ROOSEVELT TO REAGAN

Clayton Koppes
Professor of History

Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, two of America's most influential presidents, bookended a distinctive period in United States history. Grappling with an unprecedented economic crisis, Roosevelt through his New Deal reshaped the role...
of government, introducing rudiments of a welfare state. He also prosecuted the United States’ greatest war, which left his country poised at the pinnacle of world power but existentially threatened as never before. In tandem with his policies, FDR generated a political realignment that endured until the late 1960s, when Lyndon Johnson, seeking to outdo his political hero, saw his presidency come to grief on the shoals of the Great Society and his war in Vietnam.

If economic crisis and assertions of rights stimulated governmental responses, so too the shifting parameters of national security shaped and were shaped by American politics. The Cold War served as constraint and goad in domestic politics and, by the same token, domestic politics shaped the conduct of foreign affairs.

When liberalism and détente seemed to reach a crisis in the late 1970s, Ronald Reagan seized the moment to advance his alternate vision of the state, even as he invoked Franklin Roosevelt, his erstwhile political hero. Courting the South and the white working class was central to both Roosevelt’s and Reagan’s successes. Reagan also reoriented foreign policy and yet was able to seize a unique moment to collaborate in ending the Cold War – a grand paradox since he had been the personification of the Cold Warrior. When he left office, the United States and the Soviet Union enjoyed happier relations than at any time since Roosevelt’s presidency.

The history of this period is written not only from the Oval Office and halls of Congress, but from the street-wise insurgencies of African Americans, women, and gays and lesbians who demanded rights the state had not previously extended – and thereby created new political constituencies and altered old ones. Personal liberation evoked a new consciousness for many – and perplexed those attached to conventional understandings. American society underwent massive changes during this half century, as the way people live and express themselves shifted dramatically, and yet older patterns persisted. While organized around a political framework, the course uses changing cultural expressions as a counterpoint – and a counterpoint that reflected and altered the political landscape.

Consultation and Special Needs

Consistent with the Americans for Disabilities Act (itself a significant political statement), I will make all reasonable accommodations. Please confer with me if you have needs in this area.

I’m always happy to meet during office hours. If they aren’t convenient, we’ll schedule at a mutually convenient time.

My office hours are Tu and Th 11 00 to 12 30. I’ll announce additional office hours. My office is 305. I’m always available by email.
Discussion

Active, respectful, informed participation is expected in discussion. I anticipate – and welcome – disagreement. Showing respect does not mean dissembling in the face of others’ point of view. Respect often involves expressing disagreement, with sensitivity and civility. It is through disagreement that we grow. Robert Heinlein, the science fiction writer, once said, “I never learned anything from anybody who agreed with me.”

Writing assignments

There are four writing assignments. Two assignments (the first and final) are essays of approximately six to eight pages on key themes in the class; each counts 1/3 of the final grade. I’ll give you prompts. The first, third, and fourth essays each count one-third of the final grade.

The second assignment is a group project in which you and members of your group (to be determined) write a joint essay reflecting on our visit to the Allen Memorial Art Museum to view art related to the African American freedom struggle. This essay will be graded pass/fail. (More details later.)

The third assignment is an analysis of an important period Hollywood film. You’re to use the film as a window into American culture and politics of its era. You may introduce cinematic considerations, but that’s not required. Outside research is not required, although it is welcome. This essay may be turned in at any point but no later than Dec. 1. It would be in your interest to do the project earlier in the semester, rather than during the end-of-semester crunch. It makes the most sense to view and analyze the movie while the material from the period is being discussed in class.

The pictures are:

*The Grapes of Wrath* [1940] – The Joads, dusted out in Oklahoma, endure terrible hardships as they trek to the promised land of California, in one of Hollywood’s more “political” pictures.

*Since You Went Away* [1943] – David O. Selznick’s effort to immortalize sacrifices on the home front during World War II – and to top his iconic success, *Gone With the Wind.*

*The Best Years of Our Lives* [1946] – Bittersweet tale of readjustment to “normal” society after World War II.

*Tea and Sympathy* [1955] – Alternately harrowing and sentimental, the picture explores the pressures put upon an adolescent male suspected of homosexuality at
a New England prep school in the 1950s — and the help an obliging older woman provides to resolve his dilemma.


_Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner_ [1967] — Hollywood’s first serious effort to deal with interracial romance. (It occurs, coincidentally, in the year the U.S. Supreme Court ruled bans on interracial marriage are unconstitutional.)

