Post-World War II American Thought

Professor Contact Information

Prof. Daniel Wickberg
x6222
wickberg@utdallas.edu
JO 5.428, Office Hours M 10:00-11:30

Course Prerequisites, Co-requisites, and/or other restrictions:
Graduate Standing, School of Arts and Humanities

Course Description

This course provides a critical historical introduction to major themes in mid-20th century American thought. This period is marked by a new middle-class affluence; an increasing sense of the bureaucratization and “massification” of economic, political, and social life; the expansive growth of higher education; a Cold War-fueled internationalism on the world stage and a deradicalization of social thought at home; an emergent conservative movement at the moment of a supposed “liberal consensus”; the growth of a cult of the nuclear family in domestic life; the emergence of a youth-oriented popular culture in films and music; and a burgeoning Civil Rights movement initiated by blacks and their supporters. We will be reading a variety of texts primarily concerned with social thought, ideas about freedom and the new political conditions of the era, the integration of psychology and sociology as perspectives on modern life, the role of “culture” and literature in modern life, and the expansion of science and technology in creating new forms of liberation and constraint. In some ways, the postwar era represents the first years of our own time, and its characteristic conundrums and problems are ones that remain with us still. Nevertheless, this is a history course, and we will not be primarily concerned with contemporary applications of these texts and ideas; we wish to understand them in their time, and to have a clear understanding of how those texts and ideas, and their contextual conditions differ historically from the present.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes:

Students will be able to describe and historically situate major forms of social and cultural thought from the postwar era.
Students will be able to think about and evaluate ideas historically (as belonging to their specific era).

Students will be able to identify important works of recent historical scholarship on the intellectual history of the postwar period and situate them within their historiographical context.

**Required Textbooks and Materials**

The following required texts are available for purchase at Off-Campus Books and the Campus Bookstore:

- James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Beacon)  
  978-0807064313  
- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*  
  978-0393322576  
- Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future* (JHUP)  
  978-0801886331  
- Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd* (NYRB)  
  978-1590175811  
- Daniel Horowitz, *Anxieties of Affluence* (UMass)  
  978-1558495043  
- Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American* (Harvard UP)  
  978-0674027428  
  978-0415952651  
- Richard King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals, 1940-1970* (JHUP)  
  978-0801880667  
- Thomas Kuhn, *Structures of Scientific Revolution* (U Chicago)  
  978-0226458120  
- Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age* (Harper & Row)  
  978-0060153519  
  978-0812219401  
  978-0195343045

Additional readings are available on electronic reserve, and will be indicated by an * in the reading calendar. The password for electronic reserve will be provided by the instructor.

**Assignments and Academic Calendar:**

Wednesday January 15       Introduction: No Reading
Wednesday January 22  Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*


Wednesday February 5  Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979*

Wednesday February 12  Richard H. King, *Race, Culture, and the Intellectuals 1940-1970*

Wednesday February 19  Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*

Wednesday February 26  Library Session: No Reading

Wednesday March 5  James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*
Jason Stevens, “James Baldwin and the Wages of Innocence,” in *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America’s Cold War*, pp. 265-297*

Wednesday March 12  Spring Break

Wednesday March 19  Paul Goodman, *Growing Up Absurd*

Wednesday March 26  Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*

Wednesday April 2  Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
Wednesday April 9  

Wednesday April 16  
C. Wright Mills, The Politics of Truth (excerpts)

Wednesday April 23  
Nelson Lichtenstein, ed., American Capitalism, pp. 1-134, 191-290

Wednesday April 30  
Last Meeting: no reading,

Wednesday May 7  
Final Papers Due 5:00 pm

Grading Policy

Grades will be determined on the following basis:

One Oral Presentation 20%
Discussion and Participation 40%
Final Paper 40%

All assignments must be completed. Participation grade will be determined by a combination of the following: attendance, demonstrated evidence of having completed and thought about assigned readings, quality of comments, questions, and criticisms about readings. Failure to do the readings and to participate in class discussion will result in a low participation grade. Course grades will be made on the scale of A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D, F.

Course & Instructor Policies

Students are expected to attend all class meetings prepared to participate in discussion of assigned readings. The only legitimate excuses for failing to attend class are religious holidays, illness and personal/family emergencies. Any other absence will be regarded as a choice made by the student not to attend.
Tardiness disrupts class meetings. Please make every effort to be on time. Repeated tardiness will lead to a lower participation grade. Please make sure all cell phones are off or disabled during class. Please do not use laptops or other electronic devices during class unless required to do so by a disability. Students are expected to treat one another with civility, and to allow all students the freedom to participate in discussion. Debate is the lifeblood of intellectual work, and vigorous debate is encouraged. Rudeness and personal remarks, however, will not be tolerated. As much as is possible, I encourage students to consider ideas on their merits, and not take criticism of ideas personally. I try to encourage a classroom that is both intellectually lively and open to a variety of views, and at the same time, respectful of the views and concerns of others. I will do my best to abide by that spirit; I ask that you do as well.

All assignments are due on the designated dates. Students should meet all deadlines. If there are legitimate reasons why an assignment cannot be completed, it is the student's responsibility to request an extension. If no extension is granted, late assignments will not be accepted, and the student will fail the class.

**Oral Presentation Assignment**

Each student will be required to make an oral presentation to introduce a particular facet of the required reading for a specific day. I will make assignments at our first class meeting. The oral presentation should be 10-15 minutes in length (no longer—I will cut you off if you exceed the time limit!) and provide a critical and historical introduction to some aspect of that day's reading. You can provide historical and biographical information about the author of a text or its reception; identify its central arguments and explain them; and/or raise questions for class discussion. The purpose is to open up an avenue for class discussion. Please provide a one-page summary of your presentation to your classmates and instructor.

**Final Paper Assignment**

Imagine that a new edition of a classic postwar text is being published, and you have been asked to provide a critical historical introduction that situates the text within its time; identifies principle arguments, rhetorical style, and/or audiences; explains its historical significance; and points new readers to additional reading and avenues of exploration. The paper you produce will not be a piece of original research, driven by a particular thesis, but will provide an overview that emphasizes certain features of the text, the author, and the historical and intellectual movements that helped shape it. Your paper should be 12-15 double-spaced pages (3000-4000 words), provide citation to both the primary text and any additional secondary literature you utilize, and end with a short bibliography (5-7 items—scholarly articles and/or books) of recommended future reading. You may write your critical introduction to any of the following texts:
Hannah Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951)
Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (1959)
William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale* (1951)
Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962)
Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (1964)
Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (1950)
E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (1957)
C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (1951)
Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History* (1952)
Lionel Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* (1950)
Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center* (1949)
David Riesman et al., *The Lonely Crowd* (1951)
Dwight Macdonald, *Against the American Grain* (1962)
Richard Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (1948)
Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1955)
Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (1960)

If you have an alternative text you would like to use, please consult with me for approval. Your text should be a significant piece of serious non-fiction written and published between 1945 and 1965. Papers are due on Wednesday May 7.