

H253 syll fall 07

History 253

THE SHAPING OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICA,
1960 TO THE PRESENT

Clayton Koppes
Professor of History
Oberlin College
Fall 2007

“There is nothing so remote as the recent past”

-- British playwright Alan Bennett

Office: Rice 305, 775-8317

Office Hours: Mondays 11 00 to 12 00 and 2 00 to 3 30

Fridays 11 00 to 12 30

And by Appointment

American society, politics, and culture have undergone remarkable change in the past half-century, but many issues have proved to be remarkably durable. This course analyzes some of the major trends in recent American history, as well as addressing conflicting interpretations about the meaning of that history. While this course may help explain contemporary America, it is also an exercise in historical understanding apart from presentist concerns.

The class is a mixture of lecture and discussion. Participation in class discussions, based on thoughtful consideration of the readings and the issues, is expected. Class participation may be helpful in resolving borderline grades. The following class periods will be devoted primarily to discussion: Sept. 21 (Black liberation movement), Oct. 5 (Vietnam), Oct. 12 (the Sixties), Nov. 2 (the women’s movement), Nov. 9 (Reagan), Nov. 30 (Bill Clinton and late-century liberalism), and Dec. 7 (Iraq).

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There are three writing assignments. The first two are synthetic essays of five or six pages in which you analyze and develop an argument about a specific topic (I'll give you suggested topics). The first is due before fall break. You may write on the Black liberation movement (due Sept. 28), Vietnam (due Oct. 12), or the Sixties (due Oct. 19). The second essay is due during the second third of the class. You may write on the women's movement (due Nov. 9), Reagan and the new right (due Nov. 16), or queer liberation (due Nov. 30). The final essay (six to eight pages) will ask you to interpret a broader theme running throughout the course. Each essay counts one-third of the final grade.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Paul Boyer, *PROMISES TO KEEP: THE UNITED STATES SINCE WORLD WAR II*.

George Herring, *AMERICA'S LONGEST WAR; THE UNITED STATES IN VIETNAM: 1950-1975*.

Anne Moody, *COMING OF AGE IN MISSISSIPPI*.

Ruth Rosen, *THE WORLD SPLIT OPEN*.

An additional book, dealing with very recent history, may be assigned.

SCHEDULE

1. INTRODUCTION: THE UNITED STATES IN 1960; INTERPRETATIONS OF RECENT AMERICA

Sept 5, 7 SKIM BOYER, CHAPS. 1-5

2. THE KENNEDY MYSTIQUE; COLD WAR AND CUBA

Sept. 10, 12, 14 BOYER, CHAPS. 6-7

3. THE BLACK LIBERATION MOVEMENT

Sept. 17, 19, 21

Sept. 17 special visit by ted shaw, director of the naacp legal and educational fund

MOODY, *COMING OF AGE IN MISSISSIPPI*, ALL; BOYER, CHAP. 8

4. LYNDON JOHNSON AND LIBERALISM AT HIGH TIDE

Sept. 24, 26, 28 BOYER, REVIEW CHAP. 7

5. VIETNAM

Oct. 1, 3, 5 HERRING, ALL (SKIM EARLY CHAPTERS; BOYER, CHAP. 10

6. THE SIXTIES: "LIKE A SPACESHIP"

Oct. 8, 10, 12 BOYER, CHAP. 9; ADDITIONAL READINGS TO BE ASSIGNED

7. NIXON AND THE SEVENTIES; ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Oct. 15, 17, 19 BOYER, CHAPS. 11-13

FALL BREAK -- Oct. 22, 24, 26

8. THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Oct. 29, 31, Nov. 2 ROSEN, *THE WORLD SPLIT OPEN*, ALL

9. REAGAN AND COUNTERREVOLUTION

Nov. 5, 7, 9 BOYER, CHAP. 14

10. THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Nov. 12, 14 BOYER, CHAP. 15

Nov. 15 (THURSDAY) Special visit by Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, authors of *The Preacher and the Presidents*, a study of Billy Graham

Nov. 16 MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART (Special visit to the Allen Memorial Art Museum)

11. QUEER LIBERATION

Nov. 19, 21 (No class Nov. 23 because of Thanksgiving)

ADDITIONAL READINGS TO BE ASSIGNED

12. BILL CLINTON: LIBERALISM LITE?

Nov. 26, 28, 30

BOYER, CHAP. 15

13. GEORGE W. BUSH: RED, BLUE, AND PURPLE AMERICA; IRAQ: "RISE OF THE VULCANS"

Dec. 3, 5, 7

ADDITIONAL READINGS TO BE ASSIGNED

14. THE UNITED STATES IN 2007: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Dec. 10, 12

FINAL ESSAY DUE ON DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED

