

**History 340-01, Fall 2008**  
**The United States Since World War II (RI, SI)**

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This course examines major events, decisions, and trends in the political, social, and cultural history of United States since World War II. Because the United States emerged from that war as the world's dominant economic and military power, and because it struggled to maintain that position throughout this period, this course also aims to internationalize US history. Our main focus will be the decisions and historical forces that make our familiar world understandable. Faced with what will almost certainly be an historic election this November, this class will also concern itself with the presidency and presidential decision-making. We will examine especially the relationship between presidential personality, campaigning, presidential power, the rise of the national security state, and its implications for democracy and the constitutional system. Students have also expressed interest in social and cultural history, so we will direct our attention to longer-range problems and social processes that have challenged leadership at every level of civil society and government: for example, the civil rights struggle, the War on Drugs (now four decades old), and the debate over immigration policy which heated up in the 1980s. We'll even have some debates about popular culture and consciousness.

This may be the most controversial field of history you will study, because our current dilemmas emerge directly from its legacies. The study of the recent past itself poses a dilemma. On the one hand, the subject is fascinating, fun, and hugely relevant. It lends itself well to a speaking intensive course in which we'll be dealing with past controversies which remain controversial in the body politic *and* among historians. Our political and moral convictions will inevitably shape the kinds of questions we ask, and might push us toward preordained conclusions. On the other hand, past actors deserve to be understood on their own terms first before we can evaluate them, in light of their fears, worldviews, sense of possibilities, and choices. They cared about things we may no longer care about, thought in ways that might seem alien, and above all, lack the hindsight we enjoy. "The past is foreign country to us all," even the recent American past. We must understand the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. Finally, we all have a responsibility to rise above mere opinion to reach toward confident and settled convictions backed by reliable evidence.

History at its core is a form of knowledge and explanation that arranges evidence and detail into a narrative or argument that makes sense -- better sense than other competing interpretations. Treat this class as an extended set of exercises in bringing evidence to bear on different interpretations that seem plausible and compelling because the weight of evidence leads you to that conclusion. If history cannot be entirely "objective," we can aspire to comprehensive understandings grounded in reliable factual evidence and reasonable agreement as to general democratic principles of discussion and debate.

### **Learning Goals**

At the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Identify and explain the significance of major events and developments in US political, social, and cultural history since 1941.
2. Analyze competing truth claims and interpret evidence in 10 specific areas of historical and historiographical debate, 2 of which you will lead in cooperation with 4 of your peers. Your grade will reflect above all your ability to rise above description to the level of assessing interpretations in light of evidence.
3. Speak clearly, forcefully, respectfully, responding to conceptual and factual claims with an understanding that the process of group discussion and debate can be a powerful vehicle for deepening knowledge and sharpening reasoning.

4. Assess the impact of the presidency, the national security state, and the welfare state on American political and social development.
5. Understand key changes in the international arena that have affected the composition and texture of American society and the relative power of the United States in the world.

**Required readings:**

Paul Boyer, *Promises to Keep: the United States since World War II*, Third Edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005).

PDF files available on Blackboard for this course, either under reserves or in Course Documents. Check Blackboard weekly for succinct supplementary materials to Boyer, required of all class participants.

Expect to read 80-100 pages a week and to do some serious digging: **books and articles** available in Jackson Library, a major regional research library; **scholarly articles** online through the Library's web page and the course page for this class; **journalism** through the wonderful ProQuest historical databases that include *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and other African American newspapers; **primary documents** such as speeches, congressional testimony, memoirs, diaries, and correspondence, available through hardcopy document collections, through a burgeoning universe of web sites, and even through Jackson Library microfilm collections.

**Recommended Readings:**

James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: the United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford, 1996). On hard-copy reserve in the library and available through Jackson library as an **e-book**. Bancroft Prize-winning survey especially good on various sides of various debates.

James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: the United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford, 2005). Worthy successor to the previous. On **hard copy reserve** Jackson library. If you plan to go on in this field, these readily available surveys would do well to be by your elbows!

Melvin P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007). On **hard-copy reserve** in Jackson library and readily available in paperback. Balanced and up-to-date scholarship on crucial episodes of the Cold War, especially its origins in the 1940s, end in the 1980s, and the Kennedy-Khrushchev brinkmanship of 1962.

