History 253: The US since 1945

Professor Jason Petrulis
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Class hrs: Tu/Th 11AM-12:15PM, King 123
Office hrs: W 9:30AM-11:30AM, Rice 305

“The 20th Century is the American Century... American jazz, Hollywood movies, American slang, American machines and patented products, are in fact the only things that every community in the world, from Zanzibar to Hamburg, recognizes in common. Blindly, unintentionally, accidentally and really in spite of ourselves, we are already a world power in all the trivial ways.”

– Journalist Henry Luce, “The American Century,” 1941

“Future generations will look back on the period between 2006 and 2008 as the real turning point. Here was the moment when what remained of the American Century ran out of steam and ground to a halt.”


Course description. This course examines major developments in US history from World War II to today using primary and secondary sources. Topics include civil rights and the rise of the right; the Cold War and the War on Terror; the welfare state and deregulation, consumerism and deindustrialization; and immigration and globalization. Scholarly controversies receive particular attention.

Reading. The following books are required:

- Ellen Schrecker, The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents
- Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America
- William Chafe, Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom
- Christian Appy, Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides
- Kristin Luker, Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood
- Leon Fink, The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South

Additional readings will be posted to the course web site or can be accessed through the library (online or as a course reserve). Please note that most books can be purchased as eBooks through Google or Amazon (usually one or the other) at a discount compared to paper copies; and that we are using the Third Edition of Major Problems if you are considering a used copy.

Please read all assigned reading carefully and critically, and come to class prepared for discussion. You should take careful notes on the reading and are strongly encouraged to keep a reading journal. Since we will refer to specific examples in the monographs and texts, you must bring the required reading to class, and bring Major Problems to each session.
Assignments.
- **Active, thoughtful, and engaged participation** (determines borderline grades). Including discussion, group work, and occasional in-class writing assignments.
- **Midterm exam** (20%). In class, covering all reading and in-class material. OCT 18.
- **Paper assignment** (40%). A 10-12 pp paper analyzing a significant primary document from the period covered in this course.
  - Primary document proposal (1-2 pp): DUE THU NOV 15 at 11 AM
  - Final paper: DUE TUE DEC 4 at 11 AM
- **Final exam** (40%). Take-home. Covering all reading and in-class material.
  - DISTRIBUTED in class on TUE DEC 11
  - DUE by email, WED DEC 19 at 9 AM

Learning objectives.
- Hone reading skills, including argument identification and strategic reading
- Navigate scholarly controversies and formulate responses
- Analyze and contextualize primary sources; use primary sources in an original research paper
- Deploy secondary sources as support, not summary
- Write concise, well-crafted essays that construct an original argument, supported by primary source evidence and secondary source analysis
- Contribute to the community of the classroom through discussion, group work, and writing
- Engage as citizens with contemporary and historical issues

Additional details.
- **Academic honesty.** Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable, and easy to avoid. Familiarize yourself with Oberlin’s Honor Code, and talk to me to clear up any questions; ignorance is no excuse. Per Oberlin requirements, I will refer all suspected academic dishonesty to the appropriate dean. Offenders will receive a zero on the assignment and an F in the class.
- **Accommodations.** Please let me know about any issues or accommodations (activities, disability, religious, etc) during the first two weeks of class.
- **Attendance.** You are expected to attend every class session. You can miss two sessions for any reason – illness, job interview, presidential campaign volunteering, hamster death, lassitude – and will make up any in-class assignments you miss. Each additional unexcused absence will drop your overall grade by 1/3 grade per absence. (Use your absences wisely.) You must inform me in a timely way to request an excused absence, including religious holidays or extended/severe illness (which requires a note from the dean’s office).
- **Communicating with the professor.** Office hours are Wednesday, 9:30 AM to 11:30 AM. I will schedule additional office hours ahead of the paper and exams. I am also available to chat immediately after class on Tuesdays. I respond to emails as quickly as possible, and at least once a day during the week. I do not check email regularly on weekends, vacations, or holidays. Email is business correspondence, and should be composed accordingly.
- **Drafts.** I am happy to meet with you at any stage of the paper writing process, and will review drafts until November 27 (one week before the paper due date). I also encourage you to consult with peers and the Writing Center early and often! I will not answer substantial paper questions the day before the paper is due, so plan ahead.
Additional details, continued.

- Due dates. The paper is due at 11:00 AM, December 4; once class has started, a paper will be considered late. Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a grade per day.
- Sources. You may only use academic secondary sources, and may not use Wikipedia or similar sources in your work. Please consult with me if you have questions about a source.
- Technology. There is no “connecting” in class: no phone calls, texts, email or other internet use, or the like. The first infraction will cost 5 percentage points from your overall grade; the second costs an additional 10 percentage points; and so on. If you want to use a computer in class, you will need to sign a written commitment to these rules.

Any other issues will be discussed in class; important communication will be posted on the course web site. Please check it regularly.

