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**History 340-01, Spring 2017**  
**The United States Since World War II: The Great Debates (SI)**



The major events, decisions, and trends in U.S. history since World War II were all burning points of debate and discussion at the time. Some remain so among historians. In this Speaking Intensive class, a series of discussion-debates between rotating groups of 4-5 students will capture the voices and represent the views of historical actors (or, when more appropriate, historians). I have drawn up a list of controversies from which the students will choose. Almost half of our meetings will be led by 4-5 students in formal panels of discussion and debate, moderated by the professor. During these, the rest of the class will pose as journalists or citizens with knowledge of the debate and its context, drawn from our readings and the debaters' 1 page summaries of their main points.

Students will learn to take historical perspective, to place themselves in the shoes of people in every corner of the nation's diverse arena of free speech. Much of our imperfectly understood past was their uncertain future, and the lights by which we understand our journey from past to future have changed dramatically. We should understand them on their own terms before evaluating them in light of present knowledge and values. Thereby, we will understand better the continuities and changes in human experience that make us who we are.

Students will hone their ability to research, paraphrase, quote, give evidence, defend, and critically assess positions taken by historical actors and thinkers. Above all, students will gain confidence in their own voices and will gain agility thinking on their feet! Class climate will consistently be substantive and civil, serious and fun!

Topics are skewed toward understanding national developments and society and culture as filtered through the nation's political debates and defining events. The United States emerged from World War II as the globe's dominant economic and military power. Our leaders' strategic decisions to contain international threats were all accompanied by debates about the limits and proper uses of American power, at times hotly contested by vocal and powerful grassroots movements. The dramatic postwar economic expansion that created the modern middle class was punctuated by insecurities and outright rebellion among those people left out of the charmed circle of American affluence and suburban comfort. By the 1970s, as minorities, women, immigrant newcomers, and low-income people gained ground through their own activism and government support, a souring economy and a national military defeat in Vietnam provided two contexts in which many majority whites who had been relatively privileged by the good times felt increasingly insecure and threatened. As the nation became more diverse, the nation's wealth and power became more unequal in its distribution. There was a revolution in gender roles and expectations. And a lot of soul searching. Is American greatness in decline? Was suburban middle-class life, and the gender roles that took shape in the 1950s, stultifying or satisfying to most? How did television affect the culture and values? Was the Cold War necessary and inevitable, and what measure of responsibility did American politicians bear for making it colder? How much have politicians acted in the national interest through reasoned debate, or promoted their self-interest or party interest by manipulating fears and emotionally charged symbols? Is racial integration achievable if we only treat individuals in a "color-blind" way? Have the bonds of civility and national unity weakened to the point where the nation is at risk of unraveling? Or is the roiling pot of social change and diversity a more hopeful indication that the American promise have come within more people's reach? These are not new questions!

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 inevitably 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 about our past, about those whose views we might abhor, and about ourselves.** 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 and generations will have in relation to us. Yet we *can* and *must* evaluate them in light of what we now know and what they knew. Developing the wisdom of hindsight is a powerful tool, and it should come only after a thorough understanding of the players and viewpoints in any controversy that shaped our world. We can thereby understand the constraints and opportunities of the present, and imagine the possibilities of the future.

We will make links from past to present, but expect to be yanked back into the past by me if we don't fully get it!

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 the interest of reconstructing the past debate. If "debate" is an intimidating word, redolent of battles, winners and losers, think of these as "round-table discussions." Students may choose to move into and out of "role play" with these characters, or they may be more comfortable speaking about them in the third person. We may even have debates and discussions based on more recent scholarship. 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, where you assess your historical actor and viewpoints in the more general context opened up by the debate itself. These exercises will most likely set you up

for the final research project, a revision and expansion, a deepening of the understanding of this person in their context.

## Learning Outcomes

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. Collaborate with team mates in scripting and improvising from contrasting perspectives.
3. Verbally present ideas and facts clearly, forcefully, and consistently. *Respectfully* engage your peers and the professor in dialogue that balances good listening and thoughtful, evidence-based speaking. Discussion and debate can be a powerful vehicle for expanding knowledge and sharpening reasoning. Believe me, you don't forget stuff you have to speak publicly about.
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 write on a question that emerges from one of your debates or research exercises. Exercise information literacy and evaluate various viewpoints and arguments that are contained in primary and secondary sources that you will identify and locate.

## Required readings (sequence and 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, and on the internet from someone who posted it.

James T. Patterson, *Restless Giant: the United States from Watergate to Bush v. Gore* (New York: Oxford, 2005). Available through library as an ebook. ***A note on Patterson: we might and should have points of disagreement, but he is quite good at presenting various arguments that were in contention at the time and since. His concerns are politics, foreign affairs, society, and culture, in that order!***

Each debater's "prep sheet" of notes and main points posted 1 day in advance of the debate.

PDF files available on Canvas for this course.

**Check Canvas before each class for specific assignments from the two books and occasionally for succinct supplementary materials, required of all class participants.**

Expect to read 60-90 pages a week and to do some serious digging for your presentations from the following sources: **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* and *Readers' Guide Retrospective* and *ProQuest Congressional*; **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 Lynda Kellam, History Department library liaison. We will have a workshop on information literacy shortly.

## 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 two 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, not just the 4 or 5 people a week who are principal debaters. You will all be expected to ask informed questions from identifiable perspectives during the question and answer period that occupies the last half hour of every discussion-debate. **Debaters:** Debaters must read Patterson material assigned for their date at least *two weeks in advance* and be prepared to keep up with the class as you do the necessary research to find substantial material on your person. Segments of class time between debates will give groups the opportunity to prepare and strategize for upcoming debates.

**Graded Requirements:**

1. Short Canvas Writings or Quizzes, 10%
2. Participation, 20%
3. Debate Preparation and Performance, 20%
4. Post-Debate Evaluative Papers of the Position You Took, 20%
5. Mid-term, 10%
6. Final revised and expanded paper requiring a bit of additional research, 20%

**1. Canvas Exercises in Evidence and Argumentation—Either Discussion Thread Assignments or Mini-Quizzes with Essays and Multiple Choice Questions Limited to 25 minutes. 10 %.** Look for assignments in the Calendar and under Assignments in Canvas. I will assign short "free writing" assignments peppered throughout the semester, asking you to contribute to discussion threads. They might ask you to comment upon debates in which you did not participate, putting the issues in broader contexts raised by lectures, the readings, or current events; or they might ask you to evaluate secondary and primary sources relevant to a topic under discussion, such as how newspapers responded editorially to the Cuban Missile Crisis; or reflect upon Patterson's thesis and viewpoints in relation to what you have learned. Quizzes will assess how well you are putting together material from readings, lectures, and debates.

**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. 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 soon.

**3. Discussion-Debate Preparation and Performances. 20%.** You will be asked to participate in 2 roundtable discussion-debates. That's 10% of your grade for each. Some of the roundtables/debates will be historiographical, that is, comprised of historians today explaining what they think happened and why. Most debates will ask you to present the ideas of thinkers and actors speaking at the time the issues were most salient. **The class will understand that you are presenting the views of an historical actor as fully as you can, and at the end of each debate you will have the opportunity to share your own interpretation of their part in history.** Groups will caucus two weeks in advance with me and sometimes strategize at the end of Tuesday class.

There will be more than 10 debates but the number is not yet determined. **Honors students will participate in 3 debates. Students who feel the need to strengthen their grades by the end of the semester will also have the option to debate a third time.**

Please treat the research for these discussion-debates as a collaborative exercise within your debating team from the start. Familiarize yourselves with the whole debate, and then pick a position to represent. **Loose "scripting" of the controversy beforehand is encouraged; you are not just arguing individual positions, but cooperating to present fairly to the class several positions.** But of course you will not be reading a script when you engage each other. Use note cards, not lengthy texts. By no means bring in books and documents and rifle through them. Prepare in advance.

