

United States Since 1945

This is an online course with a synchronous option.

Please note: This is a DRAFT syllabus subject to change.

From the dropping of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima to the era of Donald Trump, the United States has been characterized by deep divisions over race, immigration, normative family values, and the changing role of the state. This course explores some of the key developments in the history of the United States since 1945, with an emphasis on the nation's diversity and explaining present-day conflicts. We will analyze journalism, popular culture, and political and scholarly sources to explore how social movements like the Black freedom struggle, feminism, and the religious right changed the United States. We will also probe the relationship between America's global military and economic power and ordinary people's lives.

This course focuses on six intersecting themes: the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy; the expansion of the federal government; the political geographies of race, class, and region; grassroots protest vs. the power of elites; the power of television and consumer culture; and the "culture wars" over race, gender and sexuality, religion, generation, and "American" identity.

The course is divided into three thematic and chronological modules:

Module 1: Cold War, Civil Rights, 1945-62

Module 2: American Liberalism and the Great Society, 1963-74

Module 3: Cold War to Culture War, 1975-present

Learning Outcomes: Students who complete this course will: (1) gain a better understanding of key developments in U.S. politics, culture, and society since 1945; (2) improve their ability to critically engage and interpret a variety of primary and secondary sources; (3) identify different scholarly and methodological approaches to the study of recent U.S. history; (4) improve their ability to develop evidence-based arguments and present them clearly and concisely in written essays and oral presentations; (5) gain an appreciation for the limits of knowledge and the complex processes of change over time; (6) respond to different perspectives with openness, sensitivity, compassion, and respect.

Scheduled Meeting Time: You may take this course entirely asynchronously and online, but you may attend weekly discussions on Zoom if you wish. These real-time sessions on Zoom will be scheduled during our assigned class time, 2:30-4:00pm EST.

· Class is scheduled for 2:30-5:00pm Eastern Time. Within that timeframe, we can adjust the course schedule IF students vote to do so. You may also take the entire course asynchronously and online.

Lectures: Lectures will be pre-recorded and posted on the HIST 3618 Moodle site so you can watch them at your convenience.

Evaluation:

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| Participation (Weekly Zoom workshops or Moodle discussion forum) | 20% |
| 4 Quizzes (US Constitution/map & at end of each module) | 20% |
| Song of the Week Presentation | 15% |
| Op-Ed on the Legacy of James Baldwin, due Oct. 21 | 20% |
| Final essay (documentary critique), due Dec. 9 | 25% |

Grading: The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g. A+ =9, A=8, B+=7, C+=5, etc.). Assignments and tests will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100; A = 80-89, B+=75-79, B=70-74; C+=65-69, C=60-64, etc.). For a full description of York’s grading system, see <http://history.laps.yorku.ca/students/grading-system/>.

Course Reading: The assigned articles (or links to them) are posted on Moodle under York University’s Fair Dealing guidelines.

Students new to U.S. history may wish to consult a general textbook, such as *U.S. History*, an open-source textbook by OpenStax, which is available for reading or download at this link: <https://openstax.org/details/books/us-history>

Class Participation (20%): The exchange of ideas is an essential element of university history courses. Students may participate in HIST 3618 discussions in one of two ways: (1) attend weekly discussions on Zoom during a portion of our scheduled class time; (2) contribute written responses to a weekly discussion board. How you participate in HIST 3618 discussions is entirely up to you, and you may change your participation option each week (for example, you could attend a Zoom discussion in Week 2 but do a discussion post in Week 3, etc.).

Five discussion questions will be posted on Moodle each Monday around noon. They will form the basis of class discussions on Zoom or Moodle,

On Wednesdays from 2:30-3:00 pm, the course director will give a brief PowerPoint presentation on Zoom about the week’s discussion questions, keywords, and themes, as well as upcoming assignments, followed by a Q&A. The presentation will be recorded and posted to Moodle on Wednesday evening (or as soon as the Zoom recording is processed).

· Subject to change. Class is scheduled for 2:30-5:00pm EST, but we can push back the start time until 3:30 or 4 if students prefer.

Participation Option 1: Synchronous discussions on Zoom will follow the PowerPoint presentation after a short (10-minute) break. Depending on student interest, Zoom discussions will last about 30-40 minutes. Participating in Zoom discussions gives you a chance to interact with the course director and each other and discuss course materials and assignments “in person.” Attending class in real time can also help with time management.

Participation Option 2: Asynchronous discussion posts (150-300 words in answer to TWO discussion questions) must be submitted to the Moodle discussion forum by Monday at 4:00pm EST. Your answers must make direct reference to the assigned reading material, referring to the author’s last name (eg., McMahon argues...). Your answers must be submitted on Moodle.

