

# Contemporary United States History

Professor: Dr. Kyle Riisman

Classroom: Smith Hall Room 245

Time: Monday and Wednesday, 4-520PM

Office: Cullimore Hall 326, NJIT campus

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 330-430 and by appointment

Contact: [kriis@njit.edu/973-596-3379](mailto:kriis@njit.edu)

## **Course Description:**

This course examines the transformations in American life from the end of World War II to the present. In analyzing those transformations, we will consider four broad, interrelated themes:

- The United States as world power in both peace and war
- Civil Rights including women's and gay liberation movements
- Rise of new conservatism
- The politics of space and place

## **Course Goals**

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Identify and understand the key events, themes, and trends in postwar American life
2. Demonstrate proficiency in identifying and analyzing primary and secondary sources
3. Demonstrate proficiency in historical analysis, including making evidence based arguments, through speaking, writing and other modes of expression

## **COURSE TEXTS**

All course texts and assignments are available via Blackboard. **Please bring all readings to class.**

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

**YOU MUST COMPLETE ALL ASSIGNMENTS TO PASS THE COURSE. FAILURE TO DO SO WILL RESULT IN AN AUTOMATIC F. Assignments handed in late will be assessed a penalty of 10 points per day late. Beyond ten days, late work will receive a maximum of 30/100 (better than a zero).**

### Primary Source Analysis

Three times this semester you will be asked to analyze a primary source in its historical context using a worksheet provided by me via Blackboard. These assignments will form the building blocks of skills needed to complete the paper, the final exam, and further coursework in the History department.

### Film Worksheets

For each film, students will complete a film worksheet that will ask them to not only identify basic elements of the films but also demonstrate critical thinking about the films as historical texts. The worksheet will be uploaded via Blackboard on the day of the discussion of the film.

### Reading Quizzes

You will take pop quizzes 4 times during the semester. The goal of these quizzes is to test your ability to comprehend course readings and apply them to the content of the course.

### Paper

You will be asked to complete one paper assignment for this class that will include a rough draft and a final draft. This paper will demonstrate not only an understanding of a particular issue or theme of postwar American history but the applied skills of historical research and analysis. Topics and all other details including a grading rubric will be available via an assignment sheet on Blackboard.

### Class Participation:

Participation in the context of this course does not simply mean showing up to class. You are asked to be active in and engaged with class discussions.

Participation will be assessed on the quality of contributions to class discussions. Quality participation demonstrates the following:

- Understanding of the historical context as gleaned from lectures and readings
- Completion of that week's assignments such as readings, watching videos, and completing worksheets, etc.
- A willingness to engage in critical assessment of course texts and lectures

Students are expected to attend class and to be punctual. Excessive absences or late arrivals will result in a greatly diminished class participation grade. Further, there will be only one screening of each film so please do your best to not miss class.

To keep track of your participation grade, I will be posting quarterly updates to the Blackboard gradebook. If you have questions about this grade or ways to participate more effectively, do not hesitate to contact me or come to office hours.

### Final Exam

There will be a take-home, essay final exam that will ask you to think integratively about the topics covered using the tools of historical analysis practiced over the course of the semester.

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Primary Source Assignment –  $4 \times 3\% = 12\%$
- Film Worksheets –  $2 \times 3\% = 6\%$
- Reading Quizzes –  $4 \times 4\% = 16\%$
- Paper:
  - Proposal – 3.5%

- Rough Draft – 7.5%
- Final Draft – 20%
- Participation – 15%
- Final Exam – 20%

**\*Do not wait to contact me if you are falling behind or having trouble understanding course content. I am here to help so please let me know how I can do so\***

### Course Policies

#### Respect, Decorum, and Civility

In this course, we welcome intellectual inquiry and thoughtful discussion of difficult questions, but hate speech and hurtful comments will not be tolerated. We must come to class with an open mind, a willingness to learn, and fundamental respect for the humanity of each person in the room and the historical actors we discuss.

#### Attendance:

Students are expected to attend all course meetings on time unless receiving prior authorization. Missing class will not only adversely affect your class participation grade, but there will be screenings in class that will only be offered during that class period so do your best to attend. If you miss class to attend an NJIT sponsored event, to observe a religious holiday, or due to a documented illness, those absences will be excused. For these absences to count as excused, you must receive permission from the instructor in advance or provide a doctor's note in the case of sickness.

#### Office hours and appointments:

My office hours will be every TBD. I am also available to meet by appointment if students are unable to make it to my office during these times. Feel free to send me an email to set up a meeting if you'd like to talk to me. And please come by if you have any questions about course topics, assignments, or grades. It is always better to ask for clarification than to guess!

#### Academic dishonesty:

Students are expected to obey the honor code, and I will enforce this code to its fullest extent.

Generally speaking, it is a violation of the academic integrity code to:

- Use someone else's words or ideas without attribution
- Copy content from someone else's paper, quiz, or exam
- Pay for course assignments to be complete by someone else

For the tenets of the code and clarification of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please consult: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

#### Cell phones:

Use of a cell phone in class for unauthorized activity will result in student's choosing either:

1. Immediate expulsion from class
2. Placement of the student's cell phone at the front of class with the instructor for the remainder of that class and each class for the remainder of the semester.

Though, you may think texting, using Twitter, etc. is innocuous or invisible, it is not. It interrupts the flow of discussion, distracts other students, and will inevitably be embarrassing when you are asked to leave the class.

