

## Before 1968: Social Critique in a Silent Decade

### Course description:

Social critique is often supposed to have reached its zenith in the United States, and globally, with the youth movements of 1968—at the Democratic Convention in Chicago, responses to the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, and the intensification of the Vietnam War and protests against it.

But significant—and trenchant—critiques of postwar American society had already been developing and pursued into new forms of activism in the 1950s and early 1960s. This seminar seeks to recover and understand these intellectual, cultural, and political efforts, which Americans made only a few years out from or in the midst of the Taft-Hartley Act, “Treaty of Detroit,” House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), and McCarthyism.

We will read the literary works and works of social criticism in strictly chronological order of publication for a few reasons. We will reconstruct what resources and arguments would have been available to readers, tracing timelines, intellectual lineages, and cultural trends. This approach will enable us to identify borders, walls, and silences between discursive and activist communities as well as moments of crossover, engagement, contestation, and rupture. This will culminate in mapping and debating the conceptual matrix that underpinned the broad revolutions of 1968.

### Assignments:

Participation in discussion (20%)

Response papers (20%)—Write ~200 words on each week’s readings, plus one or two questions inspired by them.

Research presentation (20%)—Share your ongoing research for 8-10 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of feedback and Q&A.

Research paper (40%)—Topic of your choosing in consultation with instructor. 12-15 pages, 12-pt font, double-spaced.

### Schedule

#### Week 1

Shirley Jackson, “The Lottery” (1948)

#### Secondary:

Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74, no. 1(2008): 3-32.  
Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (W.W. Norton, 2013), chapters 10-12

#### Week 2

C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951)

Charles Denby, *Indignant Heart* (1952)

#### Secondary:

Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), selections

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Knopf, 2003), selections

Robin D.G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), selections

Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996), selections

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Vintage, 2011), selections

### **Week 3**

James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953)

Arthur Miller, "The Crucible" (1953)

#### Secondary:

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Vintage, 2011), selections

### **Week 4**

James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (1955)

#### Secondary:

Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (Knopf, 2010), selections

Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* (Vintage, 2011), selections

### **Week 5**

Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (1957)

Martin. Stride Toward Freedom (1957)

John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (1958)

Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Power of Nonviolence" (1958)

#### Secondary:

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Knopf, 2003), selections

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Basic Books, 1983), selections

Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (University of Washington Press, 2012), selections

Tommie Shelby and Brandon Terry, eds. *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Belknap Press, 2018)

### **Week 6**

Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961)

Martin Luther King, Jr., "If the Negro Wins, Labor Wins," Speech to the AFL-CIO (1961)

Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects* (1961)

#### Secondary:

Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University press, 1987), selections

Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton University Press, 1996), selections

### **Week 7**

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962)  
Students for a Democratic Society, "Port Huron Statement" (1962)

#### Secondary:

Richard Flacks and Nelson Lichtenstein, eds. *The Port Huron Statement: Sources and Legacies of the New Left's Founding Manifesto* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015)  
Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (University of Washington Press, 2012), selections

### **Week 8**

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)  
Martin Luther King, Jr. *Strength to Love* (1963)

#### Secondary:

Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), selections  
Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (Basic Books, 1983), selections  
Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement, from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (Knopf, 2010), selections  
Tommie Shelby and Brandon Terry, eds. *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Belknap Press, 2018)

### **Research Paper Proposal Due (One paragraph on the topic, plus annotated bibliography of 5 or more sources)**

### **Week 9**

James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963)

#### Secondary:

Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (Henry Holt & Co., 2006), selections

### **Week 10**

Howard Zinn, *SNCC, The New Abolitionists* (1964)  
The Student Voice: Periodical of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1960-1965)  
James Baldwin, *Going to Meet the Man* (1965)

#### Secondary:

Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (Basic Books, 2014), selections  
Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (Henry Holt & Co., 2006), selections

### **Week 11**

SNCC, Freedom School Poetry (1966)  
SNCC Newsletter (1967)

Fannie Lou Hamer, *To Praise Our Bridges* (1967)  
Martin Luther King, Jr. *Where Do We Go from Here* (1967)

Secondary:

Peniel E. Joseph, *Stokely: A Life* (Basic Books, 2014), selections  
Peniel E. Joseph, "The Black Power Movement, Democracy, and America in the King Years," *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (Oct 2009): 1001-1016.  
Joshua Bloom, *Black Against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party* (University of California Press, 2013), optional  
Tommie Shelby and Brandon Terry, eds. *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Belknap Press, 2018)

**Week 12**

Student presentations

**Week 13**

Student presentations

**Research Papers Due**