

HIST 345 – Modern American History, 1945-Present

Spring 2006
T, Th 11:30-12:45
Pierce Hall 223

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Ofc. Hrs: Tues., 1:00-2:30, or by appointment
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Course Summary

This course will cover some of the major events, movements, and trends that have defined the American experience since 1945. We will use a variety of materials to facilitate our understanding of modern American history, and we will give special attention to methods of interpreting primary and secondary sources. Our readings and lectures will cover everything from cultural history (film, literature, television, consumerism) to social history (the civil rights movement, suburbanization) to foreign relations (the Cold War, Vietnam). Although this is a diverse set of topics, a few major themes will ground our study of post-1945 American history during these years: 1) America's assumption of an "internationalist" posture and "superpower" status, 2) the emergence of the Cold War, with its decades-long domestic and international consequences, 3) unprecedented economic growth, which spawned what one economist memorably referred to as "The Affluent Society," 4) sharp debates over political solutions to social problems, 5) the predominance of political liberalism from the 1940s to the 60s, followed by the rise of conservatism, and 6) changing attitudes about race, class, ethnicity, and sex.

Course Objectives

There are several objectives for this course, but I am primarily interested in helping you improve vital skills. You will be challenged to develop critical thinking skills through close readings of short texts. Regular classroom discussions – during which everyone will have to participate – will help you to hone your ability to interpret evidence and communicate your ideas verbally. Yes, you will pick up a certain amount of "factual" historical knowledge along the way (the kind of thing you expect to have to learn in a history class), but this class is as much about broadening your skill set as it is about remembering historical details. You will also learn about the process whereby history is "created" and disseminated textually and orally. As a writing-intensive class that fulfills the sophomore writing requirement, this course will assist students in developing their writing abilities through short writing assignments and longer essays. The ability to communicate effectively in writing will benefit you tremendously in upper division courses and in the job market.

As a Sophomore Writing Course, this class will have 20-25 pages of formal writing assignments. Any student who fails the writing assignments cannot get SW credit for the course. To get credit for your sophomore writing requirement you must earn a grade of C or higher. You can pass the course with a C- or D, but you will not receive credit for the sophomore writing requirement.

Required Books

These are available in the Oxford bookstore, though cheaper versions can often be found online.

- Ralph B. Levering, Vladimir O. Pechatnov, Verena Botzenhart-Viehe, and C. Earl Edmondson, *Debating The Origins of the Cold War: American and Russian Perspectives* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001)
- Fraser Harbutt, *The Cold War Era* (Malden: Blackwell, 2002)
- Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, 2nd Edition (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002)
- Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Dell, 1976)
- Robert Mason, *Chickenhawk* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984)

(Do not confuse this book with Mason's similarly-titled *Chickenhawk: Back in the World*)

- Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999)
- Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)
- Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)
- Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005)

Testing and Grading

Students will be graded on the following:

Quizzes

There will be five quizzes, and these will consist of questions based on the day's readings.

Quizzes will begin when class begins, so be sure to show up on time. Makeup quizzes will **NOT** be allowed, except in the case of a documented medical or family emergency.

Essays

You will be asked to write three essays of varied lengths – short (4-6 pages), medium (6-8 pages), and long (8-10 pages). Preliminary drafts and peer reviews are integral parts of the writing and revision process for this course. For each essay you will be expected to turn in a first draft, which I will grade and return (this will be 20% of the paper grade), followed by a final draft, which I will also grade and return (this will be 80% of the paper grade). I will break you up into groups of five, and you will all be responsible for reading the papers written by the members of your group. So be sure to **BRING FIVE COPIES OF YOUR FIRST DRAFT**, one for me and one for each of your peers. I will pass out more detailed instructions on essays and the peer review process during the second week of the semester. I will be holding additional office hours (1:00-2:30) to discuss papers on Feb. 15, March 8, and April 26.

All papers – drafts and final versions alike – are due at the beginning of class, and 5 points will be deducted for every day that a paper is late, including weekends, unless you have a documented medical or family emergency. Papers may NOT be e-mailed. Also note that I have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism. I will distribute writing tips and citation rules during the second week of the semester. These should help answer general questions related to writing academic papers (style, organization, avoiding plagiarism, etc.), as well as specific questions about history papers (using evidence, citing properly, etc.).

