

Fifties America: Affluence, Conformity, and Paranoia

20th Century US History Selected Topics

HIS524-01 T 3:30-6:20 MHRA 1209

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Office Hours: MHRA 2114, T/Th 9:30-1045, or by appt.

Required Texts

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

Coontz, Stephanie. *The Way We never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York: Basic Books, 1992.

Delton, Jennifer A. *Rethinking the Cold War: How Anticommunism and the Cold War Made America Liberal*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

McCarthy, Anna. *The Citizen Machine: Governing by Television in 1950s America*. New York: The New Press, 2010.

Course Description

This course looks at the pivotal decade of the 1950s in America, a period that many might look at with nostalgia and connect to the sitcom *Happy Days*. Sandwiched between 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 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 constant nuclear threat and the arms race that led to a heightened sense of paranoia, despite the façade of prosperity and contentment.

Course Goals

The goals for this course relate to students' ability to analyze and interpret historical documents and arguments.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]

Graded Course Components

1. Research assignments

All undergraduate students will be required to complete a series of research exercises during the course of the semester. Each assignment must be completed by the assigned due date. Here is a summary list of these assignments:

1. Project Description
2. Preliminary Bibliography
3. Critique of a Peer's Paper

2. Book Reviews (see Appendix 1)

Scholarly book reviews do more than just summarize the information from a book. They require critical analysis regarding the argument and the evidence historians employ in their work. You will each complete two book reviews over the course of the semester, each of which will be no less than 4 pages in length.

3. Class presentations

All students will be required to present their research at the end of the semester. In addition, students will lead class discussion once during the semester as part of a group.

4. Final Paper (See Appendix 2 and 3)

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. **No late papers will be accepted.**

All students will supply briefly annotated bibliographies with their final essays. For a better sense of what it entails to create an annotated bibliography, see the Cornell University Library's web site at <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/research/skill28.htm>. This page contains a very good overview of the process. The Cornell Library's tutorial page, titled "Skill Guides: How to Find Specific Resources," is filled with other useful information. This page may be found at <http://olinuris.library.cornell.edu/ref/tutorialsguides.html>.

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 5 questions from the weekly readings. I will collect these questions at the beginning of class and they will contribute to your participation grade.

Grade Distribution

(Undergraduates)		(Graduate students)	
Research exercises	15%	Final paper (25-30 pages)	50%
Book Reviews	20%	Historiographical essay (4-5 pages)	15%
Class presentations	20%	Class presentations	20%
Final paper (15-18 pages)	30%	Class participation	15%
Class participation	15%		

Schedule of Assignments

Jan 28: Book Review One
Feb 25: Proposal and Preliminary Annotated Bibliography
Mar 25: Book Review Two
Apr 10: Rough Draft
Apr 17: Peer Review
May 6: Final Draft

Schedule of Class Meetings

Jan 14: Introduction to Course

Jan 21: The Cold War

Read Delton Ch. 1-3

Read at least two different documents related to communism from this website:

<http://writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/50s/home.html>

Jan 28: National Security State and Foreign Policy

Finish reading Delton

Readings on BB

***Book Review One Due**

Feb 4: Library

Feb 11: Red Scare/McCarthyism

Read McCarthy Intro and Ch. 1

Readings on BB

Feb 18 : Civil Rights and Race Relations

Read McCarthy Ch 2-3

Readings on BB

Feb 25: Baby Boom and Suburbia

Finish Reading McCarthy

Readings on BB

***Proposal and Preliminary Annotated Bibliography**

Mar 4: GI Bill and American Dream

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Read Coontz, Intro and Ch. 1-4
Readings on BB

Spring Break

Mar 18: Gender Identity and Consumerism

Read Coontz, Ch. 5-7
Readings on BB

Mar 25: Media America/Television and Movies

Finish Reading Coontz
Readings on BB

***Book Review Two Due**

Apr 1: Media America/ Music

Read Altschuler, Ch. 1-3
Readings on BB

Apr 8 : 50s Legacy

Finish Altschuler

***Rough Draft Due**

Apr 15: Presentations

***Peer Reviews Due**

Apr 22: Presentations

Final Paper Due to my office by 6:30 p.m. May 6

Appendix 1: Book Review Guidelines

There is no single formula for writing a book review, but for this course, include the following:

1) Basic bibliographical information in proper format: author, full title, where and when published, publisher, number of pages. This should be at the beginning of the review and it should be “stand-alone” at the top of the first page.

For example:

David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Knopf, 1989), xi, 316 pp. Then skip one line and begin your review.

2) Early in the review say something about the author. Where does (s)he work or teach? Is the author a historian, journalist, etc.? What other important publications has the author written? [This should be integrated into the flow of the review. Do not begin with a stand-alone paragraph that talks about the author, then abruptly shift to the review.]

3) Hone in on the author’s argument. You should state the argument early in your review, in the first paragraph. Then critique the author’s argument. What are the most important sources that (s)he has used? Is the author persuasive? How could the argument be improved? If the book’s title is misleading, you should note that.

