

America since 1973

History W3594. Columbia University. Spring 2004
MW 9:10-10:25am. Hamilton 717.
Syllabus revised: January 26, 2004

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At first glance, the years since 1973 have been very good ones for the United States. Despite a few recessions, the economy has grown steadily, more than doubling the real gross domestic product. The worst abuses of individual rights, such as state-sanctioned racial segregation and legally permissible sex discrimination in employment, are fading memories. New technologies, from the VCR to the Internet to the MRI, have given Americans more ways to amuse themselves, heightened economic productivity, and longer lives. And the Soviet Union, the only nation ever to have threatened America's existence as a country, no longer exists.

On the other hand, Americans have suffered severe disappointments. Prosperity has come more slowly than it did in previous decades and has not been evenly distributed, so that inequality in income and wealth is far greater now than it was thirty years ago. Americans still battle over questions of race, ethnicity, and sexuality, as well as the role of the government in regulating those issues. Families are weaker, more Americans sit in prison, and political leaders are unable to agree on basic rules for the elections that define American democracy. Internationally, the nation remains vulnerable to economic competition and military attack. These problems have left many asking the question posed by Rodney King during the Los Angeles riots of 1992: can we all get along?

This course will suggest some answers to that question, focusing particularly on the shifting political economy of the country during the resurgence of conservatism, the political debates over culture and identity, and the waning of the Cold War and its replacement with other international concerns. In addition, it will suggest ways in which historical analysis can illuminate the recent past. By focusing on events, narrative, and the question of change over time, a historical appreciation of these years can complement the work of other social science disciplines and prepare students for further study of contemporary America.

Books (on sale at Labyrinth Books, 536 W. 112th Street, and on reserve at Butler Library)

- Bowden, Mark. *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*. 1999. Rev. ed., New York: Signet, 2002.
- Coupland, Douglas. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Dudley, Kathryn Marie. *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.
- Fink, Leon. *The Maya of Morganton: Work and Community in the Nuevo New South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Luker, Kristin. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Mauer, Marc. *Race to Incarcerate*. New York: New Press, 1999.
- Meyerowitz, Joanne, ed. *History and September 11th*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003.
- Rieder, Jonathan. *Canarsie: The Jews and Italians of Brooklyn against Liberalism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. Rev. ed., New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Sturken, Marita. *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Thelen, David P. *Becoming Citizens in the Age of Television: How Americans Challenged the Media and Seized Political Initiative during the Iran-Contra Debate*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*. 1973. Reprint, Warner Books, 1992.

Requirements

Attendance and Participation (20 percent)

Students are expected to attend lecture twice a week and section once a week. The attendance and participation grade is based on their prompt arrival and active participation in section meetings. **You should be in your seat, ready to take notes at 9.10 am; chronic tardiness will be reflected in your grade. Please do not eat in the classrooms, before or during lecture or section.**

Reading Responses (10 percent)

Each week when reading is assigned, students will be given questions based on those readings. They will write one- or two-paragraph responses to one of those questions, to be sent by e-mail to their section leaders 24 hours before the start of section. Each timely response will receive one point. Each response submitted less than 24 hours before the start of section or brought to section on paper will receive half a point. No credit will be given for responses submitted after section begins or brought late to section, or for responses that fail to show significant engagement with the reading. Twelve assignments will be given, but a maximum of ten points will be awarded, so it is possible to miss two assignments due to illness, computer malfunction, or other mishap without affecting the final grade. Responses should not summarize the readings. Rather, they should challenge, complicate, or extend the readings in ways that will provoke classroom discussions.

First Paper (10 percent)

Students will choose a *New York Times* story from 2004 and compare it to a *New York Times* story on the same general subject from the period 1973-1980 in a paper of 750-1250 words (roughly 3-5 pages). The paper should describe a major difference in the content or presentation of the issue in the two stories and suggest a reason for that difference. Include both stories with your paper. [Note: with some exceptions, the full text of the *New York Times* is available online through ProQuest Historical Newspapers (1851-1999) and LexisNexis (since 1980). See LibraryWeb for details.]

