

HIST 439 – Recent US History

Saxe - Section #20333, Barret 214, 2-4:30 TR

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Office Hours – MF, 11-12 or by appointment, 307 Clough

Course Description:

This course examines the evolution of American society since 1945. Special attention is given to the Cold War, consumer culture, political developments, the cultural transformation of the 1960s and 1970s, and the resurgence of conservatism.

Required Texts:

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*

Miles Davis, *Kind of Blue*

Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero*

Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time*

Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*

Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*

Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism*

Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*

The professor will provide additional readings throughout the course.

Course Requirements:

Exams

Midterm – October 16. 15% of final grade.

Final – December 16. 20% of final grade

Class Participation

Active participation in class discussions over readings and other topics. In addition, students will prepare four “talking points” for every class. 20% of final grade.

Essays

All essays should be typed, double-spaced, and should contain the following at the top of the first page: name, word count, date, and a meaningful title. In addition, any use of sources must be cited using Chicago-style footnotes (see

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html for help or you may ask the instructor). A title page and works cited page are not necessary. At the end of each essay, the Rhodes pledge should be printed and signed.

Students will write a series of short essays throughout the semester.

Essay #1 – due in class, September 25

In 900 to 1200 words, please write new liner notes for Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*. In writing these liner notes, you are to relate the album to other readings from the course.

Essay #2 – due in class, October 23

A criticism of Norman Mailer's *The Armies of the Night* is that the first half is "so bombastic that the reader is worn down by the end of the entire book. This is certainly not history as the title claims." Assess this statement in 900 to 1200 words, using specific examples from the text to justify your answer.

Essay #3 – November 20

Less Than Zero has been called the *The Great Gatsby* of the 1980s, revealing the superficiality and materialism of the eighties just as Fitzgerald had shown in the Roaring 20s. Is this a fair characterization of the eighties? In 900 to 1200, analyze Ellis's *Less Than Zero* in light of some other piece of evidence you have found from the 1980s or another account of the 1980s. How effective is Ellis at capturing the decade?

Research Essay –

Research paper of approximately 4500 words. This paper must be a work of original research. The most difficult challenge of this kind of essay is to decide on a workable topic. A quick survey of the required readings may help to narrow down an area of interest. Another approach is to look at the types of sources that are both available and interesting to the writer and develop a topic from that point. The nature of the topic of this paper is wide open, but it will need to be related to the theme of postwar America. International affairs, labor relations, popular culture and the Cold War have all been fruitful areas of research for papers for this course, and students are encouraged to pursue their own individual interests when designing their topics. Students are encouraged to meet with the professor to discuss any questions with finding or shaping a topic. 30% of final grade.

List of deadlines for the final essay

1. September 4 – Introductory abstract and bibliography

This is a 200-300 word abstract of your proposed topic in as detailed form as possible. You will also need to include a preliminary list of primary and secondary sources. This needs to be a hard copy that I receive in class.

2. September 18 – Final Bibliography

The final list of all the sources you will include in your essay. This needs to be a hard copy that I receive in class.

3. November 13 – Final draft of essay

The last draft of your essay is due. It must include a bibliography. Due, in class, and an email copy must be sent to me, as well.

4. December 8 – Revised draft

After receiving comments from the professor, students will have the option of revising their draft and turning it in December 8 outside the professor's office by noon. Students can improve their paper grade up to one full letter grade through revision. Due, in my office by 5, and an email copy must be sent to me, as well as the previous draft of the paper with comments.

Course Policies:

Class attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed one absence without penalty. Students are required to find out what they missed in class on the day of their absence. If students miss more than one class, they are required to meet with the professor to discuss their absences. Failure to do so will result in the lowering of a student's final grade by one third grade point for every absence over one. Please consider this policy when planning for extracurricular activities (sports, mock trial, etc.)

Due dates and times for writing assignments are fixed. Most assignments are due in class, not in the professor's mailbox. Late assignments will receive a failing grade. All assignments must be turned in to the professor. Failure to complete an assignment will result in a failing grade for the class.

The professor supports the Rhodes College Honor Code. To demonstrate commitment to the Code, each student must write "pledged" and sign his/her name on every assignment. If you have questions about plagiarism, please talk to me directly.

Course Calendar

August 28

Introduction

September 4

Introductory paragraph and bibliography for research essay

Chaos and Consensus – Early Postwar America and the Cold War
(Hodgson, Part I; Schrecker, all)

September 11

The Affluent Society – Birth of Postwar Consumer Culture
(Cohen, Part I and Part II)

September 18

Final bibliography for research essay

Fighting for the Dream – The Origins of the African-American Freedom Struggle
(Sitkoff, Ch. 1-5)

September 25

Essay #1

The Howl – Fighting Conformity in the "Golden Age"
(Davis, listen to all; Rosen, Part I)

October 2

The Affluent Society – Segmenting the Mass
(Cohen, Part III and Part IV, Epilogue)

October 9

The Liberal Consensus – Defining the Sixties
(Hodgson, Pt. II; Sitkoff, 6-7)

October 16

Midterm

October 23

Essay #2

Armies of the Night

(Mailer, all; Hodgson, Ch. 19-20)

October 30

“America’s Longest War” – Vietnam and the Creation of the New Left
(Hodgson, Pt. III [except Ch. 19-20])

November 6

“A Woman Needs a Man like a Fish Needs a Bicycle” – Feminism and America
(Rosen, all)

November 13

Final draft of research essay

Vietnam, Watergate, Disco, and Malaise – The Four Horsemen of the Seventies Apocalypse
(Hodgson, Pt. IV)

November 20

Essay#3

The “Me Decade” – Culture and Society in the Eighties
(Ellis, all)

November 27

Thanksgiving

December 4

Conservatism Ascendant – Ronald Reagan and his Impact
(Sitkoff, 8)

December 8

Revised draft, turned in to Saxe’s office by noon

Tuesday, December 16

Final Exam, 8:30