**Jackson Library Course Page (for Research):** Library -> Subject Guides -> History -> 340  
[http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/bibs/his/his340\\_us\\_since\\_1945.asp](http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/bibs/his/his340_us_since_1945.asp)

**Requirements:**

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. *You must email me in advance if you will miss class, or, in case of emergency, within 24 hours after class.* I can excuse absences only on the grounds of personal or family illness or serious emergency (*not* conflicting work schedules, appointments, oversleep, or extracurricular activity). More than three unexcused absences and your final grade will go down 2 points for every day missed. Three *consecutive* unexcused absences constitute grounds for withdrawing you from the course.

**Reading and Preparation:** For this class to work, everyone must consistently prepare and be willing to share your insights verbally. You will be responsible for reading 60-80 pages per week. You must however read this with care and active attention to detail that is relevant to interpretive problems.

**Blackboard Discussion Thread Assignments. 10%.** These will be specific short "free writing" assignments peppered throughout the semester, asking you to contribute to discussion threads. They will variously ask the following: comment upon debates in which you did not participate; locate and evaluate secondary and primary sources relevant to a topic under discussion; evaluate assigned readings in light of their persuasiveness in their own time, and their relevance to our own lives and political choices.

**Class Participation 20%.** Several elements can constitute good participation. Essential is your thoughtful contribution to discussion when I pose questions to the class. Posing good questions and offering pertinent evidence when we have clear issues under discussion will earn you points. Always try to reflect upon the relationship between interpretation and evidence. Balance listening and talking. Since this is a Speaking Intensive class, if you feel extremely reticent to talk, please come talk to me and visit the Speaking Center.

**Roundtable Discussion/Debate Preparation and Performance. 20%. You will be asked to participate in 2 roundtable discussions/debates.** Some of the roundtables/debates will be historiographical, that is, comprised of historians today explaining what they think happened and why. Other roundtable/debates more properly will require that you imagine yourselves thinkers and actors speaking at the time the issues were most salient. I leave leeway here for creativity, and the distinctions need not be hard and fast. The evening before you are to participate, you must post on Blackboard a 1 page summary of the main points you will be making and whose views you will represent. These should be clear and in complete sentences. Any quotes or statistics should have complete bibliographic citations. For the discussion/debate to succeed, other people who take different positions need to anticipate counterarguments or complementary viewpoints to their own.

**Short Evaluation Post-Debate Papers. 20%.** These are due exactly 1 week after your participation in the roundtable discussion/debate. In light of other evidence and interpretations you have now heard, critically assess the position you took. Answer: Does the position I took hold up logically in light of all the evidence and counter arguments? What are the outlines of a more satisfactory and complete position? Finally, were *all* the debaters missing something important we know in retrospect?

**Final Research Paper. 30%. Due the Day of the Final Exam.** Since this is also a Research Intensive class, in lieu of any final exam, I ask that you write 8-10 pages on a specific problem of interpretation and evidence that came up *at any point in the course, but most probably in relation to one of the debates in which you were a participant.* (In other words, you do not have to start from scratch). What I need to see, however, is a much fuller and more extensively documented *explanation, a partial solution to a historical problem,* using evidence collected across the arc of the semester. Example: "In authorizing the use of atomic weapons against Japan, Harry Truman thought he was targeting military facilities and not civilian populations. This is abundantly clear from his personal diaries. What is not clear is why military contingency planning did not reflect these priorities. Was Truman simply trying to assuage his own conscience, knowing full well that the atomic bombs would kill "all those kids"? Or had the logic of air war come to the point where *everyone* deemed the mass killing of civilians too horrible to name but too essential to forego?"