Readings and Class Preparation

Weekly readings consist of primary documents, selected literature, and some essays that can be accessed electronically (through e-Journals or JSTOR via the library web page under Information Gateway; through Electronic Reserve; or through the *LearnLink* class conference). All readings should be completed before the date for which they are assigned in the syllabus. Unless instructed otherwise, I expect all students to be prepared to discuss each week's readings and lecture topics. I am always happy to hear what you have to say, but be aware that your opinions should be *informed* [As a great wit once wrote: "Everyone is entitled to his or her own opinions; no one is entitled to his or her own facts."] I will respect your ideas in the classroom, and I expect you to show respect to other students, even when you disagree with them.

A key point about reading for this class is that you should not read **PASSIVELY**. Be tough; get into the habit of interrogating everything you read. Ask yourself: Do I like this article? Do I hate

it? Does anything jump out as surprising, infuriating, or particularly satisfying? Keep in mind that secondary sources are essentially *arguments*. They were not passed down on stone tablets from God. Rather, they are the work of ordinary people who have conducted research, organized their ideas, and put these ideas down on paper for the rest of us to interpret. So when you are reading a *secondary source* for this class, keep these questions in mind: What is the thesis, and what other major points does the author make? What kind of evidence does he/she use to prove his/her argument? Is the argument persuasive? Are there any weaknesses in the argument? When you are reading a *primary source*, ask these questions: Who is the author? Who is/was the audience? What were the historical circumstances surrounding the source's creation? Is there a thesis? When we read this source today, what can we learn about the time period during which it was created? Finally, whatever you are reading for this class, always try to devise a few questions for discussion.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation are expected. Class discussions are an integral part of the mechanics of learning the course material, so I hope to dedicate part of each week to a focused discussion of specific readings. You are allowed two unexcused absences, and I will deduct points from your participation grade for each subsequent unexcused absence. Absences are considered unexcused unless you have a documented medical or family emergency. Your participation grade will be calculated from your attendance, classroom participation, your reviews of your peers' writing, and your work on short response papers that I will solicit from you on a few occasions throughout the semester. If you miss a class, it's up to you to get the notes from your classmates.

Final Exam

We will have a final exam at the end of the semester. I will ask you to draw on what you have learned from lectures, readings, and discussions in order to write synthetic answers to complex questions. Exam questions will be drawn largely from material that is covered in class, which is another incentive to show up, pay attention, and take good notes. I will distribute a study guide one week before the exam, and we will have a review during the last class session. As per the rules of the College, the time and date for the final exam are not negotiable.

The grading scale is 93-100 = A, 90-92 = A-, 87-89 = B+, 83-86 = B, 80-82 = B-, 77-79 = C+, 73-76 = C, 70-72 = C-, 67-69 = D+, 60-66 = D, and 0-59 = F. Final grades will be determined in the following manner:

Quizzes	10%
Essay 1	15%
Essay 2	20%
Essay 3	25%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	10%

Classroom Etiquette

Just a few classroom rules: Wear whatever you want and drink whatever you want, but please show up on time, leave on time, and don't eat in class. (And turn off your cell phone, Jack!!) If you need to get in touch with me, I prefer that you visit during office hours or speak with me after class. I will answer your e-mails, but I would appreciate it if you only e-mailed me as a last resort. Oxford College and Emory University are small enough that you can expect to be able to meet with your teachers face-to-face on a regular basis. I should point out, though, that I am only on campus on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you are unable to meet with me on one of those days,

contact me and perhaps we can work something out. Finally, I may make minor changes to this syllabus, but if I do so, I will tell you in advance via *LearnLink*. ****Consult the *LearnLink* conference at least once a week for announcements, assigned readings, and schedule changes.**

Course Schedule

Jan. 18 – Introduction: Major Themes, 1945-present

Jan. 23 – World War II and its Aftermath

Read: Paul Fussell, *Wartime* (on *LearnLink*); Levering, pp. 4-23

Jan. 25 – Truman and the Atomic Bomb

In class: Atomic bomb debate, Dutch Van Kirk video excerpt

Read: *LearnLink* documents

****Turn in:** Short (500 words) paper defending your debate position

Jan. 30 – Intro to Cultural History: *Film Noir*

Read: *LearnLink* documents

Feb. 1 – ****No Class Today**

****Assignment:** Write a short (500-700 words) paper explaining either the Soviet or American perspective, as described in Levering, pp. 1-151. **Turn this in on February 6.**

