

# American Decades: Culture Wars after WWII

## American Studies 3000



Instructor: Joshua Woodard  
Tuesday-Thursday 9:30-10:45  
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Office Hours: [Tuesdays 10:45-Noon]

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### **Course Description:**

Perhaps you have heard the phrase "Culture Wars." It gestures towards the clash of cultural values in American society and politics. Such conflicts are prevalent throughout American history, but the twenty five years following World War II was an era of intense debate about what kind of nation the U.S. was and ought to be. The conventional memory of the era holds that America emerged from World War II as a global superpower and an international leader among nations. An economic boom, a proliferation of the middle class, and conspicuous consumption of goods were held as symbols of the United States' cultural and societal superiority. However, even the most popular ideals had their detractors. Dissent was present in the early portion of this era, 1945-1960, but reached a fever pitch throughout the 1960s in the form of the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam War movement. Through pop-culture, politics and social history, we will survey the clashing of these cultural values throughout this era.

By the end of this course students will be familiarized with America's domestic cultural history of the Post World War Two era. This class will also demonstrate how so many of the internal conflicts that defined this era continue to be relevant today. Furthermore, learning about this era through close readings of its historical artifacts will provide the cognitive skill set needed to understand and address the world's current and pressing issues.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To cultivate a better understanding of America's cultural history of the Post World War Two era with respect to some of the most intense domestic conflicts such as, the Civil

Rights Movement, McCarthyism, Youth Culture, Consumer Culture, Feminism, and the Anti-war movement.

- Students should understand which historical actors were involved, the claims they made or the actions they took, why they did so, and how their historical context shaped their decision making.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Learn to track competing values and ideals that reflected the visions of what kind of nation Americans wished to live in.
  - Build well-reasoned and evidenced based arguments about the cultural conflicts that defined this era.
  - Bring into concert the ability to read evidence from primary sources while grounding that evidence in secondary scholarship.
  - Develop the ability to connect class materials and independent research in order to complete written assignments and the final project for the class.
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**Materials**- The vast majority of your readings, i.e. journal articles, book chapters, primary sources, films, and audio material, will be available through the "Class Readings" Folder on the course's blackboard homepage.

**Books:** This course requires you to purchase only two books, both of which should be easily available in the SLU bookstore or other retailers.

- Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War A Very Short Introduction* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003).
- Kurt Vonnegut, *The Cat's Cradle* (London: Penguin Books, 2008)
- The following book is not required, but it is a brief and excellent guide for virtually every writing situation, and I highly encourage every student who wishes to improve their own writing to acquire

William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style 4<sup>th</sup> ed* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2000).

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## **Policies:**

### Classroom Etiquette-

In accordance with SLU's Code of Student Conduct, I wish to provide a class atmosphere that encourages learning by working with fellow classmates in a positive and respectful way. Many of the topics that we will cover are controversial, but I encourage every student to voice their differing viewpoints on anything we discuss in class so long as it comes from a place of civility and respect for other class participants. Differing viewpoints can lead to debates which create moments of learning, so it is my hope to have these debates. Furthermore, no student will be punished in any way from adopting an opinion that differs from the teacher or their classmates.

Drinks in class are ok. I prefer that snacks be eaten before class. No cell phone usage is allowed. If a call must be made or taken please step outside. If this becomes a regular occurrence then I will have a discussion with that student. \*\*\* I am using an asterisk for this important message: I will allow laptops for now. I will also find novel ways for you to use your laptops in class. However, if for some reason the laptops become a distraction from our learning environment then I will ask all of you to leave your laptops at home. Also, you will be expected to bring readings in printed form even if you prefer to read off of your computer screen.

Audio and visual recordings of the class are allowed only as authorized by Disability services. Please do not upload to the internet any class materials that you did not yourself produce. Violations of these policies may result in a penalty on your final course grade.

### Absences and Late Work

Class attendance is crucial to any course, especially courses with a smaller class size such as our own. Attendance is mandatory, but I will make the policy easy enough. Everyone begins with three excused absences. Whether it be a family emergency, a school event, a doctor's appointment, or you just couldn't pass up a sunny day, you have three days you can use. After those three days your final grade will be reduced by a third of a letter grade for every absence, ie a B+ becomes a B. In cases where a student misses more than their 3 days for reasons outside of their control, they can come to me and we can work out the details of the situation. This attendance policy is crafted to encourage not to miss a class unless it is unavoidable. Also, on some days I might take role by having you sign a sheet, on other days I will take roll by administering an in-class assignment. On days where you are absent the in-class writing assignment you miss will not count against your grade. Instead, your other grades will be accordingly weighted in order to reflect your missed classes. Also, please contact our fellow students for material you missed in class.

Out of class assignments such as papers or projects must be turned in on time. All late work will be reduced by a third of a letter grade for every day it is late. Exemptions for this

rule will given only in the most extraordinary circumstances and must be documented in some way.

