

**History 419/519 Modern America 1945-present**  
**WSUV Fall 2007**  
TU,TH10.35-11.50 VMMC 16

Dr. Laurie Mercier

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“The historian, you know, must have no country.”

John Quincy Adams

**Course Description**

This course will integrate social, economic, political, and cultural history to explore the dramatic changes that have occurred in the United States since the Second World War. We will study a variety of critical events and people, but we will focus in particular on three major themes of the period: the Cold War, which shaped both foreign policy and domestic politics and culture from the 1940s to the present; social movements, which beginning with the Civil Rights movement fundamentally altered American society; and finally, the decline of the liberal consensus, the rise of the new conservatism, and essential changes in the American economy since the 1970s. We will attempt to understand how Americans viewed their times by examining a variety of primary and secondary sources and popular culture examples (magazines, movies, television, and music).

Regular attendance is critical for success in the course. The instructor assumes that an absence is due to an illness or family emergency, and the STUDENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR MISSED INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS. Since critical announcements and instructions are usually delivered at the beginning of class, **please be in the classroom no later than 10:35.**

The course will approach modern American history through lectures, films, music, and discussion of secondary and primary source readings. It is critical to read with care each assignment (refer regularly to syllabus schedule) and come to class prepared to contribute your thoughts, questions, insights, and evaluations. The success of the class depends on the full participation of all members. We will strive to create an atmosphere of cooperation, respect, openness, and good humor. Understand that we will often disagree in our debates of critical and sensitive topics—the classroom is the appropriate place for this kind of open exchange that allows for the consideration of multiple perspectives. Lectures will provide historical and historiographical context, overviews and analyses of significant themes and events, and questions for further discussion.

I strongly encourage the continuation of our discussions outside of the classroom via email or in my office. Priorities for the course include improving your reading comprehension, critical thinking, writing, and oral communication skills, as well as to expand your knowledge of 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. history. If I can help you with any of these goals at any time, please do not hesitate to contact me.

### **Required Readings**

Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and Roots of Middle East Terror*

Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It*

Van Gosse, *The Movements of the New Left*

Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides*

Dean Baker, *The United States Since 1980*

### **Evaluation**

**1. Class participation (25%).** It is important to read with care each assignment and come to class prepared to discuss the readings. Make sure you understand the main points and arguments of each selection. Preparation will be measured by oral contributions to class discussions, small group discussion summaries, attendance, and short in-class quizzes. **You are strongly encouraged to take notes in class** to help you retain and reinforce information discussed.

**2. Mid-term in-class exam (25%).** Possible identification and essay questions will be distributed in advance to help prepare for this 75-minute in-class exam.

**3. Critical news analysis paper assignment (25%).** 5-6 pages doublespaced, wordprocessed. Select a topic concerning the post-1945 period that interests you (such as the 1954 US intervention in Guatemala, Cuban missile crisis, assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Woodstock, 1970 shootings at Kent State, etc). Analyze press coverage of the topic (such as in the *New York Times* and/or monthly newsmagazines such as *Time* or *Newsweek*) during the period. The objective of the assignment is to apply critical thinking skills to the historical "record" as portrayed by the media. How did various factors, such as political or cultural biases, sources interviewed, and so on, shape the interpretation and reporting of events? **More details for the assignment will follow.**

**4. Final take-home exam paper (25%).** Two essay questions concerning main themes of the course.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is the cornerstone of the university and will be strongly enforced in this course. Any student caught cheating on any assignment will be

given an “F” for the course and will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Plagiarism is considered cheating. Consult with the instructor if you do not have a clear understanding of plagiarism.

Disability Accommodation: Accommodations may be available if you need them in order to fully participate in this class because of a disability. Accommodations may take some time to implement so it is critical that you contact Disability Services as soon as possible. All accommodations must be approved through Disability Services, located in the Student Resource Center on the Lower Level of VSSC. (360) 546-9138

### Course Schedule

**(Note: readings and assignments due on date listed.)**

**T Aug 21** Introductions; critical themes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century

**Th Aug 23** Hard Times: Legacy of the Depression and New Deal

Great Depression and New Deal:

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/picturing\\_the\\_century/galleries/greatdep.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/picturing_the_century/galleries/greatdep.html)

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/teachers/browse\\_26.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/teachers/browse_26.html)

**T Aug 28** The “Good War”: The U.S. in World War II

Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/dec07.html>

American Folklife Center Veterans Project: <http://www.loc.gov/vets//sights.html>

Handout: selected oral histories from Studs Terkel, *The Good War*

**Th Aug 30** Legacy of War, Origins of the Cold War, and the Bomb

National Security Archive: the Atomic Bomb and end of WWII:

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/index.htm>

**T Sep 4** A Watershed Moment: Establishing US supremacy

The Truman Doctrine: <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/trudoc.htm>

Joseph McCarthy speech: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/6456>

Handout: NSC-68

**Th Sep 6** Policy into Practice: Battling International Communism

- T Sep 11** Iran: A Case Study  
(**Kinzer, all**)
- Th Sep 13** Cold War Culture: McCarthyism and Monster Movies
- T Sep 18** Cold War Culture: Domesticity and Consumption
- Th Sep 20** Cracks in the Consensus: Integration, Rebels, and Rock  
(**Van Gosse, 1-7, 39-64**)
- T Sep 25** Challenges at Home: Civil Rights Movement(s)
- Th Sep 27** Citizens All: A People's Movement  
(**Robinson, all**)
- T Oct 2** At the Brink: JFK, Cuba, and the CIA
- Th Oct 4** Visions for Change: LBJ & the Great Society

LBJ's Great Society Speech:

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/13/documents/lbj/>

- T Oct 9** Visions for Change: Malcolm and Martin  
(**Van Gosse, 72-86, 91-95**)

Speeches of MLK: <http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/mlkpapers/>

Speeches of Malcolm X: <http://www.malcolm-x.org/speeches.htm>

- Th Oct 11** **Mid-term exam**
- T Oct 16** Challenging Anti-Communism: the New Left and New Social Movements  
(**Van Gosse, 7-38, 65-67, 87-90**)
- Th Oct 18** Vietnam: the Forever War  
(**Appy: xv-31; selections parts 2-3, about 150 pp**)
- T Oct 23** LBJ & Vietnam
- Th Oct 25** Film: Berkeley in the '60s
- T Oct 30** The Young and the Restless: Black Power and Flower Power  
(**Van Gosse, 103-106, 110-112**)
- Th Nov 1** 1968: Days of Rage

(Van Gosse, 112-122, 127-153)

**T Nov 6** Vietnam: the Forever War  
(Appy, selections from parts 4-6, about 150 pp)

**Th Nov 8** The 1970s: Feminisms, Earth Day, and Disco  
(Van Gosse, 68-72, 99-109, 123-127, 154-174)

**T Nov 13** The Imperial Presidency  
(paper due)

**Th Nov 15** Rambo, the New Right, and the Reagan Revolution

Ronald Reagan speeches: <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/major.html>

**Nov 19-25** Thanksgiving break, no class

**T Nov 27** [C]old wars of the 1980s

National Security Archive: <http://www.picosearch.com/cgi-bin/ts.pl>

**Th Nov 29** Changing U.S. Economy and Growing Inequalities  
(Baker, 1-135)

**T Dec 4** New Wars of the 1990s

**Th Dec 6** Globalization and the New Economy  
(Baker, 136-235)

**Th Dec 13** Final exam due **NO LATER THAN 9:00 am** (to Mercier's office or mailbox)