

TAU American Studies

Spring 2018

At the Gates of Eden: A Postwar History of the American Dream (1945-1980)

Instructor: Dr. Yoav Fromer (yoavfromer@tauex.tau.ac.il)

Office Hours: Through appointment

Course Description:

This course sets out to explore the postwar American experience (1945-1980) and to investigate the fate of the 'American Dream' that this period ultimately came to define. The central goal will be to trace the immense potential for achieving transformative political, racial, socioeconomic and cultural change that was so prevalent in the wake of the Second World War, and evaluate the manner in which it did – or did not – end up transforming America. The course utilizes an interdisciplinary set of tools in order to broaden the scope of inquiry and provide a multidimensional and complex understanding of the postwar experience in its entirety. We will proceed chronologically and thematically to review critical chapters in the postwar American story with the hope of understanding how such watershed moments of promise and opportunity (for social justice, economic and racial equality and gender empowerment) ended up impacting American politics, culture and society.

The readings couple key primary sources and secondary historical and social scientific studies, with salient literary, musical, cinematic and artistic expressions, in an effort to penetrate deeper and portray a panoramic picture of postwar American life across all its layers. Among the central questions that we will be asking: What is the legacy of the New Deal and Great Society? What were the causes – and consequences – of the Civil Rights, Counterculture and Feminist movements? How did the Cold War and Vietnam impact these movements? What happened to American liberalism as result of the transformative events of the Sixties and what sparked the rise of conservatism? How did American capitalism evolve over the years? And finally, what is it about this tumultuous period that can help us better understand contemporary American society?

The course consists of an interactive weekly session. For each meeting, students will complete several complementary readings (30 pages) that include a blend of primary and secondary sources as well as a literary excerpt. The readings offer varying perspectives about salient events. In addition, there will be a companion viewing assignment (which will be comprised of a notable film, documentary, television show, or art work from a particular period). During class, we will often view short newsreel clips that help dramatize the events that are being discussed.

Reading Material

All the readings will be uploaded in advance to the course “Moodle” site.

Assignments and Grading

- **Take Home Midterm** (15%)
- **Take Home Final Paper** (65%)
The date for has been prescheduled and appears on the course website.
- **Informed Participation in-class or via email** (30%). You must participate either in class or in writing. I am fine with both – but it is a mandatory part of the grade (written participation comprises of a well thought-out email response – a couple paragraphs – in which you discuss some interesting or important aspect of the weekly readings and how they relate to the class discussions).

Attendance

- Showing up to class is MANDATORY. Attendance will be taken every week. More than **three unexcused** absences (that are not due to sickness with a doctor’s note, family emergency or “Miluim”) will lead to automatic penalization of your final grade.

March 3

Introduction: Great Expectations

- Henry Luce, “The American Century” (1941) – in class reading

March 10

The Cold War, Part I: Enemies Abroad

- George Kennan, “The Long Telegram” (1946)
- President Truman’s Speech to Congress, March 12, 1947 (“The Truman Doctrine”)
- Watch: Dr. Strangelove (1964)

In Class: “How to Spot a Communist,” “Duck and Cover”

March 17

The Cold War, Part II: Enemies at Home

- Ellen Schrecker, *McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (selected documents)

In Class: Hollywood Ten and HUAC, The Army-McCarthy Hearings

March 24

The 1950s: People of Plenty

- Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, Introduction
- Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War*, Chapter 7
- Watch: Episodes of “Father Knows Best” and “Ozzie and Harriet”

In Class: Norman Rockwell’s American Portraits, Nixon-Khrushchev “Kitchen Debate”

March 31

The “Other” 1950’s: the Gathering Storm

- Jack Kerouac, *On the Road* (excerpt)
- Watch: *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)

In Class: Joint reading of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”

April 7

Civil Rights I: The Times They are a Changing

- Writings by Martin Luther King, Elizabeth Eckford and James Farmer
- Barry Goldwater, “States’ Rights” and “Civil Rights” in *Conscience of a Conservative*
- Watch: PBS Documentary “Freedom Riders”

In Class: The Little Rock Nine (1957), March on Washington (1963), “Bloody Sunday” (1965)

Passover Break

April 28

Civil Rights II: The Rise of Black Power – Freedom is NOT Enough

- Selected writings by Stokely Carmichael, Huey Newton, Angela Davies and The Black Panthers Manifesto
- The Kerner Commission Report, Executive Summary (1968)
- Watch: Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet" Speech (1964)

In Class: The Watts Riots (1965)

- **Midterm to be emailed after class; Due back in hard-copy May 3 in my mailbox (Webb Fifth Floor) by 16:00**

May 5

The War Abroad: Vietnam

- Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (excerpts)
- Michael H. Hunt, *Vietnam War Reader* (select letters from the front)
- Watch: *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert McNamara*

In Class: Walter Cronkite, *The World Tonight*, Report from Vietnam (February 23, 1968)

May 12

The War at Home: The New Left, Antiwar Movement, and the Counterculture

- Writings by Todd Gitlin and Tom Hayden (SDS), Jerry Rubin, and The Weathermen
- Watch: President Nixon's "Silent Majority" Speech (1969)
- Watch: Berkeley in the Sixties

In Class: The 1968 Democratic Party Convention, Woodstock, Catonsville Nine; Protest Art and the Vietnam War

May 19

The War within the Home: Feminism and the Women's Rights Movement

- Writings by Kate Millet, Betty Friedan, Francis Beal, Susan Brownmiller and the Boston Women's Health Collective

- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (excerpt)
- Watch: PBS documentary “Makers: Women who Make America” (part II)

Watch: Gloria Steinem on “Meet the Press” (1972)

May 26

Backlash: The Rise of the Right, Part I

- Jonathan Rieder, “The Rise of the Silent Majority,” in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order (1932-1980)*
- Watch: All in the Family (Pilot Episode)

In Class: Boston Busing Integration Crisis (1974)

June 2

Family Values: The Rise of the Right, Part II

- Matthew Lassiter, “Inventing Family Values,” in *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970's*
- Selected writings by Phyllis Schlafly
- Watch: interview with Jerry Falwell

In Class: The Textbook Wars in West Virginia (1974)

June 9 (Shavuot holiday – an alternative make-up date will be scheduled)

The Age of Malaise: Decline, Stagflation and the End of the New Deal(?)

- President Jimmy Carter’s “Malaise” Speech (1979)
- Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin Alive: The 1970's and the Last Days of the Working Class*, Chapter 4
- Listen: Bruce Springsteen “Darkness on the Edge of Town” (Full Album)

In Class: The Oil Embargo, Iran Hostage Crisis, “Network”, Reagan’s Inaugural Address (1981)