

History 4473

Recent America: The United States Since 1945

Fall 2008

Instructor: Dr. Dan Williams
Office Hours: TLC 3225
T, Th, 11:00-12:30
Wed., 10-12, 1-4
(and by appointment)

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Course website: www.westga.edu/~dkwillia

Class Location:

Pafford 204

T, Th, 2-3:15

Description:

This course will offer you an opportunity to analyze important societal trends in the United States from 1945 to the early twenty-first century, and will equip you to assess the central influences that have shaped recent American history. In this course, we will discuss race relations, gender roles, cultural and intellectual trends, technological developments, the economy, politics, religion, literature, the media, family life, youth culture, education, immigration, demographic changes, attitudes toward crime and poverty, and many other aspects of postwar American life.

Classes will consist mainly of interactive lectures and class discussions. I encourage all students to participate by asking questions during lectures and making comments in discussion sessions. Six classes will be devoted to discussions of the reading material, and the lecture-based classes will include some discussion time, as well.

Learning Outcomes:

In this course, students will learn critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze diverse perspectives, and they will also gain the knowledge needed to evaluate American societal trends in their historical context. This course will also help students to improve their writing, research, and communication skills.

Assessment:

Students' final grades will be determined as follows:

Book analysis	20%
Research paper	30%
Class participation/ email summaries	20%
Final exam	30%

There will be no opportunity for extra-credit assignments in this course.

Grading Methodology: This university does not use a plus / minus grading system, but during the course of the semester, I will use plus / minus grades, as well as split-letter grades (e.g., an A- / B+), in order to evaluate students' written work with precision. In computing final course grades, I convert all grades into numeric scores according to the following system:

A = 95

A/A- = 94

A- = 92

A-/B+ = 90

B+ = 88

B+/B = 87

B = 85

B/B- = 84

B- = 82

B-/C+ = 80

(A similar pattern is used for grades in the C-range and D-range).

In computing final course grades, a grade average of 89.5 or higher converts to a course grade of A, a grade average between 79.5 and 89.49 converts to a course grade of B, and a grade average between 69.5 and 79.49 converts to a course grade of C. A grade average of 59.5, which converts to a D, is the lowest possible passing grade in the course.

A-range grades, including the grade of A-/B+, are reserved for work that is of exceptional quality. In order to receive an A-range grade on an essay assignment, a student's essay must show evidence of original thinking and the ability to synthesize information from a wide variety of sources, as well as an accurate understanding of the material and good writing technique. Papers that receive a grade of 90 or above must be cogent and persuasive in their argumentation, and they must be well written and tightly organized around a strong thesis. In short, a paper that receives an A-range grade not only meets the basic requirements for the assignment, but also demonstrates that a student has mastered the interpretative, analytical, and writing skills expected for a course at this level.

B-range grades are given to essays that demonstrate a student's accurate understanding of the material, adequate use of the assigned documents, and competence in writing. They rarely contain the sophisticated analysis required for an A-range essay, but they meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

C-range grades are given to essays that contain factual inaccuracies, errors in interpretation, inadequate use of the assigned documents, or poor writing technique, even though they usually meet most of the basic requirements for the assignment.

D-range and failing grades are assigned to work that fails to meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

Final exam: There will be only one exam in this course: a take-home, comprehensive final. The final exam will give you a choice of broadly-based essay questions relating to themes covered in the course readings and lectures throughout the semester. After receiving these exam questions, you will have five days to write two 4-6 page essays in response to the questions of your choice.

Book analysis and research papers: You will be expected to write one 4-6 page essay in response to one of four questions based on some of the assigned books in this course. The questions and due dates for the essays are listed in the book analysis guidelines on the course website.

You will also be expected to write one 8-10 page research paper for this course. Consult the online guidelines for research papers for more information about this assignment.

Papers that are turned in after the assigned date will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are overdue.

It should go without saying that all papers that you write must be your own work, and that any students who are caught plagiarizing another student's work, a paper from a web site, a textbook, or any other source will automatically fail this course and may be subject to further disciplinary action. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will not be tolerated. Please look at the course website to find guidelines on proper footnoting procedures and avoiding inadvertent plagiarism.

All of your written work for this class must be original; you are not allowed to submit essays that you have written for other courses or that you have completed prior to this semester.

Class participation and email book summaries: Classes will consist of interactive lectures, which will give you a chance to ask questions and discuss the ideas presented in the readings. In addition, there are six class periods reserved for discussion of the assigned books. It is very important for you to read these books prior to the class discussions so that you can come to class prepared to participate. Failure to attend and participate in these discussions will adversely affect your class participation grade. I do not have a formal attendance policy, but since students cannot participate in class discussions if they do not attend class, habitual absences, as well as habitual silence in class throughout the semester, could negatively affect a student's class participation grade.

