

History 340-01, Fall 2011

The United States Since World War II (RI, SI)

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 3:30 PM-4:30 PM; Wednesday, 1 PM-2 PM;
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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. This class will examine presidential decision-making, the rise of the national security state in the context of Cold War, Third World interventions, and the implications of these developments for democracy and the constitutional system. Depending on what you will decide most interests you, on the home front we will examine communism and anti-communism, the civil rights struggle, the War on Poverty and the War on Drugs (now four decades old), immigration policy, feminism, and the perennial contest between liberalism and conservatism. A series of discussion-debates will ask you to represent the views of historical actors (or historians) and then critically assess them. (See the separate sheet of possible discussion-debate topics I am asking you to consider for next week's process of narrowing down).

Almost half of our meetings will be led by 4-5 students in formal panels of discussion and debate, moderated by the professor, with the class serving as interlocutors. Studying the recent past is fascinating, fun, and hugely relevant. This may be the most controversial field of history you will study, because our current dilemmas emerge directly from its legacies, achievements, and failures. There is an obvious danger here. Our political and moral convictions usually and properly shape the questions we ask of the past. Such is the nature of "issue based inquiry." But unless we are careful and self-aware, these convictions might push us toward preordained conclusions, and we thereby learn very little. This class will therefore challenge you to entertain *and accurately represent* points of view that you may disagree with. This may make you uncomfortable. But past actors deserve to be understood on their own terms *first*, before *we* can evaluate them. They did not have the benefit of hindsight. We do in relation to them, as future historians will in relation to us. Developing the responsible wisdom of hindsight is a powerful tool. We can thereby understand the constraints and opportunities of the present, and imagine the possibilities of the future.

History is a form of knowledge and explanation that arranges evidence into a narrative or an argument that explains change and continuity over time, usually as a result of both 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, after a general class Q and A session. These will culminate in two short papers. These exercises will most likely 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. Assess the impact of the presidency, the national security state, and the welfare state on American political and social development.

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 3 or 4 other students. Then you will write a short paper that assesses the interpretations you presented in light of the contexts, communities, and constraints of the time, and in light of evidence and counter-arguments your peers and the class presented during the debate.

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. Discussion and debate can be a powerful vehicle for expanding knowledge and sharpening reasoning.

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 or research exercises. This involves gathering information and evaluating various viewpoints and arguments that are contained in primary and secondary sources that you will identify and locate.

Required readings (selections to be determined when the class decides on the particular debates):

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 for your presentations and varied weekly blackboard assignments: **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.

NB!! Jackson Library Course Page (for Research): Library -> Subject Guides -> History -> 340
Compiled by the professor and Dr. Stephen Dew, History Department library liaison.

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 excuse absences only on the grounds of personal or family illness, or serious emergency, or documented need to attend a religious observance. 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 insights from your reading and research verbally. 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 that occupies the last half hour of every discussion-debate.

1. Blackboard Discussion Thread Assignments. 20 %. 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; report on little research assignments associated with the issues under discussion that week.

2. Class Participation 20 %. Several elements can constitute good participation apart from your good debate performance. You can respond thoughtfully when I pose questions to the class. Posing good questions when we have clear issues under discussion also earns you points. Reflect upon the relationship between interpretation and evidence. Balance listening and talking. Engage with the speakers specifically by name. Expect 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. We will have a workshop on speaking on September 20.

3. Discussion-Debate Preparation and Performances. 20% . You will be asked to participate in 2 roundtable discussion-debates. Some of the roundtables/debates will be historiographical, that is, comprised of historians today explaining what they think happened and why. Most will ask you to present the ideas of thinkers and actors speaking at the time the issues were most salient. The distinctions need not always be hard and fast. Groups will caucus two weeks in advance with me to strategize at the end of Tuesday class.

Two days before you present-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 according to the Chicago Manual of Style 15th edition. For the discussion-debate to succeed, other people who take different positions need to anticipate counterarguments or complementary viewpoints to their own. The discussion board will also allow for dialogue among the debaters in the interests of as full an airing of views for the class as your knowledge permits.

4. Short Evaluation Post-Debate Papers. 4-5 pages 20% (that's 10% each). These are due exactly 1 week after your participation in the discussion/debate. You have now stepped back from the controversy and are giving your reasoned judgment on it. Explain their views you presented in terms of the broader contexts of choice and understanding historical actors were part of. In light of other evidence and interpretations you have now been exposed to, critically assess the position you presented. What elements were reasonable, off-base, forward-looking, chauvinistic? Finally -- bonus points in the conclusion -- were *all* the debaters missing something important we now know in retrospect?

5. Final Research Paper. 20%. A one-page "proposal" is due November 10 at the absolute latest. The final paper is due the Day of the Final Exam, Saturday December 10, at 6:30 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 arrived at 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. The University is asking you 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 all!

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: Please turn off cell phones unless you are a caretaker or emergency responder. Please do not text. All laptops must be used for activities exclusively related to class. None will be permitted during debates, when handwritten notes should suffice. The class deserves no less than your undivided attention. It is a learning space where a full range of verbal and nonverbal cues come to play, and electronic devices can close doors as well as open them.

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

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. I am more serious about this than almost anything. Cheating cheapens the value of other students' honestly done work. 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 schedule firmed up, including titles for non-debate days (mostly Tuesdays as I'm scheduling debates for Thursdays). On this Thursday, we will have our first free-for-all debate about Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb on Japan. Starting on September 8, 10 discussion-debates will follow. You must choose two people to speak and read about. Don't try to represent more than one individual. 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 if necessary at greater length out of class.

8/23: Introductions: Review of Debate Options

Finding Secondary and Primary Sources

8/25: 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 Truman 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, is it possible that Truman dropped the bomb at least 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, thereby saving American troops' lives?

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 Friday: Indicate your highest preference, and then six others **in each half of the course** that you would be willing to research and participate in (for a total of 12 out of 26 or so). You will choose one before the cutoff date indicated; and one after. Anybody who does not post on blackboard or return the sheets to my history office by noon Friday consents to possibly being assigned 2 debates. [Pick the particular individuals you wish to represent later].

9/8: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #1

9/15: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #2

9/22: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #3

9/29: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #4

10/6: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #5

FALL BREAK

10/13: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #6

10/20: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #7

10/27: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #8

11/3: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #9

11/10: No Class – Research proposal for final paper due

11/17: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #10

Classes after that will be devoted to wrapping up issues and getting you in a prime position for writing a good research paper.

11/22: No class -- research

11/29: Student Reports

12/1: Student Reports

Saturday DECEMBER 10, 6:30 PM -- 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>).