_Easy Rider_ [1969] — An “on the road” movie dressed up to explore the counterculture in all its excess and ambivalence.

_Philadelphia_ [1993] — The first major movie about AIDS.

Class discussion will be useful in resolving borderline grades.

The midterm grade will be based on all work through Oct. 15.

_All work in the class is governed by the Oberlin College honor code. Please review it. Suspected violations will be referred to the Honor Committee._

**Required Texts**


The additional readings listed are on Blackboard and are an integral part of the course.
Sept. 1, 3  THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE NEW DEAL

The United States in 1930
The Great Depression and Herbert Hoover
“Fear Itself”
Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Realignment of American Politics

Chap. 1
Kennedy, prologue and chaps. 1-4
William E. Leuchtenburg, “Franklin Delano Obama,” chap. 10, and

Sept. 8, 10

Franklin and Eleanor: A Unique Partnership
New Deal Mythology: What It Did – and Didn’t Do
The New Deal and Race
Constitutional Crisis and the New Deal Constitutional Revolution
The New Deal and the Environment

Kennedy, chaps. 5-12
Katznelson, *Fear Itself*, chap. 5
Edward Berkowitz and Larry DeWitt, “Social Security from the New Deal
to the Great Society: Expanding the Public Domain,” in Brian J.
Glenn and Steven M. Teles, eds., *Conservatism and American Political Development* [2009], pp. 53-85
Clayton Koppes, “Efficiency, Equity, Esthetics,” in Donald Worster. ed.,
*The Ends of the Earth* [on New Deal environmentalism] [recommended]

Sept. 15  1930S CULTURE

A “Left” Literature
Hollywood Gloss and Glamour

Short takes of classic Hollywood films to be shown in class

Sept. 17  THE U.S. IN WORLD WAR II

From “Isolation” to Super Power
War: Loss, Prosperity, Freedom
War, Propaganda, and the Creation of Myth and Meaning
Wartime documentary Wings for This Man and excerpts from Hollywood feature
Tender Comrade (1943) to be shown in class

Kennedy, chaps. 13-15 (Blackboard and hard copy reserve)
Koppes and Black, Hollywood Goes to War: How Politics, Profits, and Propaganda
Shaped World War II Movies [1987], chap. 4

Sept. 22 – ESSAY ON NEW DEAL DUE AT CLASS TIME

Sept. 22 THE COLD WAR: FROM YALTA TO THE YALU

Origins of the Cold War: The Clash of Interpretations
The Militarization of the Cold War
Culture and the Cold War

John Gaddis, The Cold War, chap. 1
Melvyn Leffler, “What Do We Now Know?” American Historical Review
Sheila Miyoshi Jaeger, Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea [2013]
Chap. 3
Lawrence, pp. 1-66
Clayton Koppes, “Solving for X: Kennan, Containment, and the Color Line,”
Pacific Historical Review, (Feb 2013) and “Beyond Containment: George
F. Kennan and the Various Non-WASPS,” H-diplo blog (Aug. 2014)

Recommended:
Koppes, “The Real Ambassadors? The Cleveland Orchestra Tours the Soviet
Union, 1965,” paper presented at conference on East/West cultural
exchanges, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, June 2012, forthcoming in
Simo Mikkonen, ed., Art and Diplomacy: East/West Cultural Exchanges
During the Cold War (Ashgate, 2015)
Tim Scholl, essay on Oberlin College choir tour of USSR, 1964

Sept. 24 POSTWAR: AFFLUENCE, ANXIETY, AMBIVALENCE

Liberalism in a New Key
Red Scare/Lavender Scare
Talking and Not Talking About Sex

Alan Brinkley, “The New Deal and the Idea of the State,” in Gary Gerstle
and Steve Fraser, eds., The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order,
1930-1980 [1989], pp. 85-121
Katznelson, Fear Itself, epilogue
Jonathan Bell, The Liberal State on Trial: The Cold War and American Politics
in the Truman Years [2004], pp. xiii-xix
Ardis Cameron, *Unbuttoning America: A Biography of Peyton Place* [2015], TBA
Rosen, part 1
Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* [1953], Pp. 56-68 and intro [1967]

On gays and lesbians at midcentury, read posted excerpts from one of the following:

David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*
Margot Canaday, *The Straight State*
Michael Sherry, *Gay Artists in Midcentury America*

