

Fifties America: Affluence, Conformity, and Paranoia

20th Century US History Selected Topics

HIS524-01 Thurs 3:30-6:20 Bryan 110

Instructor: Dr. Susan W. Thomas Email: swthoma3@uncg.edu

Office Hours: MHRA 2114, T/Th 8:30-9:15 and Th 1:00-3:15, or by appt.

Required Texts

Altschuler, Glenn T. *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n Roll Changed America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. (e-book)

Cohen, Lisabeth. *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Knopf, 2003.

Kruse, Kevin M. *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.

Course Description

This course looks at the pivotal decade of the 1950s in America, a period that many might view with a large dose of nostalgia and connect to the sitcom *Happy Days*. Sandwiched between the trauma of WWII and the chaotic 1960s, the fifties have been viewed as a period of consensus within America. Most citizens trusted the government implicitly and believed in the promise of the American Dream, or they were too busy with their own lives to concern themselves with speaking out. Returning GIs reunited with sweethearts, married, and set the Baby Boom in motion, but these changes also led to a recapitulation to prewar gender ideals. Levittowns emerged, suburbanization took root, and urban sprawl began, beginning our continuing love affair with cars and the open road, as well as our dependence on crude oil. The demand for military preparedness in the face of the Cold War fostered the rise of the Military Industrial Complex and the creation of the interstate highway system. Race relations came to the fore, setting in motion the unending push for Civil Rights; rock 'n roll music created a new identity for American youth, which in turn threatened to upset the family dynamic; and television became the centerpiece of the home, where programming reinforced ideas of stability and possibility. In the background was the menace of Communism, spawning McCarthyism and the constant nuclear threat that permeated daily life. Paranoia indeed ran deep, despite the façade of prosperity and contentment.

Course Goals

The general goals for this course relate to students' ability to analyze and interpret historical documents and arguments. Accordingly, we will stress development of the following skills:

- Analyze historical duration, succession, and changes in terms of human agency and larger systems or structures in a wide variety of times and places. [Historical Comprehension.]
- Use historical thinking to contextualize and analyze primary and secondary sources representing different points of view. [Historical Analysis]
- Conduct original research by investigating and interpreting primary and secondary sources. [Historical Research]
- Use evidence-based reasoning to interpret the past coherently while developing and

presenting an original argument, orally and in writing. [Historical Interpretation]

I. Course Goals and Requirements for Undergraduates (UG) and Graduates (G)

A student who successfully completes this course should be able to:

1. Interpret primary sources from the period under study and analyze them orally and in writing
2. evaluate modern scholarship of a variety of genres and methodological orientations, by recognizing arguments and placing them in context of other arguments
3. Employ print and electronic resources to locate suitable primary and secondary sources for a research project
4. Formulate a thesis based on primary sources that is contextualized in the secondary scholarship
5. Write clear, argument-driven essays employing standard citation style

Additional course goal for M.A. Students

6. Demonstrate deeper insight into the relationships linking different works of secondary scholarship, as well as those relationships between secondary and primary sources

Graded Course Components

1. Research and Writing Assignments

The process of writing your research paper will require that you complete a series of linked assignments as well as a peer review of another student's paper. Each assignment must be completed by the assigned due date. Here is a list of these assignments:

1. Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography (Annotated using Chicago/Turabian style citations)
2. Rough Draft (within two pages of the required minimum)
3. Peer Review
4. Presentation of Research

2. Analytical Papers

The course is divided into three broad topics. At the conclusion of each topic, students will submit an analysis of the main issues raised in that section, the historiographical positions and debates, and take a position on what is most important. These will be due on the date we begin sections 2 and 3, and on the date we begin the Presentations for section 3.

You will have additional information provided on Canvas regarding expectations for these assignments.

Undergrad papers = min. 5 pages; Grad papers = min. 7pg.

3. Class presentations

All students will be required to present their research at the end of the semester. The presentations will be brief (**10 minute for undergrad/15 minute for grad students**) explanations of your research question and your findings.

4. Final Paper

All students will produce a research paper based on original research in primary sources and contextualized with secondary sources by the end of this semester. Paper topics may vary by individual

interest within the chronological time frame of the course. Please remember that the quality of your writing, particularly the clarity and persuasiveness of your argument, will factor into the final grading.

You will have additional information provided on Canvas regarding expectations for this assignment.

Undergrad papers: 12-15 pg/Grad papers 15-18 pg

5. Class Participation

The discussion and the exchange of ideas are very important in this seminar style class. Everyone will be expected to participate, and you should feel free to ask questions in every class.

Note: I ask that all students bring at least 2 analytical questions from the weekly readings. I will collect these questions at the beginning of class and they will contribute to your participation grade.

6. Leading Discussion

Students will lead discussion during the second half of our class period. You will be assigned to a group and the group will be responsible for engaging the rest of the class in the assigned readings. On the day that you are to lead discussion, **each group member is required to submit a 2 page analysis of the assigned readings.**

Grade Distribution

(Undergraduates)		(Graduate students)	
Research exercises	20%	Analytical Papers (3, 7 pg min)	30%
Analytical Papers (3, 5 pg min)	30%	Discussion Leader	10%
Discussion Leader	10%	Participation	10%
Participation	10%	Presentation	10%
Final Paper (12-15 pg)	30%	Final paper (18-20 pages)	40%

Academic Integrity

All assignments must be your own work, in your own words. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and may be reported to the UNCG administration. Any information that you borrow from another source, even if you do not use a direct quotation, must be cited in a footnote or endnote giving credit to that source. You must make sure that you comply with the UNCG Academic Integrity Policy. It is online at <http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/>

Attendance and Late Work Policy

Attendance:

The class meets once weekly and attendance is expected, not rewarded. Be on time and be prepared to stay for the duration of the class period. More than one absence will be considered excessive and you will receive a full letter grade deduction in the attendance portion of your grade beyond that one absence.

Late Work:

I have a strict late work policy, especially given that assignments have concrete due dates set at the beginning of the semester and are to be submitted online through Canvas. Work ahead so that your last minute emergencies do not negatively affect your performance and grades.

Note the following:

1. **I do not accept late final papers.**
2. **Rough drafts are required** of everyone but are not graded. If you **fail to submit a rough draft you will lose a full letter grade on the final paper.** You will **lose ½ letter grade if you submit a late rough draft or if you submit a draft that shows no conscientious effort to do your best work and comply with expectations.** You have until the following class period to submit a late rough draft or you will lose the full letter grade.
3. Other assigned work (research assignments, book review, discussion reading reviews): If submitted late will lose one full letter grade and must be completed prior to the subsequent class period or you will receive a zero for that assignment.

Schedule of Class Meetings

Aug 17: Introduction to Course

PART ONE: COLD WAR POLITICS

Aug 24: The Cold War

Aug 31: National Security State and Foreign Policy

Sept 7: Red Scare/McCarthyism

Sept 14: Library Workshop

PART TWO: FIFTIES CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Sept 21: Civil Rights and Race Relations

Sept 28: Baby Boom and American Dream

Oct 5: Gender Identity

Oct 12: Consumerism

PART THREE: CONFORMITY AND REJECTION

Oct 19: Media America/Television and Movies

Oct 26: Religion

Nov 2: The Beats

Nov 9: Presentations

Nov 16: Presentations

Final Paper Due to Canvas by 6:30 pm Dec 7 (exam date). Final Grades due to Genie by 5:00 pm Dec 11.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change based on exigent circumstances (weather, illness). If there is a change, I will make it to the online version of the syllabus and announce it either via email or in class.

The workload for the course will not change.