**One day before you present-participate**, you must post on Canvas Discussion Board a 1 page summary of the main points you will be making, whose views you will represent, a bit of biography, and the sources for these views. These should be clear and in complete sentences. Any quotes or statistics should have bibliographic citations according to the Chicago Manual of Style 16th edition. For the discussion-debate to succeed, other people who take different positions will benefit by having the counterarguments or complementary viewpoints to their own. The discussion forums 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 that historical actors were part of. Avoid the temptation to just rehash the points everyone made. This is an evaluation of how your position in the debate now looks from a more commanding overview. Critically assess the position you presented in light of other evidence and interpretations you have now been exposed to. 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. Mid Term Exam, March 21. 10%.** Open book, open note. This exam will ask you to evaluate James Patterson's thesis about "grand expectations" as the organizing principle for explaining American politics and culture. A critical appreciation by Tim Lacy will be required reading and will nicely frame your essay. Agree or disagree with evidence.

**6. Final Paper. Revision and Expansion of one of your two papers, with extra research and fuller clearer contextualization. 20%. The final paper is due the Day of the Final Exam, Saturday December 10, at 6:30 PM in my office 2141 MHRA.** Write 8-10 pages on a specific problem of interpretation and evidence that came up in one of the debates you participated in. (In other words, you do not have to start from scratch). Provide a much fuller and more extensively documented *explanation, a partial solution to a historical problem*, using evidence and scholarship collected before and 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?" If you had (hypothetically) represented Truman in a debate about the bomb, this would be an opportunity to investigate official documents before the decision on the subject of civilian deaths, and probe more fully how the prospect of civilian deaths perhaps affected his later decisions in Korea not to use nuclear weapons (you would have learned of this after your debate by a careful reading of Patterson's sections on Truman's leadership).

**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.

#### **Administrative Matters:**

**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. 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, such as searching e-books if you go that route. None will be permitted during debates, when handwritten notes should suffice. I may ask some of you to stop using laptops entirely if it is clear you are spending more than 20% of your time looking at your screen. 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 suck people right out of class and create distracting winds in the process.

**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. Plagiarism should not worry you when speaking, since you are representing others views and mixing your own and their words.

**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: By next week 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.

#### **1/17: Introductions: Review of Debate Options**

##### **Finding Secondary and Primary Sources**

#### **1/19: Discussion of and Explanation of Available Debate Options!**

**ASSIGNMENT:** Read the description of debates on Google Docs (through Canvas link and sent to you already as an email). PREVIEW Patterson's treatment of those debates in both of his books. **START TO DECIDE** which ones will interest you more, following guidelines on the document.

**1/23: DUE By MONDAY Next:** Indicate your highest preference, and then **by order of preference** nine others **in each half of the course** that you would be willing to research and participate in (for a total of 20 out of 42 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 after I develop the Schedule of debates, lectures and reading assignments].

#### **1/24: PRACTICE DEBATE, WHOLE CLASS: A World Destroyed: World War II and its Legacies**

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

**Assignment:** Read the following and then give me a paragraph on Canvas' discussion board that relates a *specific analytical point* to a *specific piece of evidence*. I want to see how you all write and reason early on!

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

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

Spend 30 minutes with 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>).

**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? Or did he have ample reasons for using the weapons even though an invasion was not in the cards for months?

### **1/26: Preparation for the First Round of Debates—Research Workshops**

I will endeavor to have all assignments by this date, and will inform you of which debate you will participate. Come having read relevant material, eager to collaborate on scripting a balanced debate.

### **1/31: Caucusing and Activities TBA—Maybe a Speaking Center Workshop and Presentation**

This is a tentative schedule for debates:

**2/2: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #1**

**2/9: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #2**

**2/16: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #3**

**2/23: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #4**

**3/2: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #5**

**3/9: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #6**

### **Spring Break**

**3/21: Mid-term on Patterson’s thesis of “grand expectations”**

**3/23: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #7**

**3/30: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #8**

**4/6: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #9**

**I’d like to discuss ideas for your final papers even before you’ve done with debates and debate papers.**

**4/13: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #10**

**4/20: Roundtable Discussion/Debate #11**

**4/27: Final Debate (if enough interest exists)**

**Saturday DECEMBER 10, 6:30 PM -- final papers due in my office 2141 MHRA**