Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, two of America's most influential presidents, bookend 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 the American war in Vietnam. The history of this period is written not only from the Oval Office, 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.

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 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.

As a counterpoint to the political narrative, the course also assesses changing American culture. We will screen three landmark films -- *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955), and *The Graduate* (1967).

**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 (tentatively) are TuTh 11 to 12 30 and by appointment. My office is Rice 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, each of which counts 25 percent of the final grade. Three assignments are essays of approximately six pages on key themes in the class. I’ll give you prompts.

The fourth assignment involves reading a classic novel or play from the 1940s/1950s and writing an essay in which you discuss what the work says about American life and culture at the time. While each work has considerable literary merit, I’ve chosen them primarily for how they capture aspects of American life when they were written. Each is readily available in libraries and in inexpensive paperback editions (they are worth owning). In an essay of approximately eight pages, analyze the work’s theme and what it says about American life in its time period. You may do additional research on the novel or play, but you should be able to write a good essay by relating it to material covered in class. I’d urge you to read the novel or play in conjunction with our coverage of its time period in class. You will be happiest if you then write the essay when the book and time period are fresh in your mind. The essay may be turned in at any time. The final deadline for this assignment is class time on April 29. You may choose from the following works:

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939. The saga of the Joads, dusted out in Oklahoma during the Depression, traveling Route 66 to the promised land of California, encountering hostility and death and having a political awakening.


Richard Wright, *Native Son*, 1940. Bigger Thomas, trying to negotiate between black and white worlds, caught up in forces beyond his control on South Side Chicago.


James Baldwin, *Giovanni’s Room*, 1956, and Gore Vidal, *The City and the Pillar*, 1948. Early gay male novels. Though set in Paris, where Baldwin chose to live, the European setting of *Giovanni’s Room* also makes a point about America; many American artists have used Europe as a counterpoint to understand the U.S.


Mary McCarthy, *The Group*, 1963. The intertwined lives of “the group,” seven graduates of Vassar in 1933, one of whom is a lesbian, during the 1930s.

Lorraine Hansbury, *Raisin in the Sun*, 1959. The first play by a black woman to be produced on Broadway. Based on an actual court case involving housing discrimination. (Since reading this one play involves less time than the other novels and plays, you should also do outside research on Hansbury and the play.)

Class discussion will be useful in resolving borderline grades.

The midterm grade will be based on all work through March 18.

*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.
CLASS SCHEDULE

Feb 4, 6 THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND THE NEW DEAL

The United States in 1930
The Great Depression and Herbert Hoover
"Fear Itself"

Kennedy, prologue and chaps. 1-4

Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Realignment of American Politics
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

Kennedy, chaps. 5-9
Katznelson, Fear Itself, chap. 5
Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939 [1990], pp. 323-368

Feb 11 NEW DEAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

The Dust Bowl: "The Worst Hard Time"
Conservation and Preservation
The Mythos of Dam Building
Culture in the Depression: Hollywood Gloss and Glamour

Kennedy, chaps. 9-12
Donald Worster, Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s [1979], Chap. 1
Siegfried D. Schubert et al., “On the Causes of the 1930s Dust Bowl,” Science, 303 (March 19, 2004), 1855-1859 (recommended)
Clayton Koppes, “Efficiency, Equity, Esthetics,” in Donald Worster, ed., *The Ends of the Earth* [on New Deal environmentalism]

Documentary *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) to be shown in class.

**Feb. 13  CULTURE IN THE 1930S**

*The Grapes of Wrath* (1940) to be screened on Feb. 17 (Monday) at time to be determined.

**Feb. 18, 20  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

**Feb. 20 – ESSAY ON NEW DEAL DUE AT CLASS TIME**

**Feb. 25, 27  THE COLD WAR: FROM YALTA TO YALU**

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

John Gaddis, *The Cold War*, chap. 1  
Melvyn Leffler, “What Do We Now Know?”  
Sheila Miyoshi Jaeger, *Brothers at War: The Unending Conflict in Korea* [2013]  
Chap. 3  
Lawrence, pp. 1-66  

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

**Mar 4 POSTWAR**

[No class Mar 6]

**Liberalism in a New Key**  
The Rise of the National Security State  
The Affluent Society / The Age of Anxiety  
Red Scare/Lavender Scare  
The New Language of Sex

*Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) to be shown at a time to be determined

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  
Rosen, part 1  
David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*: pages TBA --or--  
Margot Canaday, *The Straight State*, pages TBA  
Michael Sherry, *Gay Artists in Midcentury America*, (recommended)

**March 11 THE KENNEDY CONUNDRUM**

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

Alan Brinkley essay on JFK from *The Atlantic*, 2013

**Mar 13 LYNDON B. JOHNSON AND THE GREAT SOCIETY**

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  
The New Immigration

Self, prologue and chap. 1
Additional readings to be announced

**Mar 18**  THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT, I

*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
Robert Weisbrot, *Freedom Bound* recommended for an overview and chronology)

**Mar 18  Essay Due at Class Time**

[No class Mar 20]

**Mar 25, 27  NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK**

**Apr 1**  MIDCENTURY MODERN: *meeting at Allen Memorial Art Museum to view and discuss art related to the course*

**Apr 3  THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LIBERATION MOVEMENT, II**

Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, pages TBA

**APR 8, 10  THE AMERICAN WAR IN VIETNAM**

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
Self, chap. 2
Jaeger, *Brothers at War*, chap. Chap. 15 (recommended)

**Apr 15  THE SIXTIES**

“Like a Spaceship” / The 50s and the Origins of the 60s
Sex, Drugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll
The Counter-Culture and the Challenge to Conventional Authority
Searching in the Debris of Modernity
Self, chap. 7
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

**Apr 17 WOMEN’S LIBERATION**

Rosen, parts 2 to end; review earlier chapters
Self, chaps. 4-6

**Apr 22 The Graduate (1967) to be shown in class**

[No class Apr 24 – respite to finish essays on period novels]

**Apr 29 – Final deadline for essay on novels or plays of the 1940s/50s due at class time**

**Apr 29 LGBT LIBERATION**

The Rights Revolution, continued: Gay and Lesbian Insurgency
AIDS: Hostility, Indifference, Organizing
From Sexual Rebels to Gay Marriage

Self, chap. 8
George Chauncey, *Why Marriage*, chaps. 1 and 2 (recommended)

**May 1, 6 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
Leuchtenburg, "Ronald Reagan," in In the Shadow of FDR, pp. 225-235
Van Gosse, "Postmodern America: A New Democratic Orce 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]

May 8 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 TIME SCHEDULED FOR FINAL EXAM