Your active participation in HIST 3618 discussions is crucial to your success in and enjoyment of this course. You will engage intellectually with the readings and major themes of the course; better your understanding of key developments and events in US history since 1945; get clarification about assignments; and improve your academic skills. This is a momentous time in US history, and students are encouraged to follow the news, draw connections between past and present, and engage in a *historically minded* consideration of current events.

Evaluation: Whether you participate on Zoom or on Moodle, evaluation will be based on your familiarity, comprehension, and intellectual engagement with the assigned reading and lectures. For details, please see the participation guidelines posted on Moodle.

Courtesy and Respect: Each of us brings a different perspective to US history topics that can be polarizing and unsettling, and it is crucial that we engage in a respectful exchange of ideas and opinions. Please communicate your own views in ways that are constructive, as clear as possible, and grounded in the course content. Do not use offensive language, even if it appears in our sources. Be open to listening to your classmates’ views and respect their right to hold different opinions. We all need to work together to create a positive learning environment characterized by civility, diversity of opinion, equity, and mutual respect.

Quizzes (20%): In lieu of a final exam, there will be four quizzes in HIST 3618. Each quiz is worth 5% of your final mark and must be completed on Moodle during the time period specified below. The first quiz will focus on the US map and the Constitution. The other three quizzes come at the end of each module. Each quiz has 20 questions. They are mostly multiple choice or true-false questions, but may also include a short answer. If you require accommodations, please contact the course director before the quiz opens.

Once you begin the quiz, you have two hours to complete it. Quizzes close at the end of each module. You will receive your quiz grade, and the answers, after the quiz closes (11:59pm EST on the last day the quiz is open). Quiz deadlines are firm; it is not possible to take the quiz once it closes. Missed quizzes will receive a grade of 0. Please note the due dates below are subject to change. (They will be finalized in September).

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| Map/Constitution Quiz: | Sept. 23-Oct. 7 |
| Module 1: | Sept. 30-Oct. 7 |
| Module 2: | Nov. 4-Nov. 11 |
| Module 3: | Dec. 2-Dec. 9 |

Please note: if you keep up with the reading and lectures, these “open-book” quizzes are an easy 20% of your final grade, so take them seriously and do your coursework on time!

Song of the Week Presentation (15%): Popular music is a rich historical source, and HIST 3618 has a playlist! Students are encouraged to listen to all five songs on each week’s playlist, but working on your own or with your peers, you will choose one week for your presentation. Select one song as Song of the Week and make a brief *individual* presentation (a 3-minute “elevator pitch”) about why that song (as opposed to the other songs) should be designated Song of the Week. The format of your presentation is up to you. You may do an oral presentation on Zoom in front of your classmates or only the instructor. You may pre-record your presentation on Zoom or another platform, or you may do a sound recording, a video, or PowerPoint presentation.

Your grade will be based on your ability to make a succinct but persuasive argument that uses concrete evidence from the song(s) and other course materials to explain *in 3 minutes* why your chosen song should be Song of the Week. Please note: your visual presentation and technical skills are NOT being evaluated. More detailed guidelines about the Song of the Week Presentation are posted on Moodle.

Op-Ed on Legacy of James Baldwin (20%, due Oct. 21): Please write a 750-800 word (3-page) op-ed about James Baldwin’s legacy and US political culture today. Your essay must include a minimum of two *specific* references to Baldwin’s “Letters from a Region of My Mind” and a concrete reference to recent events (requiring outside research). You may refer to the assigned TV interview with Baldwin (“The Negro and the American Promise”) or his other work, but this is not required. More detailed information about this assignment will be posted on Moodle.

Documentary Critique (25%): Your final assignment is a 750-800 word (3-page) review of a documentary film on the US since 1945. Your essay should describe and critically analyze the film, keeping in mind that a documentary is a secondary source. It should include a clear statement of the film’s main argument, use of sources, and relationship to the relevant scholarship. It should also describe and evaluate how the film is constructed (eg., a single narrator, interviews with scholars and/or historical participants (who?), film footage, music and soundtrack, etc.) More detailed information about this assignment, including a list of documentary films from which to choose, will be posted separately.

Communication: If you have trouble keeping up with the work, are dissatisfied with a mark, or if you have any other concerns about HIST 3618, please contact me as soon as possible. General questions about assignments should be submitted on Moodle.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

Module I: Cold War Culture, 1945-1962

Topic 1 – Sept. 9: Welcome! Introductions to the course and each other

--Thinking Historically about the United States Since 1945

Topic 2 – Sept. 16: America’s Cold War: Fighting Communism at Home and Abroad

--Robert McMahon, “World War II and the Destruction of the Old Order,” from *The Cold War*.

