



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
TRENT UNIVERSITY

HISTORY 3121: **The United States Since 1945**
2014-15 Fall
Oshawa

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In 1945, America emerged victorious from the Second World War as the most powerful nation on Earth. Over the next several decades, America grew into a global empire, struggling against its political and ideological rival, the USSR. Some, but not all, of its people, enjoyed one of the largest booms in prosperity in human history, but by the beginning of the new century, America was facing a period of decline. At the same time, millions of Americans fought to make the nation live up to its democratic promise. In these years, America and the possibilities of American lives were forever altered. If you are interested in understanding why the United States is the way it is today, you should take this course.

Required Texts: Zaretsky, Atwood Lawrence, Griffith, Baker (eds.), *Major Problems in American History Since 1945 (4th edition)*; all other required texts will be available through Blackboard.

learningSystem/Blackboard: Blackboard

Type	Day	Time	Location
LECTURE	MON	3:10 PM	OSH 109
SEMINAR	MON	2:10 PM	OSH 126
SEMINAR	MON	5:10 PM	OSH 109

Objectives:

In this course, our first goal is to better understand the history of the United States since 1945: how the contradictions, conflicts, and unfinished revolutions of these decades have shaped America as it is today. Our second goal is to better understand how historians have understood and written this history; to critique their arguments and make historical arguments of our own using analysis and evidence. Finally, I expect you to have your own goals for your work in this course, which we will consider during the first week.

Course Evaluation:

There are three types of evaluation in this course: seminar participation, written assignments, and written in-class tests.

Type of Assignment	Weighting	Due Date
<u>Seminar Participation</u>	<u>20%</u>	<u>Ongoing</u>
<u>In-class Test 1</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>October 27</u>
<u>Review Essay</u>	<u>30%</u>	<u>November 17</u>
<u>In-Class Test 2</u>	<u>10%</u>	<u>November 24</u>
<u>Reparations Response</u>	<u>30%</u>	<u>December 1</u>

Seminars:

We will do some of our most important work in seminars. Here, we draw on the readings to better understand historical issues through an informed discussion with our colleagues. Seminars are a space for you to question the ideas that you hear in lecture and read in the textbook and articles. Our discussions will develop your ability to evaluate historical arguments and help you to think, speak, and write about history.

-Your participation in seminars is graded weekly. Every student is entitled to miss one seminar for any reason without penalty. After that, any missed seminars will receive an F for that week. Marks lost for missed seminars can not be made up unless you provide a documented reason for missing the seminar. Participation is being graded, however, not just attendance. If you just show up and do not contribute, you will receive a C- for that week.

-Arrive having done the readings, and thought a bit about them. This is essential. Coming to seminar with a few arguments, points, or questions about the readings already written down will help you participate effectively in seminar without having to make points off the top of your head. It will also help you learn and retain the readings.

-Each week's seminar readings will include primary sources and articles written by historians. In both cases, consider the following: What is the author's thesis? What arguments are they using to support their thesis? If it's an article, what sources are they using to support these arguments? Are the arguments and evidence presented convincing? Why or why not? What is the author's perspective?

-You are encouraged to make arguments and disagree with the arguments and perspectives presented by me, the authors we read, and the other members of your seminar group. Remember to be courteous and respectful of your colleagues.

-If you find it difficult to speak in seminar, please let me know. Together we can discuss how to best facilitate your participation.

In-Class Examinations:

There are two in-class examinations in this course. The first takes place October 27. The second takes place November 24. Each is one hour in length. You will be required to identify

and state the historical significance of a few terms, and answer an short essay question drawn from the lectures and readings.

Written Assignments:

Review Essay – Due November 17

Write a review essay on a topic from this period of American history. Your topic must be submitted in-class on September 22. The review essay should introduce and outline your topic for the reader, and evaluate the historical work you have read on the topic. This essay requires you to make a strong argument about the historical literature about your topic. What do historians say about the topic? Has it changed over time? Do they agree or disagree? What is your perspective on the topic? Who do you think is right? Why? What are they saying that is important? What are they leaving out? What further research needs to be done?

