

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

IDEOLOGY, CULTURE, AND AMERICAN POLITICS

Professor Peter J. Kuznick
Spring 2009

HIST-387.01/687.01

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M: 3-5

Objectives:

Focusing on the late 19th and 20th centuries, this course will combine elements of American intellectual, cultural, and political history in an attempt to understand some of the key factors that shape the way Americans interpret and act upon the world, individually and collectively. The course will assess different periods and themes in the development of American culture, paying particular attention to the emergence of a culture of abundance and its transmogrification into contemporary mass culture, the role of mass media in the formation of beliefs and attitudes, the elaboration and influence of liberal, radical, and conservative ideologies and the challenges posed by radical alternatives to mainstream thought and behavior, and the effect of anti-communism, sexism, racism, and homophobia on American life. In the process, we will draw upon a multiplicity of sources, including novels, plays, films, television, and radio.

Course Requirements:

Regular attendance is required in order to pass the class. Students will be expected to complete all assigned readings and view all assigned films by the dates indicated by the syllabus. For undergraduates, there will be a 5 page paper (25% of grade), a 10 page paper (35%), and a final exam, consisting of identifications and essays (30%). For graduate students, in addition to a final exam (30%), 2 book precis (20%), and a 15-20 page research paper (40%) will be required. Active class participation is required of both undergraduates and graduate students (10%). Students must keep an extra copy of all written assignments that are turned in. All students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the University's Academic Integrity Code. Students are forewarned that the schedule below is only a loose guideline and WILL NOT always be rigidly adhered to.

Required Texts:

Susan Douglas, Where the Girls Are

Martin Duberman, Paul Robeson

Lillian Faderman, Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers

Laura Hein and Mark Selden, eds., Living With the Bomb

Peter Kuznick and James Gilbert, eds., Rethinking Cold War Culture

Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism

Sinclair Lewis, Babbitt

Jack London, Martin Eden

Norman Mailer, Armies of the Night

Lisa McGirr, Suburban Warriors

Clifford Odets, Six Plays of Clifford Odets

Additional Readings for Graduate Students:

Mike Davis, City of Quartz

Richard Fried, The Russians Are Coming!

James Gilbert, Redeeming Culture

Recommended Readings:

George Chauncey, Gay New York

John D'Emilio, Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities

William Gibson, Warrior Dreams

Todd Gitlin, The Sixties

David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity

Elaine Tyler May, Homeward Bound

Warren Susman, Culture as History

Cornell West, Race Matters

Stephen Whitfield, The Culture of the Cold War

Course Outline:

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| January 14 | <p>Perpetual Warfare: Ideology, Culture, and Politics in 2005</p> <p>Manipulating Public Opinion in Postmodern America</p> <p>Film: Excerpts from <u>Manufacturing Consent</u> and <u>Outfoxed</u></p> |
| January 21 | <p>The Struggle for Cultural and Political Hegemony in Victorian America: Class and Sexual Conflict</p> <p>Read: London</p> |
| January 28 | <p>The Transformation of Popular Culture and the Emerging Culture of Abundance</p> <p>Recommended: Susman (Chapters 6-14)</p> |
| February 4 | <p>Advertising: The Creation of Needs?</p> <p>1920s America: The Age of Babbitry?</p> <p>Read: Lewis</p> |
| February 11 | <p>Art and Revolution in 1930s America</p> <p>Waiting for Lefty</p> <p>Read: Odets (“Waiting for Lefty” and “Awake and Sing”)</p> |
| February 18 | <p>The Cultural Cold War</p> <p>Controlling the Media: The Hollywood Inquisition and its Aftermath</p> <p>Film: Excerpts from <u>Woman on Pier 13</u>, <u>Big Jim McLain</u>, and other Cold War Films</p> <p>Read: Kuznick and Gilbert</p> <p>Recommended: Whitfield</p> <p>First Papers Due</p> |
| February 25 | <p>Living with the Bomb: Nuclear Culture</p> <p>Film: Excerpts from <u>Atomic Cafe</u> and other nuclear war-related films</p> <p>Read: Hein and Selden (Chapters 1-4, 6-7, 9, 12-13)</p> <p>Recommended: May</p> |

- March 4 The Invention and Cooptation of Teen Culture
Film: Blackboard Jungle
View Rebel Without a Cause in the Library Media Center prior to class
- March 18 The Taming of Rock and Roll
Mass Culture, Youth Culture, and the Destabilization of the American Family
Growing Up Female with the Mass Media
View Thelma and Louise in the Library Media Center prior to class
Read: Douglas
- March 25 The Radicalization of 1960s Youth Culture
Read: Mailer
Recommended: Gitlin
Film: Excerpts from Berkeley in the Sixties and The Weather Underground
- April 1 Woody Allen, Existential Despair, and the Modern Therapeutic Sensibility
The Culture of Narcissism
Film and Discussion: Annie Hall
View Stardust Memories and Manhattan in the Library Media Center prior to class.
Read: Lasch
- April 8 Sexuality and Culture in Contemporary America
Read: Faderman
Recommended: Chauncey, D'Emilio
View The Boys in the Band in the Library Media Center prior to class
- April 15 Race, Politics, and Culture in 20th Century America
Read: Duberman
Recommended: West
Research Papers Due