Finally: all course materials are the property of the professor, and are NOT to be posted, shared, or otherwise made public without my permission.
(Blank. Use me for notes!)
Course schedule

Week of Sep 4

Reading:
- *Major Problems* (MP): Ch 1, “The Origins of Postwar America,” all
- Henry Luce, “The American Century,” Life (17 Feb 1941)

Tu: Course Overview
Th: The Post-New Deal Order

Week of Sep 11

Reading:
- Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*, Part I, Part II: Sections 4, 5, 7, 13-18, 22
- Optional: MP, Ch 2, “The Origins of the Cold War”

Tu: Cold War Fears
Th: Stable Fifties, Subversive Fifties

Week of Sep 18

Reading:
- Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic*, “Prologue,” pp 3-15; Ch 3, “Reconversion” (pp 112-65); Ch 4, “Rebellion” (pp 166-91); Ch 5, “Residence” (pp 194-256); Ch 6, “Commerce” (pp 257-89)
- MP: Ch 3, “The Consumer’s Republic,” pp 81-97 (all primary documents)
- Optional: MP: Ch 3, essays by Roland Marchand and Kelly Schrum, pp 97-123

Tu: Other Americas: Gender, Race, and Poverty
Th: The Affluent Society

Week of Sep 25

Reading:
- Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, Introduction, Part I
- MP:
  - Ch 5, “The African American Struggle for Equality,” all
  - Ch 6, James Patterson “The Rise of ‘Rights Consciousness,’” pp 226-33

Tu: The Liberal Hour
Th: Civil Rights
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History 253 Syllabus

Week of Oct 2

Reading:
- Appy, *Patriots*, pp xv-xxvii (Preface), 35-149, 343-429
- MP: Ch 9, “Vietnam and the Crisis of American Empire,” all

Tu: The Nuclear Age
Th: Vietnam

Week of Oct 9

Reading:
- MP: Ch 8, “From the Feminine Mystique to ‘Second Wave’ Feminism,” all
- Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, Introduction (pp 1-10), Chs 5-9 (pp 92-245)

Tu: New Left, New Right, Counterculture
Th: Remaking Gender

Week of Oct 16

Reading (will be covered on the midterm):
- MP: Ch 7, “The New Radicalism,” all
- Optional: Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail ’72*

Tu: Revolution and Backlash
Th: MIDTERM

Week of Oct 23: FALL BREAK

Week of Oct 30

Reading:
- Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, Introduction and Chs 1, 3-4 (pp 1-74, 125-209)
- Optional: Rick Perlstein, excerpt (pp xlv-lxiv) from “Introduction,” in *Richard Nixon: Speeches, Writings, Documents*

Tu: The Crisis of Authority
Th: The ‘Age of Limits’
Week of Nov 6

Reading:
- Cowie, *Stayin’ Alive*, Book 2: Ch 5 (pp 211-61), Ch 7 and 8 (pp 313-71)
- MP: Ch 6, “Earth Day, 1970” (pp 224-25)

Tu: Energy, the Environment, and Regulation
Th: Special! 2012 Election Recap

Week of Nov 13

Reading:
- Meg Jacobs and Julian Zelizer, excerpt from *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years*, pp 20-41
- MP:
  - Ch 10, “Ronald Reagan and the Transformation of America,” all
- Optional: Lisa McGirr, Ch 4, “The Conservative Worldview at the Grass Roots,” in *Suburban Warriors*

Tu: The Rise of the Right
Th: The Age of Reagan. **PRIMARY DOCUMENT PROPOSAL DUE.**

Week of Nov 20

Reading:
- CHOOSE THREE:
  - Marita Sturken, Ch 5, “AIDS and the Politics of Representation,” in *Tangled Memories*

Tu: Culture Wars
Th: THANKSGIVING (No Lecture)
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Week of Nov 27

Reading:
- Fink, *The Maya of Morganton*, Introduction, Chs 1-3, 6-7 (pp 1-78, 140-200)
- MP: Ch 12, primary documents 2 ("Proposition 187") and 3 ("Two Reporters"), pp 438-42; George Sanchez, "Race, Immigration and Nativism," pp 452-59

Tu: Red America, Blue America, Blue Dress
Th: The ‘Browning’ of America

Week of Dec 4

Reading:
- Would you like fries with that?
  - McDonald’s, "Values in Action," corporate web site
  - Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*, Ch 5, "Why the Fries Taste Good"
  - Yunxiang Yan, "McDonald’s in Beijing: The Localization of Americana," in James L. Watson, *Golden Arches East: McDonald’s in East Asia*
  - Derek Thompson, "Big Maconomics," *Atlantic Monthly* (1 May 2012)
- MP: Ch 11, "The Promises and Perils of a New Economy," pp 394-422 (skip Weiss, pp 423-34)
- Optional: Timothy Noah, "The Great Divergence" ([web site](#) or [PDF](#), Slate.com (3 Sep 2010))

Tu: Globalization. **PAPER DUE.**
Th: Boom and Bust

Week of Dec 11

Reading:
- Melani McAlister, "9/11 and After: Snapshots on the Road to Empire," in *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945*
- Ellen Ruppel Shell, "From Rust Belt to Drone Belt," *Atlantic.com* (20 Jun 2012)

Tu: 9/11 and the Global War on Terror. **TAKE-HOME FINAL DISTRIBUTED.**
Th: America in a ‘Post’ World.

**TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE** Wed Dec 19, at 9:00 AM, by email (petrulis@oberlin.edu).