Feb. 6 – Cold War I: The Origins Debate

Read: Levering, pp. 1-4, 23-62, 85-151; Harbutt, Preface, Ch. 1

Feb. 8 – Cold War II: Domestic Subversion and McCarthyism

Read: Schrecker, iv-106; Harbutt, Ch. 2

In class: McCarthyism discussion

****Turn in: First Draft of Essay One (20% of paper grade); BRING FIVE COPIES OF YOUR ESSAY TO CLASS**

Feb. 13 – Spy Cases and the Hollywood Blacklist

Read: Schrecker, Documents 1, 2, 4-7, 11-12, 14-17, 20, 22; *LearnLink* FBI file documents

In class: Cold War film

Feb. 15 – A Conformist Society?: A Look at Suburbanization and the Consumer Culture

Read: Harbutt, Ch. 3 (esp. 123-138); *LearnLink* documents

Feb. 20 – Women in the 1950s

Read: Bailey, Ch. 1, 3 (esp. pp. 75-94)

****Turn in: Final Draft of Essay One (80% of paper grade)**

Feb. 22 – What is a “Civil” Right? Civil Rights in the 1950s

Feb. 27 – The Grass Roots: Anne Moody

Read: Moody, Parts I-II

****In class: Quiz, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* discussion**

Mar. 1 – Civil Rights (continued)

Read: Moody, Parts III-IV

****In class: Quiz**

Mar. 6 – JFK, LBJ, and the Great Society

Read: Harbutt, 139-175

****Turn in: First Draft of Essay Two (20% of paper grade); BRING FIVE COPIES OF YOUR ESSAY TO CLASS**

Mar. 8 – Vietnam I: Introductory Lecture

Read: Harbutt, 175-188; *LearnLink* docs (McNamara, Ho, LBJ)

****March 12-16: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS!**

Mar. 20 – Vietnam II: Domestic Implications

****Turn in: Final Draft of Essay Two (80% of paper grade)**

Mar. 22 – Vietnam III: The Soldier's Experience

Read: Mason, *Chickenhawk*, ALL (including Author's Note, Prologue, Epilogue)

****In class: Quiz**, Discussion of *Chickenhawk*

Mar. 27 – Radicalism and Reaction: Youth Movements of the 1960s

Read: Harbutt, 188-200; *LearnLink* documents

Mar. 29 – Movements (cont'd): The Women's Movement

Read: *LearnLink* documents

Apr. 3 – The Sexual Revolution

Read: Bailey, Introduction, Ch. 4-6, 8, Epilogue (Ch. 7 optional)

****Turn in:** Bailey short paper

In class: Discussion of Bailey

Apr. 5 – America's Right Turn: The New Right & Neoconservatism

Read: McGirr, Introduction, Ch. 1-3

****In Class: Quiz**, discussion of McGirr

Apr. 10 – "It Seemed Like Nothing Happened:" America in the 1970s

Read: McGirr, Ch. 4-6, Epilogue

Apr. 12 – Post-Vietnam Foreign Policy I: Nixon, Kissinger, and Détente

Read: Harbutt, 201-237

Apr. 17 – The Ethnic Revival

Read: Jacobson, Introduction, Ch. 1-2, 4, 7, Coda (Optional: Ch. 3, 5-6)

****Turn in:** Jacobson short paper

In class: Discussion of Jacobson

Apr. 19 – Post-Vietnam Foreign Policy II: Human Rights

Read: Harbutt, 237-263; *LearnLink* documents

****Turn in: First Draft of Essay Three (20% of paper grade); BRING FIVE COPIES OF YOUR ESSAY TO CLASS**

Apr. 24 – Reagan, the 80s, and the End of the Cold War

Read: Harbutt, 264-301, 301-326

Apr. 26 – How We Live, Eat, and Work

Read: Schlosser, Introduction, Ch. 1-8, Epilogue
(Recommended: Ch. 9)

****In class: Quiz**, *Fast Food Nation* discussion

May 1 – Final class session. Tie up loose ends, review for final exam

****Turn in: Final Draft of Essay Three (80% of paper grade)**

****Final Exam: Time and date TBA (Bring a large blue book and a pen.)**