The review essay is expected to be 10-12 pages in length, and must consider a minimum of three historical monographs and four journal articles. You must include footnotes done in Chicago style and a bibliography. Please see the Academic Skills Centre guide to when you need to use footnotes and how to cite using Chicago style:

<http://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/documentation/chicago.php>

Reparations Assignment – Due December 1

This past summer, journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates reignited a long-simmering American political and historical controversy. In a cover story for *The Atlantic Monthly* titled “The Case For Reparations,” Coates argued that the United States of America was obliged to make restitution to African Americans, not only for centuries of slavery, but for the decades of race-based violence, exploitation, and fraud that followed abolition.

For this assignment, you are to read Coates’s original piece, “The Case Against Reparations;” “The Case Against Reparations,” a response by *National Review* columnist Kevin D. Williamson; and “The Case for American History,” Coates’s rebuttal. All of these will be available on Blackboard.

After reading and reflecting, you must write a response expressing your perspective on this debate. Your perspective must be supported by your analysis of Coates and Williamson’s pieces, material that we have discussed in this course, and one new primary and one new secondary source, each chosen by you. The new primary or secondary piece cannot be one published in *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*.

Your response should be 8-10 pages in length.

Policies and Guidelines on Written Assignments

-The most important aspect of a written assignment is making a strong argument and supporting it effectively with evidence.

-Written assignments are due at the beginning of lecture. Written assignments handed in at the end of lecture are considered late, and will have 10% of the assignment’s grade deducted. An additional 10% of the assignment grade is deducted every day for late assignments.

-Individual extensions will only be granted before the due date. You must have a valid, documented reason for an extension to be granted.

-You must submit hard copies of your written assignments, unless I give you permission in advance to submit an assignment electronically.

-Written assignments must be on 8.5" x 11" white paper. Use 12-point font and 1" margins. Number your pages. Please print double-sided.

-Keep an electronic backup of your assignments. Save your work regularly as you write it.

-Do not add a title page. Do put an original title at the top of your assignment, along with your name, student number, the date, and the word count.

-Do not plagiarize. When you plagiarize, you are stealing the work of others and passing it off as your own. Please read Trent University's statement on academic dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty, which includes plagiarism and cheating, is an extremely serious academic offence and carries penalties varying from a 0 grade on an assignment to expulsion from the University. Definitions, penalties, and procedures for dealing with plagiarism and cheating are set out in Trent University's *Academic Integrity Policy*. You have a responsibility to educate yourself – unfamiliarity with the policy is not an excuse. You are strongly encouraged to visit Trent's Academic Integrity website to learn more: www.trentu.ca/academicintegrity.

-Originality counts in written assignments. Don't be afraid to do something different.

-Writing counts too. Read your work out loud before you hand it in. This will help you eliminate basic errors and run-on sentences. Print out your essay to edit it. When you proofread off the screen, you often miss mistakes. Have someone else read it over.

Do not use parentheses. A point is either important enough to appear in the text or it should be deleted. Parentheses divide the reader's attention and detract from the flow of your argument.

Shorter, clearer sentences are often best. Try to eliminate unnecessary words from your writing. Write "because" not "due to the fact that."

Course Schedule:

Week 1 (Lecture and Seminars- September 8): "The American Century": The United States in 1945

Readings: none

Discussion Questions: What are your goals for this course? What does America mean to you? Where did America stand at the end of the Second World War? What opportunities did Americans see in their future? What dangers?

Week 2 (September 15): "A Consumer's Republic": America at Home in the Cold War Era

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 2: pages 50-51; Documents 1, 2, 3, pages 64-84; Jefferson Cowie and Nick Salvatore, "The Long Exception: Rethinking the Place of the New Deal in American History" (available on Blackboard).

