

History 340-01, Fall 2010

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, we must understand US history in international context. Our main foci will be the decisions and historical forces that help make our familiar world understandable. This class will also examine the presidential decision-making, the rise of the national security state, and its implications for democracy and the constitutional system (topics which lend themselves to the speaking intensive debate format). 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 all Americans: for example, communism and anti-communism, the civil rights struggle, the War on Drugs (now four decades old), the debate over immigration policy which heated up in the 1980s, feminism, women, and the family.

This may be the most controversial field of history you will study, because our current dilemmas emerge directly from its legacies, achievements, and failures. Studying the recent past is therefore fascinating, fun, and hugely relevant. And it lends itself well to a speaking intensive course that examines past controversies that still resonate. But there is an obvious danger here. Our political and moral convictions will shape not only the questions we ask of the past -- this is inevitable -- but they also might push us toward preordained conclusions. This class will therefore also challenge you to entertain points of view that you may disagree with, and may make you uncomfortable. Past actors deserve to be understood on their own terms *first*, before we can evaluate them. They did not have the benefit of hindsight, which is a great gift to us but must be exercised responsibly. Developing wisdom of hindsight can help us assess the constraints of the present and imagine the possibilities of the future. We in all cases will endeavor to rise above mere opinion and reach toward settled convictions backed by reliable evidence.

History at its core is a form of knowledge and explanation that arranges evidence into a narrative or argument that explains change and continuity over time, in terms of conflict and consensus among very different historical actors. Treat this class as an extended set of exercises in bringing evidence to bear on different interpretations that seem plausible or compelling because the weight of evidence leads you to that conclusion. If historians cannot be entirely "objective," we can aspire to fuller understandings grounded in reliable factual evidence and reasonable agreement. I will ask everyone adhere to democratic principles of discussion and debate. In each discussion/debate, you may present viewpoints you disagree with or even deplore. Everyone will understand that you are doing this in interest of debate. Each debate will have a debriefing session and opportunity for critical reflection that will culminate in two short papers, and set you up for the final research project.

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. Demonstrate factual knowledge and understanding of various interpretations articulated by people who lived and made history, and later by scholars.

2. Analyze competing claims and interpret evidence in 10 areas of historical controversy. In 2 of these, you will co-lead a debate and general class discussion in cooperation with 4 of your peers. Your grade will reflect above all your ability to rise above mere description to assess interpretations in light of evidence.
3. Verbally present ideas and facts clearly, forcefully, and consistently. Respectfully engage your peers and the professor in dialogue that balances good listening and sophisticated speaking. Deepen your appreciation of how the process of group discussion and debate can be a powerful vehicle for expanding knowledge and sharpening reasoning.
4. *Substantively*, 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.
6. As a final product, research and report on a question that emerges from one of your debates. This involves gathering, assessing, and arriving at settled judgments about the value of various viewpoints and arguments that are contained in primary and secondary sources that you will identify and locate.

Required readings (selections and supplementary documents to be determined when the class decides on which of the possible debates we will have):

James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: the United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford, 1996). Available to you through the library as an e-book.

James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: the United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford, 2005).

PDF files available on Blackboard for this course. Check Blackboard weekly for succinct supplementary materials, 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 through Jackson Library microfilm collections.

Jackson Library Course Page (for Research): Library -> Subject Guides -> History -> 340

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 or documented need to attend a religious observance (*not* conflicting work schedules, appointments, oversleep, or extracurricular activity – the new UNCG policy is that you can be excused for two religious holidays a year). 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 asking you to withdraw 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 approximately 80 pages per week. You must however read this with care and active attention to detail that is relevant to interpretive problems. Although only 5 people a week will be the principal debaters, you will have ample opportunity to demonstrate that you are informed about the facts and controversies during the audience question and answer period at the end of every debate.

Blackboard Discussion Thread Assignments. 15%. Look for assignments under Announcements and Assignments in Blackboard posted at latest by the preceding Friday. 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; evaluate secondary and primary sources relevant to a topic under discussion; evaluate Patterson's thesis and viewpoints in relation to what you have learned.

Class Participation 15%. Several elements can constitute good participation apart from your good debate performance. Essential is your thoughtful contribution to discussion when I pose questions to the class. Posing good questions 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. Engaging with the speakers specifically by name will also earn you points. There will be an opportunity to report on research findings at the end of the semester. Since this is a Speaking Intensive class, if you feel extremely reticent to talk, please come talk to me and visit the Speaking Center.

Short In-Class Essays 10%. Short essay and identification questions drawn from the readings and debates. Will be held on October 7 and November 30.

Roundtable Discussion/Debate Preparation and Performance. 20% [10% each]. 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 will require that you present the ideas of thinkers and actors speaking at the time the issues were most salient. I leave some leeway here for creativity, and the distinctions need not be hard and fast. Groups will caucus in advance to strategize.

