

History 361

The United States Since 1974

Princeton University
Department of History

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Head Preceptor, Richard Anderson

Course Description:

There comes a time when every period turns into an historical era. We start to step out of the moment and understand the decades in perspective, learning about the chronology and the turning points that made one era distinct from the ones that came before it. After years of being relegated to the section of American history classes when courses came to an abrupt end, the contemporary era—the decades that started in the 1970s and run through today—have now reached such a moment.

America underwent huge changes in these years—the rise of a new conservative movement and the reconstitution of liberalism in reaction to it, the end of the divisive era of the long Cold War and the rise of an interconnected global economy, revolutionary technological innovations coupled with growing economic inequality, a massive influx of immigrants from Latin America and Asia coupled with a revival of isolationism and nativism, a revolution in homosexual rights and gender equality coupled with the rise of a new ethos of “family values.” These massive political, social and cultural shifts made America look like a different place than it had been when the Age of Aquarius came to an end.

This class will examine the history of this period. We will look at the growing polarization that took place even as many economic and technological forces weakened the divisions that had existed in the nation. The class will provide students with a compelling account of the major changes and events that took place in this period.

Course Requirements:

Lectures

Lectures will form the core of the course. Handouts will be available on the course's Blackboard site.

Please note: Laptops and recording devices may not be used in lecture.

Precepts

You should complete and be ready to discuss each week's readings by the time of your precept. Your mastery of the readings (which average about 200 pages per week) will not only impact your participation in precept, but also your performance in the entire course.

Short Paper Assignment:

Each section will be assigned a small set of primary documents. Students will have to write a five-page paper placing the documents in broader historical context and using them to make an argument about a specific issue in the post-1974 period. Papers will be due on Dean's Date.

Grading:

Your grade in the course will be determined by the formula below:

Short Paper: 20%
Precept Participation: 25%
Midterm Exam: 25%
Final Exam: 30%

Grades for examinations, papers and precept participation will be based on the standards set forth in the Department of History's Grading Practices (attached).

Please note: Precept attendance is mandatory for all students. Each student will be allowed one unexcused absence during the semester. A failing grade in precept participation will result in automatic failure for the course.

Readings and Class Schedule

Mon. 2/5: Divided We Stand

Wed. 2/7: Distrusting Institutions

No Precepts

Mon. 2/12: Economic Malaise

Wed. 2/14: The New Right and the Religious Right

Readings

Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies*, 1-217.

Mon. 2/19: Feminism

Wed. 2/21: The Politics of Détente

Readings

Matthew Sutton, *Jerry Falwell and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 1-26, 39-50, 57-60, 69-88, 92-139.

Mon. 2/26: The Reagan Revolution

Wed. 2/28: Cable TV and Personal Computers

Readings

Meg Jacobs and Julian Zelizer, eds., *Conservatives in Power: The Reagan Years*, 1-65, 92-134, 161-212.

Mon. 3/5: Conversation with E.J. Dionne Jr., *The Washington Post*

Wed. 3/7: The End of the Cold War

Special Event: All students are required to attend the panel with the Drive-By-Truckers from 4:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in McCosh 50. The two lead singers of the band, Michael Cooley and Patterson Hood, will be having a discussion with sociologist Jonathan Rieder about rock-and-roll, progressive politics and the South. If you have a conflict because of another class or extracurricular activity please let your preceptor know. Otherwise, attendance is required. It should be a fantastic event. They will also be playing a few songs.

Readings

Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner Take All Politics*, 1-40, 95-136, 163-252.

Mon. 3/12: The Culture Wars

Wed. 3/14: Midterm

Readings

No Reading

Mon. 3/26 Howard Stern in Red America

Wed. 3/28: Globalism and Its Discontents

Readings

Steve Gillon, *The Pact*, xi-xviii; 92-283

Mon. 4/2: Clinton, Gingrich and Triangulation

Wed. 4/4: 9/11 and the War on Terror

Readings

Ernest May, *The 9/11 Commission Report with Documents*

Mon. 4/9: Generation X and the Millennials

Wed. 4/11: Financial Insecurities

Readings

Chris Smith, *The Daily Show (The Book): An Oral History as Told by Jon Stewart, the Correspondents, and Guests*, xv-xviii; 1-82; 103-155; 215-270; 345-413.

Mon. 4/16: Interconnections: From Starbucks to Facebook

Wed. 4/18: The Gender Gap and American Politics

Readings

Julian E. Zelizer, ed., *The Presidency of George W. Bush*, 59-168, 199-281.

Mon. 4/23: Polarized Washington

Wed. 4/25: The Triumph of Same-Sex Marriage

Readings

J.D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Family and Culture in Crisis*

Mon. 4/30: Baltimore

Wed. 5/2: Conclusion

Readings

Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

Final: May 22, 1:30p.m. McCosh 50

Department of History Grading Practices

Papers and Exams

An **A** or **A-** thesis, paper, or exam is one that is good enough to be read aloud in a class. It is clearly written and well-organized. It demonstrates that the writer has conducted a close and critical reading of texts, grappled with the issues raised in the course, synthesized the readings, discussions, and lectures, and formulated a perceptive, compelling, independent argument. The argument shows intellectual originality and creativity, is sensitive to historical context, is supported by a well-chosen variety of specific examples, and, in the case of a research paper, is built on a critical reading of primary material.

A **B+** or **B** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates many aspects of A-level work but falls short of it in either the organization and clarity of its writing, the formulation and presentation of its argument, or the quality of research. Some papers or exams in this category are solid works containing flashes of insight into many of the issues raised in the course. Others give evidence of independent thought, but the argument is not presented clearly or convincingly.

A **B-** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates a command of course or research material and understanding of historical context but provides a less than thorough defense of the writer's independent argument because of weaknesses in writing, argument, organization, or use of evidence.

A **C+**, **C**, or **C-** thesis, paper, or exam offers little more than a mere a summary of ideas and information covered in the course, is insensitive to historical context, does not respond to the assignment adequately, suffers from frequent factual errors, unclear writing, poor organization, or inadequate primary research, or presents some combination of these problems.

Whereas the grading standards for written work between A and C- are concerned with the presentation of argument and evidence, a paper or exam that belongs to the D or F categories demonstrates inadequate command of course material.

A **D** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates serious deficiencies or severe flaws in the student's command of course or research material.

An **F** thesis, paper, or exam demonstrates no competence in the course or research materials. It indicates a student's neglect or lack of effort in the course.

Precept Participation

A student who receives an **A** for participation in discussion in precepts or seminars typically comes to every class with questions about the readings in mind. An 'A' discussant engages others about ideas, respects the opinions of others, and consistently elevates the level of discussion.

A student who receives a **B** for participation in discussion in precepts or seminars typically does not always come to class with questions about the readings in mind. A 'B' discussant waits passively for others to raise interesting issues. Some discussants in this category, while courteous and articulate, do not adequately listen to other participants or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation.

A student who receives a **C** for discussion in precepts or seminars attends regularly but typically is an infrequent or unwilling participant in discussion.

A student who fails to attend precepts or seminars regularly and adequately prepared for discussion risks the grade of **D** or **F**.