4) Is the book well written? Is it an interesting read? Would you recommend this book? Why or why not? What audience is it written for—specialists, undergrads, general public?

5) Pay attention to your writing.

a) Use present tense when referring to what the author writes in the book. For example: “Hall argues that popular religious belief differed greatly from clerical theology in Puritan New England. He demonstrates this by referencing at least 300 diaries written by lay members of Puritan churches in Connecticut and Massachusetts. Even ordinary New Englanders commonly kept a diary, and Hall makes good use of them.” Above all, be consistent with verb tense. Do not write “Hall contends” (present tense) in one paragraph and then “Hall argued” (past tense) in the next.

b) If you quote from the book, give the page number in parentheses immediately following the quote.

c) Avoid using the first person (Example: “I find Hall’s argument compelling”).

d) Clear economical writing, with proper grammar, spelling, syntax, and punctuation. Write as economically as possible. Never use 10 words when 7 will suffice. For example: “The town of New Harmony, located in Indiana, was founded as a utopian community.” Stay alert to repetition.

e) Be careful with sentences containing multiple clauses; more often than not you’re better off writing several short sentences rather than one of near-paragraph length.

f) When employing verbs, avoid passive voice. With passive voice the subject receives the action instead of doing it and the writing is less interesting. Simple example: Instead of “The coolant pumps *were destroyed* by a surge of power,” write “A surge of power *destroyed* the coolant pumps.”

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When writing, do not hesitate to consult a good style manual like *The Chicago Manual of Style* or Kate Turabian's *A Manual for Writers*, which is a shorter version of *The Chicago Manual*.

N.B. The type of book review that I am asking you to write is based on the reviews found in *Reviews in American History*, *The Journal of American History*, and *The American Historical Review*. These journals are available online through the UNCG library databases. Look at the book review sections of these journals to get a sense of what your finished product should resemble.

Appendix 2: CRITIQUE OF PEER'S PAPER

Write a short (2 page min) critique of your colleague's paper. On the due date, provide two (2) copies of that critique (one for your colleague, and one for me).

Components of the Critique: your critique should cover the following areas and/or questions.

1. **Thesis/Argument:** What is the argument of the paper? Is it clearly identified? Does the author maintain it throughout the paper? Does he/she successfully prove his/her point? How might the argument be strengthened?
2. **Historiography:** If appropriate, comment on how well the author situates his/her paper in the existing literature. That is, has the author examined the existing literature? How does his/her paper contribute to, modify, or reject the existing literature?
3. **Evidence:** Does the author possess sufficient evidence of sufficient quality to support his/her argument? Or does the evidence suggest something else? Does the author explain his/her evidence, or does he/she assume that you will see the importance of it? If the latter, how might he/she improve his/her discussion of the evidence?
4. **Structure:** Is the paper well organized? Could you follow the line of the argument? If not, how might the organization of the paper be improved? Remember that the ideal paper is like an assembly line, with each paragraph adding a bit more to the product until the conclusion, at which point you have a unified, coherent whole. Look for superfluous paragraphs and/or areas where expansion of the theme is necessary.
5. **Style:** Be careful and kind here. Everyone possesses an individual style. Still, you might well consider how the author's style helps and/or hinders the paper.
6. **Citations:** Does the author cite sources in a consistent way? Do the citations (either footnotes or endnotes) provide the needed support for the argument? That is, are they useful or are they peripheral to the argument?
7. **Grammar and Typos:** does the paper contain grammar errors and/or misspelled words? You only need comment on this if there is a serious problem (anyone can leave a few typos, but it's only worth commenting upon if they become so numerous as to detract from meaning).

APPENDIX 3: FINAL PAPER/DUE MAY 6

The final paper will be due by May 6 and must be submitted in person either in class or to my office by 8:30 pm on the due date. The required components for the final submission and the writing guidelines are provided below, along with formatting and style guidelines for the paper.

1. All components of the research process that led to the final paper must be included in the final submission. You will lose 10 points from your final paper grade if you do not turn these in at the end of the semester. The required assignments are:

- Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography
- Rough Draft with Peer Review

2. Final Draft Description

1. Cover Page with the following information centered vertically and horizontally: Title of Paper, Name of Course, Instructor's Name, Your Name, the Date
2. Your 18-20 page paper
3. Annotated Bibliography

3. Formatting Guidelines

- 12 point Times New Roman or similar font
- 1 inch or less margins
- Double Spacing
- Page Numbers inserted in footer/bottom right
- Footnotes follow Chicago Manual of Style

4. Style Guidelines

- Do not use contractions
- Avoid slang and jargon
- Use adverbs only when the meaning would be unclear without them
- Strive for simplicity and clarity/avoid using 'big words' just because they sound good
- Do not fill your paragraphs with complex sentences...the meaning gets lost
- Use block quotes sparingly
- Limit quoted matter to primary sources whenever possible