- April 22 Where's the Rest of Him? Ronald Reagan as a Cultural and Political Phenomenon
Troubled Masculinity: Warrior Fantasies and the American Right
View King's Row in the Library Media Center prior to class.
Read: McGirr
Recommended: Gibson
- May 6 Final Exam

Viewing Films Outside Class:

Most of the films are available on video and can be rented for viewing at your convenience. Films may also be seen in the Media Center on the lower level of the library at the following times. All films will also be available for viewing at any time when they are not being shown for class.

Rebel Without a Cause will be shown on March 2 at 1 pm, March 3 at 1 pm and 7 pm, and March 4 at 5:30 pm.

Thelma and Louise will be shown on March 16 at 1 pm, March 17 at 1 pm and 7 pm and March 18 at 5:30 pm.

Manhattan and Stardust Memories will be shown on March 30 at 1 pm, March 31 at 1 pm and 7 pm, and April 1 at 4 pm.

The Boys in the Band will be show on April 6 at 1 pm, April 7 at 1 pm and 7 pm, and April 8 at 5:30 pm.

King's Row will be shown on April 20 at 1 pm, April 21 at 1 pm and 7 pm, April 22 at 5:30 pm.

Ideology, Culture, and American Politics

First Paper

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Assignment: What can we tell about American life by reading the newspapers and magazines of the late 19th and early 20th centuries? Read one week of a national newspaper (New York Times), one week of a local newspaper (you can use ProQuest Historical Newspapers), and one month of a popular weekly magazine (or four issues of a monthly magazine) between the years 1870 and 1928. A list of suggested magazines and the dates they began publication is provided below. Choose publications from the same time period. Be sure to read editorials, letters to the editor, op-ed columns, comics, and advertisements, as well as news stories. Based on this, write a five page paper drawing tentative conclusions about the nature of American ideology, culture, and politics during this period? What concerns seem to be uppermost in the public mind? Do these publications reveal the existence of particular tensions and anxieties peculiar to the period? What attitudes do the writers exhibit toward the values identified with Victorianism, the "genteel tradition" and the culture of scarcity? What signs do you find of the emerging culture of abundance? How was the tension between these two cultures manifested? What can you discern about attitudes toward race, class, and gender? What else do you find distinctive and revealing about this period? Since this is a short paper, you will have to be selective and analytical. Be sensitive to the fact that the views and attitudes expressed by journalists, columnists, editors, cartoonists, and advertisers don't necessarily reflect the opinions of readers.

Due date: February 18

Saturday Evening Post (1821)

Independent (1848)

Atlantic Monthly (1857)

Harper's Bazaar (1867)

Popular Science Monthly (1872)

Cosmopolitan (1886)

Colliers (1888)

Munsey's Weekly (1889)

Review of Reviews (1891)

Godey's Lady's Book (1830)

Harper's New Monthly Magazine (1850)

Nation (1865)

Scribner's Monthly (1870)

Ladies' Home Journal (1883)

Scribner's Magazine (1887)

Arena (1889)

Smart Set (1890)

McClure's Magazine (1893)

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Research Paper Assignment

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Guidelines for Research Paper:

Choose a topic that allows you to write an historical essay analyzing an important issue that bears upon the themes in this course. Given the nature of the course, you may choose widely from topics in intellectual, cultural, and political history, or, even better, from topics that draw upon all three disciplines. Although it may be helpful to consult secondary accounts by historians, the essay should be based, at least in part, on primary sources. (Students who wish to do a historiographical paper or one based more on secondary sources must receive prior approval of their topics.) Primary sources might include newspapers, magazines, professional journals, books, films, records, radio scripts, cartoons, photographs, short stories, poems, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs, letters, transcripts from Congressional hearings and trials, minutes of an organization's meetings, census reports, speeches--documents that are contemporary with the problem being investigated. The essay must contain a central thesis stating your interpretation of the topic or event. Be creative, but marshal your evidence and defend your point of view. Remember this is an interpretive, analytical essay, not a "report."

Papers should be approximately 10 pages in length for undergraduates and 15-20 pages for graduate students. Papers should be double-spaced and typed. Include footnotes where necessary. All students are urged to consult with me on topics before you begin your research.

Due Date: April 15

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