In addition, as part of your class participation, you should email me short summaries of each of the six books that we discuss in class. These emails should consist of at least two paragraphs that briefly summarize the book and suggest at least one intriguing question for class discussion. Each of these emails is due at noon (two hours prior to class) on the day on which we are scheduled to discuss the book in question. I will not assign these emails a letter grade, nor will I evaluate them on the basis of grammar or structure, but I

will instead treat them as I would comments that you make in class, and I will consider their content when I formulate class participation grades at the end of the semester. Failure to submit these required emails will result in a reduction of your class participation grade.

Class communication: I may send out periodic email communiqués to students in this course, so please check your UWG email account regularly. The university administration has stipulated that all email communication between faculty and students should take place on UWG email accounts, so please use your UWG email account for all electronic communications that you send me.

University policy also prevents me from disclosing grades over email, so if you would like to discuss your grade on any assignment in the class, please set up an appointment to meet with me in my office. Please do not email me with a request for your grades, since I am not allowed to email that information to you.

To protect students' privacy rights, I will not return graded papers or exams to any third party (e.g., a student's friend or relative who asks to pick up a student's work on that person's behalf) unless a student gives me permission in writing (e.g., an email) to do so. There are occasions when I must disclose a student's grade to university administrators, other history department faculty (e.g., the department chair), or athletic coaches who need to know the academic status of students on their team, but in all other cases, I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of students' grades.

I would like to do whatever I can to help you succeed in this course. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have a question about any subject pertaining to this class. I make it a priority to respond promptly to emails from students, and I am happy to talk with students during my office hours, so please feel free to stop by my office to introduce yourself and discuss any concerns that you may have about this course. I believe that this will be an excellent semester, and I'm pleased to welcome you to this class.

Required readings:

The following texts are available in the college bookstore, and are required:

Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). ISBN: 978-0807848487.

Samuel G. Freedman, *The Inheritance: How Three Families and the American Majority Moved from Left to Right* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998). ISBN: 978-0684835365.

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001). ISBN: 978-0393322576.

John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (New York: NAL Trade, 2003). ISBN: 978-0451208644.

Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999). ISBN: 978-0345350688.

Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father: A Story of Race and Inheritance* (Three Rivers Press, 2004). ISBN: 978-1400082773.

Class Schedule:

- 8/19 Introduction: Postwar America
- 8/21 The Beginning of the Cold War
- 8/26 Families in an Age of Affluence
- 8/28 Youth Culture in the 1950s
- 9/2 **Book discussion: *Lost Horizons* (email summary due at 12pm)**
- 9/4 The Quest for Civil Rights in the 1940s and 1950s
Research paper topic due.
- 9/9 Pursuing the Dream: the Civil Rights Movement in the Early 1960s
- 9/11 Postwar Liberalism
- 9/16 **Book discussion: *Black Like Me* (email summary due at 12pm)**
- 9/18 Poverty in Postwar America
- 9/23 The Vietnam War, the New Left, and the Antiwar Movement
- 9/25 Youth Rebellion and the Counterculture
Source list for research paper due.
- 9/30 Black Power, *Bakke*, and Backlash
- 10/2 Rights Consciousness and the Emergence of Multiculturalism
- 10/7 **Book discussion: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (email summary due at 12pm)**
- 10/9 No class (Fall Break)
- 10/14 The Sexual Revolution and Gay Liberation
- 10/16 The Feminist Movement
- 10/21 *Roe v. Wade* and America's Conflict over Abortion
- 10/23 **Book discussion: *The Feminine Mystique* (email summary due at 12pm)**
- 10/28 Environmentalism in an Era of Limits

- 10/30 The Emergence of the Sunbelt
First draft of research paper due.
- 11/4 The Religious Revival of the 1970s
- 11/6 A New Conservatism
- 11/11 Race, Crime, and Drugs
- 11/13 **Book discussion: *The Inheritance* (email summary due at 12pm)**
- 11/18 Decade(s) of Greed
- 11/20 The Information Age
- 11/25 Immigration and Globalization
Final version of research paper due.
- 11/27 No class (Thanksgiving)
- 12/2 **Book discussion: *Dreams from my Father* (email summary due at 12pm)**
- 12/4 America in 2008
Final Exam Essay Questions Distributed
- 12/9 **Final Exam Essay Due at 4pm**