The 20th Century United States

This course introduces undergraduates to major themes in American history in the twentieth century. The course is organized chronologically but with an emphasis on three interrelated developments: the continuous social and economic transformations wrought by industrialization and urbanization; the contested development of American political institutions and state capacities to meet the challenges of a modern capitalist society; and struggles over lines of inclusion, identity, and citizenship that remade American culture and politics. The country’s changing role in the world, as it grew from a regional power to a global colossus over the course of the century, is also explored, with an emphasis on the ways in which this shifting global role helped to shape American politics, society, and culture at home.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- identify the broad phases of change in American culture, economics, and politics over the course of the twentieth century;
- distinguish between major historical periods within the century;
- contextualize each major period through comparative and causal assessments of what came before and after in culture, economics, and politics;
- connect national developments to changes in America’s role in the world;
- appraise contemporary debates about American politics and culture in a historically informed manner; and
- analyze and interpret historical documents and scholarship in the service of making arguments about change over time – in other words, do the work of historians.

To enable students to fulfill the last goal, the course includes an array of primary sources among the assigned reading material. It also includes two 4-5 page paper assignments. The first assignment will ask students to derive an analytical argument out of their interpretation of a primary source document I will provide. In the second, students will be asked to read a 2008 essay by Nick Salvatore and Jefferson Cowie, “The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History,” as well as published responses from five fellow historians. Students will adjudicate among the arguments made in this roundtable and make their own argument about how to “place” the mid-20th century era in the broader sweep of American history.

Students will be expected to do the assigned weekly reading and to attend lectures and weekly discussion sections. In addition to the papers and participation in section, students’ grasp of the material will be assessed through a midterm and final exam. Course grades are broken down as follows:

- 20% participation
- 15% midterm
- 20% paper 1
- 20% paper 2
- 25% final exam
Readings:

Each week we will be tackling a mix of primary source material and scholarly works. The following required readings are available and recommended for purchase. Library copies are also available on reserve:


Readings that are not included in the volumes above are available online and as a Course Packet.

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**CALENDAR:**

**Week One: Turn of a Century**

Lecture 1. Introduction: “Periodizing” the 20th Century
Lecture 2. Gilded Age Legacies

Readings:

- Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, Preface, Chs 1-3
- William O. Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, Chs 1, 3, 6, 9, 22
- Majority Opinion, *Plessy Vs. Ferguson*, 1896

**Week Two: The Age of Reform**

3. Labor, Capital, and Industrial Efficiency
4. Progressive Reform: Social and Political

- Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, Chs 4-7
- Brett Flehinger, *1912 Election and the Power of Progressivism: A Brief History with Documents*, pp. 21-33, 65-70, 106-110
Week Three: Varieties of Progressivism
5. Feminism, Maternalism, Progressivism
6. Progressivism in the World: Empire and War
   • Jane Addams, Twenty Years at Hull House (1910), pp. 113-127, 198-230

Week Four: The Politics of Conformity in the 1920s
7. The Great Migration and “The Problem of the Color Line”
8. Anticommunism, Prohibition, Nativism
   • Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed., The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, & Gender (1991), pp. 47-82
   • “Text of the Klan Debate,” New York Times, June 29, 1924

Week Five: The Crash
9. The Great Depression: Causes and Dynamics
10. The Great Depression as a Global Political Crisis
   • Rauchway, The Great Depression and the New Deal, Chs 1-3
   • Ira Katznelson, Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time (2013), Ch 1

Week Six: The Policy “Big Bang” of the New Deal
11. Making a New Deal: Movements, Politics, and Policies
12. Challenges to the New Deal: Left, Right, and Center
   • Rauchway, The Great Depression and the New Deal, Chs 4-7
   • Katznelson, Fear Itself, Ch 2
   • Franklin D. Roosevelt’s nomination acceptance speech, June 27, 1936

Week Seven: Global Catastrophe
13. America and the International Crisis
14. World War II Homefront
   • Alan Brinkley, “Legacies of World War II,” in Liberalism and Its Discontents (1998), pp. 94-110

Week Eight: Cold War America
15. MIDTERM EXAM
16. The Cold War and Domestic Anticommunism
   • Patterson, Grand Expectations, Chs 5-7
   • Ellen Schrecker, Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America (1998), Ch 10

Week Nine: American Zenith
17. Causes and Consequences of the Long Boom
18. Suburbanization and Postwar Culture
   • Patterson, Grand Expectations, Chs 2, 3, 11, 12
   • Lizabeth Cohen, A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America (2003), Ch 5

Week Ten: The Black Freedom Struggle
19. Contexts: Regional, National, International
20. The “Classical” Phase of the Civil Rights Movement
   • Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from the Birmingham Jail,” in Chafe and Sitkoff, eds., A History of Our Time 5th ed. (1999), pp. 159-172

**Week Eleven: The Liberal Hour**

21. JFK, LBJ, and the Great Society
22. The Vietnam Quagmire
   • Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, Chs 17-20
   • Young Americans for Freedom, Sharon Statement, 1960

**Week Twelve: Radical Challenges**

24. Second Wave Feminism
   • Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, pp. 245-250 (Students for a Democratic Society Issue the Port Huron Statement, 1962”), and 251-252 ("Radicals Proclaim You Don’t Need a Weatherman to Know Which Way the Wind Blows‘, 1969")

**Week Thirteen: The 1970s as a Pivotal Decade**

25. The End of the Boom
26. The Rise of the Right
   • Schulman, *The Seventies*, Chs 2, 4, 5, 7-9
   • Jacobs and Zelizer, *Conservative in Power*, Documents: Ronald Reagan, Speech to America, March 31, 1976; Newt Gingrich, Campaign Speech to College Republicans in Atlanta, June 24, 1978
   • Lewis F. Powell, “Attack on American Free Enterprise System,” August 23, 1971
   • Douglas Fraser’s resignation letter from the Labor Management Group, July 17, 1978
Week Fourteen: The Age of Reagan
27. Cold War Endgames and the Politics of Globalization
28. What were the “Culture Wars” and Why Did They Happen?

--PAPER 2 DUE ON FRIDAY--

Week Fifteen: Turn of a Century
29. The New Gilded Age
30. America in Red and Blue