

Syllabus of Record

Program: CET Beijing

Course Code / Title: (BJ/HIST 310) The United States in the Post-WW2 Era

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: History, Political Science / East Asian Studies, International Relations

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

This course is designed as a survey of US history since the Second World War, from the prosperous post-war period of the 1950s to the forty years between the election of JFK in 1960 and the election of Barack Obama in 2008, which mark one of the most turbulent periods in American history. Radical changes occurred during these decades in American political, social, and cultural life, changes which still have repercussions on American society today. Through a variety of readings, seminars, discussions, and research papers, as well as screenings of feature films, documentaries, and musical albums, the course aims at evoking the four decades for the purpose of arriving at a deeper understanding of the major events that took place during the period. A complete understanding of the transformational nature of these events is not possible, however, without placing them within the context of political and social history, and most especially within the framework of the larger interpretive principles of the culture which American Studies offers.

Objectives

Through this course, students gain:

- Knowledge of the social, political and cultural history of the U.S. in the years since World War II.
- An understanding of the meaning of the transformations which occurred during this period in light of some basic principles underlying American culture, most notably: (a) *America as a process culture* (b) *America as a culture of experience* (c) *America as a self conscious society*
- An understanding of how historical analysis is constructed
- The skills necessary to discuss important ideas and concepts that emerged in the period.

Course Requirements

Course readings, averaging 30 pages per session, should be completed before class. Students must attend all classes and are expected to participate actively in all class discussions.

Students take two in-class midterm exams (closed-book, 60 minutes). Both consist of five short essay questions. They are held at the end of Part One and Part Two respectively (see Outline of Course Content for details.)

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Students are asked to write a short critique paper (4 pages double spaced) on two assigned articles.

For their final exam, students submit a research paper (10 pages double spaced). Students are expected to show original thinking and independent analysis of the issues in question. A separate guide is circulated in class.

Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

- Class participation: 10%
- Midterm exams: 40%
- Critique paper: 10%
- Final exam: 40%

Readings

Brands, H.W. *American Dreams: The United States Since 1945*. Penguin Books, 2012.

Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Dickstein, Morris. *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties*. Liveright, 2015.

Leuchtenburg, William E. *A Troubled Feast: American Society Since 194*. Little Brown, 1973.

Norton, Mary. *A People and a Nation: A History of the United States* (Vol. II: Since 1865). Cengage, Advantage Books, 2014.

Outline of Course Content

Topic 1 – Truman and Origins of the Cold War

Topic 2 – The Reach toward National Consensus: The Eisenhower Years

- The Civil Rights Movement
- The Affluent Society

Topic 3 – The Kennedy Years: Camelot and the Myth of New Beginnings

- John F. Kennedy: The Reality & the Myth
- Lyndon Johnson and the War in Vietnam
- The Counterculture: The Glory and the Dream
- Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties

Topic 4 – The Road to Watergate

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- “Watergate”, in America since 1945 (David Burner)

Topic 5 – Retreat into Narcissism : A Self-Absorbed America

- Christopher Lasch, “The New Narcissism”

Topic 6 – Neo-Conservatism and the Advent of the Reagan Years

- America in the Eighties
- Kids 4 Bush: the First Gulf War

Topic 7 – Backlash. A View from 1994: Looking toward the Beginning of Change

- Reagan / Bush Administration: The Rise and Fall of the Right Wing Conservatives
- The Clinton Administrations: “The New American Politics: Reflections on the Early 1990s”
- Into the Global Millennium: “Yes! We Can! – Obama’s Politics of Change”
- Donald Trump: Making America Great Again