk 11) Oct. 28-Nov. 2: **Civil Rights and the Freedom Struggle and its Repercussions**

Readings: Gerstle, ch. 7; Hale, Part II (163-308);

(P): King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail"; SNCC Founding Statement, Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet"

Wk 12) Nov. 4-9: **Gender Sex and Family Redefined 1: mid 1960s to mid 1970s**

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

(P): TBA

Crit. Review 3: *A Nation of Outsiders* Due 11/9 12pm

Wk 13) Nov. 11-16: **Gender Sex and Family Redefined 2: 1968 onward**

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

(P): TBA

Wk 14) Nov. 18-23: **Summing Up: Looking Backward, Looking Forward**

Readings: Gerstle, Epilogue; other TBA

Crit. Review 4: *All in the Family* Paper Due 11/23 12pm

Wk 15) **Final Cumulative Paper OR Paper and Lesson Plans Due TBD**