Second Paper (25 percent)

Students will write a 2000-2500 word (roughly 8-10 page) paper comparing two sources created at least fifteen years apart during the period 1973-2004. The sources may be of any medium—scholarly books, popular books, journalism, government documents, novels, movies, artworks, television, video games, buildings, artifacts, costumes, etc.—but they should be of the same general medium. For example, one could compare Senate confirmation hearings for two officials nominated by Presidents Ford and George W. Bush, or the 1981 and 2001 models of the Ford Escort. As with the first paper, the second paper will contrast the two sources and explain the reason for that contrast, using additional primary and secondary source material as necessary. Proposals for the second paper must be submitted to section leaders five weeks in advance of the paper deadline.

Exams (10 and 25 percent)

A midterm and a final exam in essay format will ask students to demonstrate their understanding of lectures and assigned reading.

Guidelines for reading efficiently, building strong thesis statements, and organizing term papers can be found online at <http://www.schrag.info/teaching/teaching.html>.

All assignments are governed by the Columbia College regulations on plagiarism and acknowledgment of sources, online at <http://www.college.columbia.edu/students/academics/regulations/plagiarism.php>. Violations of these regulations will be reported to the administration and may result in grade penalties, including failure of the course. Consult Gordon Harvey's "Writing with Sources," <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~expos/sources>, and your section leader if you have any doubts about these regulations. In general, any sentence in your work that can be traced to a single sentence in someone else's work should bear a footnote.

Schedule

Week 1. Introduction

January 21. Course Introduction

Week 2. The End of the American Century

January 26. America at 1973

January 28. The Great Inflation

Fear and Loathing, 58-141, 337-393.

Week 3. The Age of Limits

February 2. Backlash: Busing, Tax Revolts, and the ERA

February 4. Energy Crisis and Environmentalism

Canarsie, 57-167, 233-263, and photographs following 54 and 167.

NOTE: I will not hold office hours on Wednesday, February 5.

Week 4. Post-Vietnam Diplomacy

February 9. The Diplomacy of Human Rights

February 11. Iran and Afghanistan

Covering Islam, xlix-lxx, 3-133.

FIRST PAPER DUE IN SECTION

Week 5. Reagan's Economy

February 16. Reaganomics

February 18. Winners and Losers

The End of the Line, xv-xxv, 1-49, 71-101, 116-182.

Week 6. The Politics of Race and Crime

February 23. The Underclass Debate

February 25. The War on Drugs

Race to Incarcerate (entire)

Week 7. The Politics of Sexuality

March 1. Abortion and the Law

March 3. Homosexuality and AIDS

Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood, 1-11, 92-245.

Week 8.

March 8. MIDTERM EXAM

March 10. Movie

NO SECTION THIS WEEK

SPRING BREAK

Week 9. Confronting the Evil Empire

March 22. Peace through Strength

March 24. The End of the Cold War

Becoming Citizens, 1-148.

PROPOSAL FOR SECOND PAPER DUE IN SECTION

Week 10. The New World Order

March 29. The Globalization Debates

March 31. Little Wars: Haiti, the Balkans, and Africa

Black Hawk Down, 1-215, 406-422 [Penguin edition: 1-179, 331-346]

Week 11. America at Work

April 5. The Rise of the PC

April 7. Welfare and the Working Poor

Generation X (entire)

Week 12. Changing Demographics

April 12. The Graying of America: Age, Disability and Social Security

April 14. The Browning of America: Immigration and Race

Maya of Morganton, 1-78, 140-200.

Week 13. Culture Wars of the 1990s

April 19. Challenging the Canon: Art, Education, and History

April 21. What is the Internet For?

Tangled Memories, 1-43, 145-259.

Week 14. At the Millennium

April 26. The Stained Blue Dress

April 28. A Nation Challenged

History and September 11th, 1-55, 94-190.

SECOND PAPER DUE IN SECTION

Week 15. Conclusion

May 3. America at 2004