**Course policy on sustainability:**

UNCG recently began a sustainability initiative. Campus-wide policies are being adopted that require students, staff and faculty to act in ecologically conscious ways while at UNCG. What is sustainability? UNCG's web site says: "Sustainability is an approach to discovering and implementing a balance of economic and social equity with ecological awareness in order to minimize damage to the environment caused by human activity." While in the classroom and while performing required course activities, students must strive to act in ecologically conscious ways. This means that you need to: recycle plastic bottles or bring filtered or tap water in reusable bottles; turn off lights and projectors when you are the last to leave a room, or when you see an empty room; recycle office paper, newspapers, and cardboard; if possible, turn papers in to me on two-sided paper; and email papers instead of driving to deliver them if they are due on a day when class doesn't meet. Many of the writing assignments will be posted on Blackboard and your feedback will be electronic, saving paper. Of course there is no grade and no points here, just the grade the biosphere gives us at the end of the third millennium!

Here are a few links to sustainability information at UNCG, including a recycling guide.

<http://sustain.uncg.edu/>

<http://www.uncg.edu/student.groups/uncgreen/index.htm>

<http://www.uncg.edu/rcy/index.htm>

**Course policy on use of electronic devices in class:**

All cell phones must be turned off unless you are a caretaker or emergency responder. No text messaging will be permitted. All laptops must be used for activities exclusively related to class. If I find anyone surfing the web or checking e-mail, they will be asked to leave the room and their laptop will not be permitted back for the rest of the semester. (If this sounds extreme, it is. TAs and faculty are telling me stories of students spending class hanging out on Facebook and only occasionally paying attention to ask a question to get the grade. Your class, your classmates, and your professor deserve no less than your undivided attention).

**UNCG's Academic Integrity Policy** (<http://saf.dept.uncg.edu/studiscp/Honor.html>).

Violations of this policy include, but are not limited to 1.) Cheating 2.) Plagiarism: (see link below).

Violations of the Academic Integrity Policy will be handled in accordance with UNCG procedures, which can be found at: <http://saf.dept.uncg.edu/studiscp/Honor.html>

Penalties can range anywhere from having to redo the assignment, to receiving an F on the assignment or even the course, to expulsion from the University (in cases of repeated violations).

**Plagiarism Defined.** Memorize the library's definition and then take the research tour!

<http://library.uncg.edu/depts/ref/tutorial/integrate/plagdef.asp>

### Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

**NB: I know from partial class responses already that the first three debates are going to be popular. By next Tuesday after hearing from all of you I will have the entire schedule firmed up so that you may sign up for your two debates. On next Thursday, we will have our first free-for-all debate about the atomic bomb. 10 more roundtables/debates will follow and you must choose two to speak and read about. Groups will meet in advance to agree on formats and allocation of positions.**

**8/26: Introductions: Preferences**

**Research Practicum #1 -- Finding Secondary and Primary Sources**

**8/28: Buried in Our Own Backyards: the Presence of the Past**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 16. Write three paragraphs in Blackboard and be prepared to discuss the following. 1) Boyer's "history" of the very recent past overlaps with your own experience. What events, decisions, and social processes most clearly seem to have affected your daily life? Or has "history" as written by a professional historian largely bypassed the daily rhythms of life of you, your friends, and your family? 2) What came as the biggest surprise in Boyer's account of the first years of this decade? That is, what did you miss as you lived through it?

**9/2-9/4: A World Destroyed: World War II and its Legacies**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 1.

**Thursday Debate -- Air War, the Bomb, and Atomic Diplomacy -- Class Free-For-All**

**[Similar preparation sheets for subsequent debates will be posted on Blackboard]**

**QUESTIONS:** Why did Truman drop the atomic bombs on Japan? Was it, as he later claimed, simply to end the war as quickly as possible and save American lives? Or was he equally if not more concerned with showing the Soviet Union and the world the awesome power of a new technology then wresting exclusively in the hands of the United States? Did he or any of his advisers see atomic bombs as a new kind of weapon needing any form of moral justification distinct from that of saturation conventional bombing?

**BLACKBOARD AND CLASS ASSIGNMENT:** Students will choose one of the three following positions to argue and defend with evidence. You must read all three so that you can anticipate counter-argument. Read also Truman's diaries and reflect on their implications.

Blackboard Discussion Board will have a thread where I require you to write a paragraph due 9/3 at midnight. Paraphrase or place in quotations a statement that is central to your author's overall argument. Identify one or two pieces of evidence that they cite that is especially persuasive.

Robert James Maddux, "Why We Had to Drop the Atomic Bomb," *American Heritage* (May/June 1995). Available through Journal Finder and Blackboard in .xps and .doc format.