### Accommodations for Disabilities:

Students who may need academic accommodations due to a disability are encouraged to contact Disability Services (977-8885 or BSC 331). I'll gladly make appropriate accommodations for students who have been approved by Disability Services. And, of course, I'll handle such matters in strict confidence.

### Academic Honesty:

Ensure that you're familiar with the CAS Policy on Academic Honesty at [www.slu.edu/x12657.xml](http://www.slu.edu/x12657.xml), and particularly the rules against cheating, plagiarism, falsification, and collusion. By submitting written work for this class, you attest that the words, concepts, and ideas are your own except where explicitly attributed to others using a recognized citation style. You're not to combine written submissions for this class with those for another class, nor to submit materials already submitted for another class, without obtaining prior permission. Violations may result in failure of the assignment or course, and referral to administrators for further action.

### **Assignments and Grades:**

#### Grade Breakdown:

- Attendance, preparation, class participation -15% of final grade.
- Reading Responses, presentations, quizzes, and in-class work 10% of final grade
- Paper #1( due in class Thursday 2/23) – 15% of Final Grade (list dates and give points)
- Midterm Exam (Thursday 3/9)- 15% of Final Grade
- Group Project (due by 4 pm Tuesday 5/9)- 30% of Final Grade
- Final Exam (Thursday 5/11)- 15% of final Grade.

Each of the components above will receive a letter grade, ranging from A to F. The final course grade will be determined by translating individual letter grades into scores on the 100 point grading scale, weighting them according to the breakdown above, calculating an overall score, and rounding that score to the nearest letter grade.

A+: 99-100, A: 94-98, A-: 90-93, B+: 87-89, B: 84-86 B-: 80-83, C+: 77-79, C: 74-76, C-: 70-73, D: 60-69, F: <60

#### Attendance, preparation, class participation:

I expect students to come to class prepared and having completed any reading assignments for the day. I also expect students to contribute meaningful thoughts to class

discussions and to take notes during lecture moments. On occasion, I will ask students to email me their notes as a way of grading your class participation.

#### Reading Responses, presentations, and In-class writing:

From time to time I will assign reading responses for class readings, or I will assign a short presentation for students to give about a particular reading or cultural artifact, or I will administer an in-class writing assignment that demonstrates your knowledge of the readings or materials discussed in class. The details for each assignment will be outlined in class.

#### Reading/Watching/Listening Assignments

You will see from the schedule below that most of your readings are secondary or scholarly sources. These sources will help understand the historical context of the era while providing information about historical events. The primary sources, which include music, TV, literature, film etc. are cultural artifacts that offer first hand insight into the lives of postwar Americans. While I hope for all of you to make use of all the primary and secondary sources on the syllabus, I do ask that everyone bring in outside primary and secondary sources from your independent research for your paper and group projects.

#### Paper #1 Cultural Document Analysis (4-5 pages): (Detailed handout with class overview)

For this paper each student will pick a primary source to analyze. Potential subjects include, but are not limited to, magazines, books, poetry, TV programs, film, music, the passage of a particular law or a pivotal historical event. The subject can be on any cultural artifact from this time period that reflects the contentious nature of the era, but a short synopsis of your subject and potential argument will be due on Thursday February 2 in order for me to approve the subject. Furthermore, the document will be double spaced, follow the footnote and bibliographic guidelines set forth in the most recent addition of the Chicago Turabian citation guide, and the page count does not include pictures, bibliography etc. The page count pertains only to the written body of your paper. The paper guidelines will be further detailed in a class hand-out.

#### Group Project (9-10 pages of research and 12-15 minute class presentation):

This is a research project that focuses on a particular cultural movement, ideology, or segment of popular culture history from this era. I will assign groups of 2-4 people, though I would prefer mostly groups of three. The length of your project will also be based on the number of people in your group. I expect each group to work as a team in research, writing, editing, and presentation of this project. Because the project is such a large piece of your overall grade and it comes at the very end of the semester, each student will be responsible for filling out a team member evaluation document after turning in the project. This document will hold all team members accountable for their work. The details for this project will be further outlined later in the semester.

### Midterm and Final Exams:

Each exam will cover the readings, lectures, and any other in class materials. The final exam will also be comprehensive and longer than the midterm. Each exam will also consist of a short multiple choice section, a short answer section, and an essay section at the end. There will be review dates for each exam where the layout of the exams will be further detailed later in the semester.

### **Schedule:**

#### Section 1: Introduction

Week 1: Tuesday 1/17- Class introduction, covering syllabus and class policies, begin covering class related material.

Thursday 1/19- Read McMahon *The Cold War* pages 1-15, 105, 117-121. and Henricksen *Dr. Strangelove's America*, xiv-xxvi.

