

History 398
The United States Since 1945
Fall 2011

Lectures: Tuesday & Thursday, 2:30-3:45

Lecture Location: Bascom 165

Professor William P. Jones

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In the three decades following the Second World War, the United States became the strongest economic and military power in the history of mankind. Unlike most previous superpowers, it gained that status without controlling a significant overseas empire and while maintaining a commitment, rhetorically at least, to spreading democracy and national self-determination around the globe. It also distributed the benefits of economic growth relatively equally within its own population, helping to forge an international economic system based on the premise that rising standards of living for most citizens would lead to economic growth, political stability and international peace.

Nevertheless, that system started to collapse almost as soon as it took form. By the mid-1950s it became clear that all citizens were not benefiting equally from the “affluent society” and that those inequalities were reinforcing race and gender distinctions that had limited democracy in the United States since its founding two centuries earlier. Meanwhile, democratic movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia began rejecting the United States as a model, turning instead to less democratic but often more egalitarian models in the Soviet Union and China and accusing the United States of placing its own economic and strategic interests ahead of its rhetorical commitment to democracy and self-determination abroad. Finally, the remarkable economic boom of the postwar era started to stall, leading many to question the basic principles that had guided domestic and international economic policies since the 1930s. By the 1970s, it seemed that a new political, economic and social order was emerging.

This course examines the rise and disintegration of that postwar order and the legacy it left for the United States and the world as we enter the twenty-first century. We will focus on major events including the Cold War, the social movements of the 1960s and the conservative revival of the 1980s but also trace key trends such as the emergence of the welfare state, changing patterns of gender and sexuality, and the increasing importance of immigration. We will seek not only to recount these developments, but also to understand how they shaped the world in which we now live.

Requirements: Weekly assignments for this course include two lectures, one discussion section, and 100-200 pages of reading. The purpose of discussion is to deepen and evaluate students' understanding of lecture and reading materials so it is critical that you attend all lectures and complete the weekly assignment before your section meeting. You are encouraged to ask questions during lectures, but you should also bring questions about lecture or reading material for discussion during sections.

Evaluation: Students will be graded according to their participation in discussion sections (20%), three short papers (15% each) and a final essay (35%). Participation will be measured by a combination of attendance, preparation and contribution to discussions. Every student must answer three of the four short paper questions listed on the syllabus.

Note on writing: All written assignments for this class should be typed, double-spaced with 12 point font and standard one-inch margins. They should be carefully edited and free of grammatical, spelling or typographical errors. All papers should be printed out and brought to class. They will not be accepted via email.

Required Reading: There are five required books for this course. They can be purchased at A Room of One's Own Feminist Bookstore, 307 W. Johnson St. (257-7888). They are all available in paperback and students can purchase used copies where they are available. Reserve copies are available for 3 hour loan at College Library.

Robert Griffith and Paula Baker, *Major Problems in American History Since 1945* (3rd edition, Houghton Mifflin, 2007)

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (Vintage Books, 2003)

Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003)

Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2002)

Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Three Leaves Press, 2005)

Academic Conduct: Students will be held to the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Instances of Academic Misconduct (including cheating and plagiarism) will be prosecuted according to the "Student Academic Misconduct Campus Procedures" of the UW System Administrative Code. Please familiarize yourself with those procedures and their definition of Academic Misconduct:
<<http://www.wisc.edu/students/conduct/uws14.htm>>

Abilities: Students who need special accommodation due to a disability should contact me privately. Please also contact the Mcburney Disability Resource Center
<<http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/>> at 608-263-2741 (phone); 263-6393 (TTY); 263-2998

(FAX); FrontDesk@mcb.wisc.edu to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Course Schedule:

Week 1 Rise of the New Deal Order
Sept. 6 Shadow of the “Greatest Generation”
Sept. 8 The Transformation of Liberalism

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 1
Cohen, *Consumer’s Republic*, 1-109

Week 2 The American Century
Sept. 13 Origins of the Cold War
Sept. 15 “The Affluent Society”

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 2
Cohen, *Consumer’s Republic*, 111-191

Week 3 Cracks in the New Deal Order
Sept. 20 Race and the Welfare State
Sept. 22 **Film:** “The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter”

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 3
Cohen, *Consumer’s Republic*, 193-289

Week 4 The Cold War Heats Up
Sept. 27 Un-Americanisms
Sept. 29 From Cuba to Vietnam

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 4
Cohen, *Consumer’s Republic*, 291-410

Paper 1 (4-5 pages; due in Section): What accounts for the economic and military power of the United States in the 1940s and 1950s? Address the legacies of the Depression and the Second World War, the economic and social policies associated with the New Deal, and any other factors that you see as relevant. Support your answer with evidence from lectures and the assigned readings for weeks 1-3.

Week 5 The Challenge of Civil Rights
Oct. 4 Revolts in the South
Oct. 6 **Film:** “Step by Step: Building a Feminist Movement”

Week 6

Oct. 11 Gender and Sexuality in Postwar America
Oct. 13 **Film:** “At the River I Stand”

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 5 & 8
Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 1-104

Week 7 The Crisis of Liberalism

Oct. 18 Roots of the New Right
Oct. 20 Roots of the New Left

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 6 & 7
Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 105-298

Week 8 End of the American Century?

Oct. 25 Dissent and Détente
Oct. 27 The Roots of Malaise

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 9
Ransby, *Ella Baker*, 299-374

Paper 2 (4-5 pages; due in Section): To what extent did the civil rights, feminist, peace and other social movements coalesce into the New Left of the late 1960s? Were those movements fundamentally liberal, or did they reject or challenge important aspects of liberalism as it had been defined in the postwar era? Support your answer with evidence from lectures and the assigned readings for weeks 4-7.

Week 9 The Reagan Revolution

Nov. 1 “To Believe in America Again”
Nov. 3 Who Won the Cold War?

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 10
McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 1-110

Week 10 The New World Order

Nov. 8 The New Economy
Nov. 10 The New Immigration

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 11
McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 111-186

Week 11 The New Domestic Order

Nov. 15 The Urban Crisis

Nov. 17 The Crisis of the Family

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 12

McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 187-274

Week 12 The Culture Wars

Nov. 22 A New America?

Nov. 24 **Thanksgiving – No Class**

Paper 3 (4-5 pages; due in class on Nov. 22): How did white supremacists, libertarians, and religious conservatives unite behind the New Right of the 1960s and 1970s? Did they represent a fundamental break from the New Deal order or a reaffirmation of the social and political values of postwar liberalism? Support your answer with evidence from lectures and the assigned readings for weeks 8-11.

Week 13 The New Liberals

Nov. 29 Postmodern Politics

Dec. 1 Rejecting the “Welfare State”

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 13

Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 1-118

Week 14 The New Conservatives

Dec. 6 September 11 and the Return of History

Dec. 8 A Second Gilded Age?

Required Reading

Griffith and Baker, *Major Problems*, Chapter 14

Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 119-260

Week 15 Is the American Century Over?

Dec. 13 Where Do We Go From Here?

Dec. 15 Review

Paper 4 (4-5 pages; due in Section): Does the “war on terror” represent a departure or a continuation of the principals that shaped American foreign policy in the postwar era? Provide specific examples to illustrate your argument, drawing from lectures and the assigned readings for weeks 13-14.

Dec. 21 **Final Essay Due (Questions distributed Dec. 15)**