**Sept. 29 KENNEDY AND JOHNSON**

*John F. Kennedy: New Frontiers and Old Realities*
*Kennedy and Camelot: Personality, Style, Myth*
*Kennedy and Crisis: Berlin and Cuba*


**LBJ: The Southerner as National Leader**
*Extending the New Deal: Liberalism’s Triumph and Its Limits*
*The Great Divorce: The South Leaves the Democratic Party*

Bloom and Breines, pp. 80-86
Self, prologue and chap. 1

**Oct. 1, 6 THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FREEDOM MOVEMENT**

*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* [1954]
Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” [1962]
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* [1963], 82-end
Bloom and Breines, parts 1, 3

Recommended:
Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound*
Freeman, *American Empire*, chap. 6 (helpful on early phases of civil rights Movement)
Oct. 8 Visit to Allen Memorial Art Museum

The purpose of this visit is to view art related to the African American freedom movement and to begin to incorporate art into a cultural understanding of the postwar period.

Oct. 15 Group Essay on AMAM Visit Due at 1 P.M.

Details to follow

Oct. 13, 15 NO CLASS

Oct. 21, 23 NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

Oct. 27, 29 THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM, AND DISRUPTION AT HOME

Vietnam and the Collapse of Cold War Consensus
Origins of U.S. Commitment
“Stop the Bombing”
Working Class War

Lawrence, chaps. 4-end; review earlier chapters
Bloom and Breines, part 4
Self, chap. 2
Sheila Jaeger, Brothers at War, chap.15 (recommended)

Nov. 3, 5, 10 THE SIXTIES

“Like a Spaceship” / The Fifties: Where the Sixties Came From
Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll
The Counter-Culture and the Challenge to Conventional Authority
Searching in the Debris of Modernity

Bloom and Breines, parts 2, 5, 7, 9
Self, chap. 7
Todd Gitlin, The Whole World Is Watching,
Beth Bailey, Sex in the Heartland, pages TBA.

Recommended:
Mark Harris, Pictures at a Revolution, [2008], pp. 380-426
Susan Sontag, Notes on Camp
Daniel Bell. _The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism_, chap. 1
_Berkeley in the Sixties_, three-part documentary film

**Nov. 12 WOMEN’S LIBERATION**

Rosen, parts 2 to end; review earlier chapters
Self, chaps. 4-6
Bloom and Breines, part 8

**Nov. 12 – Essay on African American freedom movement or Vietnam due at class time**

**Nov. 17, 19 LGBT LIBERATION**

Gay and Lesbian Insurgency
AIDS: Hostility, Indifference, Organizing
From Sexual Rebels to Gay Marriage

Self, chap. 8
Bloom and Breines, pp. 490-504
Essay from Keith Haring: _The Political Line_ [2014]
Christopher Capozzola, “A Very American Epidemic: Memory
Politics and Identity Politics in the AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1985-
1993,” in Van Gosse and Richard Moser, eds., _The World the 60s
Made: Politics and Culture in Recent America_ [2003], pp. 219-241
George Chauncey, _Why Marriage_, chaps. 1 and 2 (recommended)

**Nov. 24 Visit to AMAM to view modern art and AIDS art**

**Nov. 26 NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING**

**Dec. 1, 3, 8 THE REAGAN REVOLUTION**

The Seventies and the Collapse of the Liberal Paradigm
Reagan and the Right Against the Great Society and the Sixties
Rise of the Religious Right
Not With a Bang or a Whimper: The Cold War Ends

Self, chaps. 9-end
Bloom and Breines, part 6
Godfrey Hodgson, _The World Turned Right Side Up: A History of the
Conservative Ascendancy in America_ [1996], pp. 268-276
Van Gosse, “Postmodern America: A New Democratic Order in the
Second Gilded Age,” in Van Gosse and Richard Mosers, eds., The World the 60s Made [2003], pp. 1-15

Recommended:
Connie Schultz, Life Happens and other unavoidable truths [2005], Chap. 5, “Blue Collar Blues”
Owen Jones, Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class [2011]

Dec. 10 Conclusion: Economic (In)security, Rights, War, and the State from Roosevelt to Reagan

Leuchtenburg, “Waiting for Franklin D.,” chap. 8, in In the Shadow of FDR (recommended)

FINAL ESSAY DUE AT 11 A.M DEC. 18 (THE TIME SCHEDULED FOR THE FINAL EXAM)

11 August 2015