#### Unit 2: The Cold War

Week 2: Tuesday 1/24- Read Whitfield, *Culture of the Cold War*, "Politicizing Culture," 1-25

Thursday 1/26- Read Vonnegut *The Cat's Cradle*, Introduction by Benjamin Kunkel v-xi (if your copy of the book does not have the intro you can find it on the weekly reading tab) and chapters 1-8 (don't worry, the chapters are very short), Also watch *Dr. Strangelove* available on blackboard.

Week 3: Tuesday 1/31- Read Doherty *Cold War Cool Medium*, 1-3, 13-18, 37-59.

Thursday 2/2- Read Doherty 161-163, 168-177, also Read Heller *Catch-22*, 111-117, and Vonnegut Chapters 9-20.  
Paper #1 Synopsis Due

#### Unit 3: Technology and Technocracy

Week 4: Tuesday 2/7 Read Henriksen, 88- 111.  
Vonnegut, Chapters 21-34.

Thursday 2/9 Read Isenberg, *Downtown America*, 166-173, Avela 185-186, 206-223.

Week 5: Tuesday 2/14 Read McDougall, *The Heavens and the Earth*, 3-13, 301-306.  
Read John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier" speech.  
Vonnegut Chapters 35-49.

Thursday 2/21 In-Class Group Activity

#### Unit 4: Labor & Consumption

Week 6: Tuesday 2/21 Read Lipsitz "Taft-Hartley Act" in *Rainbow at Midnight* 157-177.

Thursday 2/23 Read Fones-Wolf Intro and Chapter 2 "Defending the Free Enterprise System" in *Selling Free Enterprise*, pp.1-11 and 32-63.

\*\*\*Paper #1 Due\*\*\*

Week 7: Tuesday 2/28 Read Cohen, pp. 7-15,112-114, and 133-150 in *A Consumer's Republic*

Thursday 3/2 Read Engelhardt Chapter 4, "The Haunting of Childhood," in *The end of Victory Culture*, pp. 133-149.  
Vonnegut Chapters 50-65.

Week 8: Tuesday 3/7 Group Activity with Primary Sources. Review for exam.

Thursday 3/9 Midterm Exam

Week 9: \*\*\*Spring Break\*\*\*

#### Unit 5: Containment and Domesticity

Week 10: Tuesday 3/21 Read May, Introduction and Chapter 1, "Containment at Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth," in *Homeward Bound*, pp. 1-38.

Thursday 3/23 Cont. May, Chapter 6,"Baby Boom and Birth Control: The Reproductive consensus," in *Homeward Bound*.  
Read Vonnegut Chapters 66-79.

Week 11: Tuesday 3/28 Read Spigel, Introduction and Chapter 4,"The Home Theater," in *Make Room for TV*, pp. 1-10 and 99-135.

#### Unit 6: Civil Rights Movement

Thursday 3/30 Episode 1, "Awakenings 1954-1956" and Episode 6, "Bridge to Freedom" from *Eyes On the Prize* PBS documentary on Civil Rights Movement

Week 12: Tuesday 4/4 Episode 7, "The Time Has Come" Episode 9, "Power," (watch from minute 20 onward) from *Eyes on the Prize* PBS documentary on Civil Rights Movement.  
Read Vonnegut Chapter 80-95.

Week 13: Thursday 4/6 Read Introduction and excerpts from Borstelmann's *The Cold War and The Color Line*, pp. 1-9, 85-110.

#### Unit 7: Counterculture

Week 14: Tuesday 4/11 Read Chapter 4 "Leftward Kicking and Screaming," in Todd Gitlin's *The 60s: Years of Hope Days of Rage*. pp. 81-104 Read Vonnegut Chapters 96-104.

Thursday 4/13 Easter Break

Week 15: Tuesday 4/18 Read TBD from Timothy Miller's *Hippies and American Values*  
Read Vonnegut Chapters 105-115

Thursday 4/20 Read Chapter 13 "Sexual Revolutions" from John De'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman's *Intimate Matters*

#### Unit 8: Rise of the Right

Week 16: Tuesday 4/25 Read Introduction 3-11 and excerpts from chapter 4 "The Conservative Worldview at the Grassroots" in Lisa McGirr's *Suburban Warriors*. pp. 147-163, 168-176

Thursday 4/27 Read Introduction pp. 3-11, excerpts from chapter 3 "From Community to Individuality: Race, Residence, and Segregationist Ideology" and Chapter 4 "The Abandonment of Public Space: Desegregation, Privatization, and the Tax Revolt," pp. 78-81, 97-104, 105-107, 125-130 from Kevin Kruse's *White Flight*

Read Vonnegut Chapters 116 to 127.

Week 17: Tuesday 5/2 Read Jacqueline Dowd Hall's "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past."

Presentations: Group project due with presentation

Thursday 5/4 Presentations and Review. Group project due with presentation.

\*\*\*Final Exam\*\*\*

Thursday 5/11 8:00 AM in our regular meeting place.