

The United States Since 1945: Affluence and Anxiety
History 4280-001
Fall 2009

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Course Objectives

1. To examine the nature of American society since the end of the Second World War.
2. To provide a sense of the development of major trends in recent decades by examining selected topics and representative figures.
3. To develop a capacity to weigh alternative solutions to past American problems and to evaluate their relevance to the present.
4. To acquire not only historical knowledge but historical consciousness.

Comment

The study of history offers many insights into the human condition and cultivates skills that will be useful to you throughout your personal and professional life. It develops reading and writing skills, analytical and critical thinking, interpretive abilities, and the capacity to evaluate ambiguous data. The study of the past enables us to place contemporary events in perspective and increase our understanding of our own time and place and role in it. Without such awareness, we're merely wandering in the dark, an accident of time. As you read about our recent history, remember to consider how it affects the history that is being made this year. None of this will come about automatically; your educational reward in this class will be commensurate with your effort.

Required Texts

William Chafe, Harvard Sitkoff, and Beth Bailey, eds. *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America* (Oxford, Seventh Edition, 2008).

Norman Rosenberg and Emily Rosenberg, *In Our Times: America Since World War II* (Prentice Hall, Seventh Edition, 2003).

Jules Tygiel, *Ronald Reagan and the Triumph of American Conservatism* (Pearson/Longman, Second Edition, 2006).

Assignments (subject to modification)

August

- 26 Perspectives on Recent American History

September

- 2 After the New Deal: The Cold War, Harry Truman, and the Policy of “Containment”
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 1-36
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. xiii-xiv, 1-22
- 9 “McCarthyism”: The Cold War Hits Home
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 41-48
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 37-63
- 16 The 1950s and Popular Culture: Cars, Influential Books, and the Kinsey (Sex) Reports
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 59-105
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 65-67, 68-80
- 23 The 1960s: Years of Promise, Years of Trouble
Note: Paper assignments determined in class.
- 30 “Power concedes nothing without demand.” Two Movements: Civil Rights; Women’s
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 134-146
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 115-150, 163-222

October

- 7 **Midterm**
Presidential Greatness
- 14 Reaching for Glory: Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 125-134
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 94-113
- 21 American Tragedy: The United States in Vietnam
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 151-161, 186-187, 217-222
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 223-271

October

- 28 America Divided: From Confrontation and Polarization to the Search for a New Politics
Why a Student Rebellion?
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 166-186, 187-190
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 81-89, 273-286

November

- 4 Richard M. Nixon: Power Used and Abused
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 202-223
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 300-311
- President Carter and the “Crisis of Confidence”
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 312-331
- 11 **Veteran’s Day** (No class meeting)
- 18 Ronald Reagan and the “Reagan Revolution”
Tygiel, *Ronald Reagan and the Triumph of American Conservatism*
Rosenberg/Rosenberg, pp. 274-314
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 333-389
(Paper Due at beginning of class)
- 27 **Thanksgiving Break**

December

- 2 World of Ideas and the “War on Terror”: It’s Roots and Causes
Historian Howard Zinn discusses various topics
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 393-438
- 9 Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic. Hyper Commercialism and Shopping Fever
Chafe/Sitkoff/Bailey, pp. 439-454, 464-468, 485-499

Formal Requirements

Students are expected to know the course requirements and meet all deadlines. Attendance is expected—from the beginning to the end of all class meetings. That is necessary to earn top grades because class sessions will supplement, not duplicate, assigned readings. It would be wise to exchange phone numbers or email addresses with another member of the class in case you need to confirm the assignment. No tape recorders are permitted.

Three quizzes, each announced in advance, will be given during the semester. Only the best two quiz scores will count toward the course grade, however. (If you miss one of the quizzes, that will be the one not counted.)

The midterm is scheduled for October 7.

The exam is scheduled for December 16, 5-7 p.m.

A five-six page paper is due at the beginning of class on Nov. 18.

Grading

Midterm = 20 percent
Paper = 20 percent
Quizzes = 20 percent

Exam = 20 percent
Class participation = 20 percent