--George Kennan, Long Telegram (1946), excerpts.

--Joseph McCarthy, “I have in my hand...” Speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, Feb. 9, 1950.

Topic 3 – Sept. 23: Cold War, Civil Rights, and American Families

--Elaine Tyler May, “Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth,” from *Homeward Bound*.

--Mary Dudziak, “Brown as a Cold War Case,” *Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004): 32-42.

Quiz 1: US Constitution/Map – Sept. 23 – Oct. 7

Topic 4 – Sept. 30: Cold War and the Nuclear Threat

--Paul S. Boyer, “Nuclear Themes in American Culture, 1945 to the Present,” in *The Atomic Bomb and American Society*.

--John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum, “The World on the Brink: John F. Kennedy & the Cuban Missile Crisis--Thirteen Days in October 1962,” <https://microsites.jfklibrary.org/cmc/>

Quiz 2: Module 1 – Sept. 30 – Oct. 7

Module II: American Liberalism and the Great Society, 1962-1974

Topic 5 – Oct. 7: The Black Freedom Struggle: Voices from the Early 1960s

--James Baldwin, “Down at the Cross: Letters from a Region of my Mind,” *New Yorker* (1962)

-- “The Negro and the American Promise” (WGBH, 1963), 59 minutes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNQGhsPb7U4&t=23s>

READING WEEK - NO CLASSES OCT. 10-16

Topic 6 – Oct. 21: Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty

--Bruce Schulman, “The Great Society,” from *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism*.

--Annelise Orleck, “The War on Poverty from the Grass Roots Up,” from *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History*.

Topic 7 – Oct. 28: The U.S. War in Vietnam

--Tim O’Brien, “How to Tell a True War Story” (1987) <https://archive.esquire.com/article/1987/10/1/how-to-tell-a-true-war-story>

--Peter Davis, “Hearts and Minds” (BBS Productions, 1974), 112 minutes.

NOVEMBER 3 = U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION!

Topic 8 – Nov. 4: Wars at Home

- Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "1968," from *America Divided*.
- Primary Sources of the 1960s, Selections by Black Panther Party, New York Radical Women, Indians of All Nations, Weatherman, Richard Nixon

Quiz 3 – Module 2 - Nov. 4-Nov. 11

MODULE III: From Cold War to Culture War, 1975-present

Topic 9 – Nov. 11: Race, Gender, and Family Values in the 1970s

- Timothy Stewart-Winter, "Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States," *Journal of American History* (June 2015): 61-72.
- Leigh Ann Wheeler, "Women at War: Feminist and Antifeminist Christians in the 1970s," *Reviews in American History* 48 (March 2020): 144-151.
- Kathleen Hughes, "She Derailed the Fight for Equal Rights for Women" (RetroReport and Fork Films, 2018), 13 minutes. <https://www.retroreport.org/video/on-account-of-sex/>

Topic 10 – Nov. 18: The 1980s and 1990s: The Reagan Revolution and the War on Crime

- Richard Brookhiser, "Reagan: His Place in History," *American Heritage* 55.4 (Aug.-Sept. 2004): <https://www.americanheritage.com/reagan-his-place-history>
- Julilly Kohler-Hausman, "Guns and Butter: The Welfare State, the Carceral State, and the Politics of Exclusion in the Postwar United States," *Journal of American History* 102 (June 2015): 87-99.
- James Forman, Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York, 2017), introduction

Topic 11 – Nov. 25: Legacies of the Cold War in an Age of Terror

- Erik German, "How the Shootout at Ruby Ridge Resonates in the Gun Debate Today" (RetroReport, 2014), 12.43 minutes <https://www.retroreport.org/video/ruby-ridge-american-standoff/>
- Elaine Tyler May, "Echoes of the Cold War: The Aftermath of September 11 at Home," in *September 11 in History*.
- Melani McAlister, "Rethinking the 'Clash of Civilizations': American Evangelicals, the Bush Administration & the Winding Road to the Iraq War," in *Race, Nation & Empire in US History*.

Topic 12 – Dec. 2: America Since 2008

- Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The First White President," *The Atlantic* (October 2017) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/10/the-first-white-president-ta-nehisi-coates/537909/>
- "George Packer Responds to Ta-Nehisi Coates," *The Atlantic* (Sept. 15, 2017) <https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2017/09/ta-nehisi-coates-george-packer-white-president/539976/>

Quiz 4 – Module 3 – Dec. 2 – Dec. 9