Gar Alperovitz, "Hiroshima: Historians Reassess," *Foreign-Policy* 99 (Summer 1995). Available through Journal finder or on Blackboard in .doc and .pdf format.

Barton J. Bernstein, "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered," *Foreign Affairs* 74, 1 (January 1995), 135-152. Available through Journal finder or on Blackboard in .xps and .pdf format.

**Harry Truman's diary entries for 07-17-45 07-18-45 and 07-25-45, on Blackboard in .jpeg.**  
**From** Notes by Harry S. Truman on the Potsdam Conference, July 17-30, 1945, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library, [http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/bomb/large/index.php](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/index.php)  
(If you cannot read Truman's handwriting, see an amateur historian whose transcriptions seem faithful to the original: Doug Long, "Hiroshima: Was It Necessary?" <http://www.doug-long.com/> Truman Diaries: <http://www.doug-long.com/hst.htm>).

Optional: For a detailed summary of the atomic bomb controversy sympathetic to Truman with footnotes you can chase down, see Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 108-111. E-book and hardcopy reserve.

**Supplementary optional reading and further research.** Though this is not one of the regular debates restricted to five people, you may still consider this fair game for your final research and writing project. See "The Atomic Bomb: A Short Bibliography" on Blackboard.

### **9/9-9/11: "An Iron Curtain Has Descended"- Cold War Causes and Consequences**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 2-3, pp. 35-96.

Optional: See also Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 82-136, and 82-91 especially on orthodox and revisionist historians.

**Roundtable #1 -- 1954 Domestic Communist Subversion --** How real a threat do "the Reds" pose to American institutions?

Bibliography, class assigned readings and questions on Blackboard!

### **9/16-9/18: 1950s, Suburbia, Consumerism, and Domesticity**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 4-5, skip 107-115 (foreign-policy), and 148-155 (civil rights) for later reading.

**Roundtable #2: Trapped in Suburbia -- A Vast Wasteland of Conformity and Uniformity? A Cage of Domesticity for Women? Or a Better Place to Raise Your Kids Up?**

Bibliography and questions on blackboard!

Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 333-242, on the suburbs; Patterson is skeptical of the cultural critics.

Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 361-369 on the crosscurrents of domesticity, the "feminine mystique," and married women's rising labor force participation.

### **9/23-9/25: Hot Peace -- From Eisenhower to Kennedy in the Cold War**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 107-115 and ch. 6.

**Roundtable #3: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Missiles in Cuba October 1962?**

Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 486-510, summarizes the evidence and stresses Kennedy's need to establish international "credibility."

### **9/30-10/2: The Civil Rights Movement and the Civil Rights Act of 1964**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, 148-155 and ch. 8.

**Roundtable #4: Promises and Dangers of the Civil Rights Act.**

**10/7-10/9: Johnson Liberalism and the War on Poverty**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 7.

**Class free-for-all: The Crisis in American Cities**

**10/14-10/16: Vietnam From Johnson to Nixon: Choosing War, Staving Off Defeat**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 10-11.

**FALL BREAK**

**10/23: Roundtable # 5 Vietnam and the Media -- Liberal Betrayal?**

**10/28-10/30: The New Left, the Backlash, the "Rights Revolution", and the Politics of Protest**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 9. Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 12, pp. 323-335.

**Roundtable #6 Law and Order, and the Legitimacy of Protest, 1970**

**11/4: Election Day -- No Class -- VOTE!**

**11/6: Roundtable #7 Nixon's Achievements and Transgressions, 1974**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 12, pp. 335-347.

**11/11-11/13: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the New Right**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 13.

**Roundtable #8 The War on Drugs and the Rights of Criminal Defendants, 1990**

**11/18-11/20: Reagan's America and the End of the Cold War**

**Roundtable # 9: Did Reagan Win the Cold War?**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 14.

**11/25: Centrist Liberalism in an Era of Globalization: Clinton in the 1990s**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 15.

**12/2: Roundtable #10: Is Immigration Good for the Country? 1996**

**12:4: Back to the Future: Summary Discussion**

Boyer, *Promises to Keep*, ch. 16, again.

How Does the Country Look Different with an Historical Perspective?