Laptops and miscellaneous technology rules:

Students may use laptops in this course for class-related activities only. If I learn that students are using laptops for any other purpose, I will issue a laptop ban for this class. Students are also prohibited from listening to ipods or using any other device in this class that has not received prior authorization. Further, do not keep headphones in your ears even if you are not listening to anything. Essentially, you are in class approximately 3 hours a week. Please be present and prepared when you are here.

Students with Disabilities or Special Needs:

Students who have disabilities or special needs should contact the Office of Disability Support Services to help procure accommodations in completing coursework. I am absolutely committed to making our classroom accessible for all students so if you require accommodations, do not hesitate to contact the center at <https://ods.rutgers.edu/contact-ods>.

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1 – Introductions/Course Expectations/What Is History?**

9/5 - Introductions/Syllabus Review/What is history?

Distribute primary and secondary source reading guides

**Week 2 – The American Century**

9/10 – Lecture: The United States as Global Power

9/12 – Discussion

Primary Source

Henry Luce, “The American Century,” *Life* (February 1941)

Henry Wallace, “Century of the Common Man” (1942)

Secondary Source

Olivier Zunz, *Why the American Century*, Preface

**Week 3 – The Atomic Age**

9/17 – Lecture: The Cold War at Home

Primary Sources

J. Edgar Hoover, “Who Are the Communists?” and “This is the Party,” in *Masters of Deceit* (1958) - <https://archive.org/details/MastersOfDeceit>

*The Atomic Café* (1982), selections

9/19 – Discussion/Worksheet Due

Secondary Source

Andrea Friedman, *Citizenship in the Cold War: The National Security State and the Possibilities of Dissent*, Ch. 1 “Internal Security, National Security: Psychological Citizenship in the Cold War Era”

#### **Week 4 – Civil Rights**

9/24 – Lecture: Civil Rights and the American Dilemma

9/26 – Discussion

Primary Source

Martin Luther King, Jr., “Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech” (1964) – [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1964/king-acceptance.html)

Secondary Source

Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, Ch. 3 “Fighting the Cold War with Civil Rights Reform” – available online via the Rutgers library

Reading Quiz #1 - Dudziak

#### **Week 5 - Urban Crisis and Suburban Ascendance**

10/1 – Lecture: Suburbanization, Crisis, and the American Dream

10/3 – Discussion

Primary Sources

Levittown Materials

Secondary Source

Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*, Ch. 7, “White Noose”

#### **Week 6 – The Great Society**

10/8 – Lecture: Civil Rights, Poverty, and the Limits of Legislation

Primary Source

Lyndon Johnson, Inaugural Address (1965) – <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26985>

10/10 – Discussion

Secondary Source

Julian Zelizer, *The Fierce Urgency of Now: Lyndon Johnson, Congress, and the Battle for the Great Society*, Ch. 4 “Legislating Civil Rights”

#### **Week 7 – Vietnam**

10/15 – Lecture: Vietnam and American Values

10/17 – Discussion/Worksheet Due

Primary Source

*Hearts and Minds* (1974)

#### **Week 8 – Feminism and Sexual Liberation**

10/22 – Lecture: Redefining Sex and Gender

10/24 – Discussion

Primary Source

Judy Syfers, “Why I Want a Wife” (1971) - <http://www.cwluherstory.org/why-i-want-a-wife.html>

Secondary Source

Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Women’s Movement Changed America*, Ch. 3

Reading Quiz #2 - Rosen

**Week 9 – Watergate and the Crisis of Confidence**

10/29 – Lecture: Richard Nixon and the Politics of Division

10/31 – Discussion/Worksheet Due

Primary Source

*All the President's Men* (1976)

Secondary Source

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline*, Ch. 2, “Getting the House in Order: The Oil Embargo, Consumption, and the Limits of American Power”

Primary Source Paper Draft Due

**Week 10 – New Conservatism**

11/5 – Lecture: The Rise of New Conservatism

11/7 – Discussion

Primary Sources

Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960)

Ronald Reagan, Acceptance Speech, Republican National Convention, 1980

Secondary Source

Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: Origins of the New American Right*, Ch. 6, “New Social Issues and Resurgent Evangelicalism”

**Week 11 Reagan's America**

11/12 – Lecture: Morning in America?

11/14 – Discussion/Worksheet Due

Primary Sources

Bruce Springsteen, “Born in the USA” (1984)

**Week 12 – Globalization and Neoliberalism**

11/19 – Lecture: Neoliberalism and the American Economy

11/21 – NO CLASS – FRIDAY SCHEDULE

**Week 13 – 9/11 and the New National Security State**

11/26 – Discussion

Primary Source

Larry King Live, NAFTA Debate (1993)

Secondary Source

Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, Ch. 3, “The Prison Fix”

Reading Quiz #3 - Gilmore

11/28 – Lecture: The War on Terror

**Week 14 – Obama and the Promise of Post-Racial America**

12/3 – Discussion

Primary Sources

The Guardian, “The NSA Files” –

<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/the-nsa-files>

Secondary Source

Sarah Igo, *The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in America*, tbd

12/5 – Lecture: Race in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Week 15 – Wrap-Up**

12/10 - Discussion

Primary Source

Barack Obama, Keynote Address to the Democratic National Convention  
(2004)

Secondary Source

Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Fear of a Black President," *The Atlantic*, August 22, 2012  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/09/fear-of-a-black-president/309064/>

12/12- Big Takeaways/Exam Review/Course Evaluations

**FINAL PAPER DRAFT DUE – Dec. 18<sup>th</sup>, 5PM**

**FINAL EXAM DUE – Dec. 18<sup>th</sup>, 5PM**