On the Friday before you participate, you must post on Blackboard a 1 page summary of the main points you will be making, whose views you will represent, and the sources for these views. 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.

On the evening before the debate, each of the discussion/debate participants will reply to at least two other debaters on the Blackboard Discussion Board, to alert them of objections or counter-arguments you may voice the following day.

Short Evaluation Post-Debate Papers. 4-5 pages 20% (that's 10% each). These are due exactly 1 week after your participation in the roundtable discussion/debate. You are no longer the person you presented; you are *you*, a brilliant history student in 2010 who has stepped back from the controversy and is giving your reasoned judgment on it. In light of other evidence and interpretations you have now been exposed to, critically assess the position you presented in the debate. 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 -- bonus points in the conclusion -- were *all* the debaters missing something important we now know in retrospect?

Final Research Paper. 20%. A one-page "prospectus" is due November 24 at the absolute latest. The final paper is due the Day of the Final Exam, December 10, at 6 PM in my office 2141 MHRA. Since this is also a Research Intensive class, I ask that you write 8-10 pages on a specific problem of interpretation and evidence that came up in a debate. (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 and scholarship collected after the debate. 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 his priorities. Was Truman simply trying to assuage his own conscience,

knowing full well that the atomic bombs would kill "all those kids," an act he deplored? Or had the logic of bureaucratic decision-making in 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. 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 class and performing assignments, 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. 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 at all. All laptops must be used for activities exclusively related to class. None will be permitted during debates, when handwritten notes should suffice. Anyone using a laptop for purposes other than class will be asked to leave; 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. This kind of distraction not only sucks your energy out of the class but those around you).

UNCG's Academic Integrity Policy <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/>

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. An Educational Resolution Program option is available to undergraduate students with no other Academic Integrity violations.

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>

Grading Scale: A+: 98-100; A: 93-97; A-: 90-92; B+: 87-89; B: 83-86; B-: 80-82; C+: 77-79; C: 73-76; C-: 70-72; D+: 67-69; D: 63-66; D-: 60-62; F: 59 and lower.

Schedule of Meetings and Assignments

NB: By next Tuesday after hearing from all of you I will have the entire schedule firmed up, including titles for non-debate days (mostly Thursdays as I'm scheduling debates for Tuesdays, except the first). On this Thursday, we will have our first free-for-all debate about the atomic bomb. Starting on September 9, 10 more roundtables/debates will follow. You must choose two people to speak and read about. Each group will meet in advance to agree on formats and allocation of positions. It will be your responsibility to caucus with your group briefly in class and then at greater length out of class.

8/24: Introductions: Review of Debate Options

Finding Secondary and Primary Sources

8/26: A World Destroyed: World War II and its Legacies

The Atomic Bomb, and Atomic Diplomacy -- Class Free-For-All -- Practice Debate for Everybody

Assignment: Read the following and then give me a couple of paragraphs on Blackboard's discussion board that relates a specific analytical point to a specific piece of evidence, and then indicates your overall judgment on one or more of the questions.

Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, Prologue and ch. 4, AND especially pp. 5-7, 108-111 on Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb.

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.

Questions: Was it justified? On what terms did he justify it? Did he feel that it was in particular need of justification? Did he see it as a morally distinct kind of "winning weapon"? Did he or anyone calculate the long-term consequences in terms of unleashing a global nuclear arms race with the Soviets? Were there elements of "Atomic Diplomacy" vis a vis the Russians, i.e. the possibility that Truman dropped the bomb in part to *intimidate* the Soviets in the *post-war world* and not simply to end *World War II* against Japan as soon as possible?

OPTIONAL: See also Harry Truman's diary entries for 07-17-45 07-18-45 and 07-25-45, on Blackboard. ¹ See also Barton J. Bernstein, "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered," *Foreign Affairs* 74, 1 (January 1995), 135-152. Available through Journal finder or on Blackboard.

DUE TODAY: Debate Preference Sheets -- I will ask you to indicate your highest preference, and then six others that you would be willing to research and participate in. You will choose one before the cutoff date indicated; and one after. Anybody who does not return these to my history office by noon Friday consents to possibly being assigned 2 debates. [Pick the people you wish to represent later].

9/9: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #1

9/14: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #2

9/21: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #3

9/28: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #4

10/5: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #5

FALL BREAK

10/14: Midterm in class essay -- 45 minutes .

The next five debates will be held on 10/19, 10/26, 11/2, 11/9, and 11/16. Classes after that will be devoted to wrapping up issues and getting you in a prime position for writing a good research paper.

11/23: No class -- research

11/30- 12/2: Wrapping up, final in class essay, and Student Reports

FRIDAY DECEMBER 10 -- final papers due in my office 2141 MHRA

¹ 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 (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>).