Discussion Questions: How did the incredible postwar boom change America and the lives of Americans? What was the link between domestic consumerism and Cold War anticommunism? Who was left out of the postwar boom? Why do Cowie and Salvatore see this era as an exception, different from what came before and after?

Week 3 (September 22): The Black Freedom Struggle

YOU MUST SUBMIT YOUR REVIEW ESSAY TOPIC AT THIS WEEK'S LECTURE

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 4: pages 127-29; Documents 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, pages 141-56; General Baker, "Letter to the Draft Board," 1965, and "Letter to the Chrysler Corporation," 1968 (available on Blackboard)

Discussion Questions: What spurred the the black freedom struggle in the 1960s? What were the differences between the civil rights movement and the black power movement? What were the continuities? What challenges did blacks face when striving for freedom and equality in the North?

Week 4 (September 29): A War on Poverty: The Great Society and the Apex of American Liberalism

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 5: pages 163-64; Documents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8; 187-204.

What was consensus liberalism? What were its achievements? What caused its collapse? Why was the idea of a "culture of poverty" so attractive?
Did poverty win the War on Poverty?

Week 5 (October 6): We Have to Burn the Village in Order to Save It: The War in Vietnam

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 8: pages 289-90; Documents 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8; 306-22.

Discussion Questions: Why did the United States spend over a decade fighting communism in Vietnam? Was the war necessary? How did liberalism intersect with the US's Vietnam policy? Why did North Vietnam defeat the world's preeminent superpower? How did the Vietnam War change America?

Week 6 (DATE & TIME TBA): "You've Got To Put Your Bodies Upon The Gears": 1960s Radicalism Shakes America

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 6, 207-08; Documents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 226-44.

Discussion Questions: What factors produced the radicalism of the 1960s? Was it youthful rebellion or legitimate political opposition? Was the radical critique of America on point or off target? Why did the US government crush radical movements?

October 20 – READING WEEK, NO CLASSES

Week 7 (October 27): “The Lives of Women Were Not of Value”: Women’s Rights and Women’s Liberation

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 7: 247-48; Documents 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 267-86.

Discussion Questions: What was the difference between “women’s rights” and “women’s liberation”? What were the major achievements of postwar feminism? How did lesbians and women of colour challenge mainstream feminism?

IN-CLASS TEST NUMBER ONE TAKES PLACE THIS WEEK DURING LECTURE

Week 8 (November 3): “Mad As Hell”: The Turbulent 1970s and the Limits of American Power

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, pages 325-327; Documents 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 347-66.

Discussion Questions: What factors spelled the end of American optimism and unquestioned affluence? What limits did America encounter in the 1970s? What gave the conservative movement its appeal and momentum?

Week 9 (November 10): “Greed is Good”: The Pumped-Up 80s

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 10: pages 368-70; Documents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; pages 386-406.

Discussion Questions: Why was Reagan such an attractive leader to so many? How were discussions of poverty and wealth different in 1985 than they were in 1965? How did Americans understand terrorism after the Iranian hostage crisis? Was Hulk Hogan truly a “Real American”? How did the AIDS crisis change America?

Week 10 (November 17): “One Market Under God”: Globalization and Neoliberalism

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 11: pages 409-11; Documents 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; 428-45; Thomas Frank, “The God That Sucked,” *The Baffler* 14, Spring 2001 (available on Blackboard).

Discussion Questions: What happened to work, in America and around the world, since the 1970s? Why do more people now work more and get less? What are the consequences of an age of expanding inequality?

REVIEW ESSAY DUE IN LECTURE

Week 11 (November 24): “You’re Either With Us Or Against Us”: 9/11 and the War on Terror

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 14, 529-30; Documents 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7; Jonathan Schnell, “How the US Changed the Meaning of War,” *The Nation* (available on Blackboard).

Discussion Questions: What was the impact of 9/11 on America and the world? What is the legacy of the George W. Bush era? Is America safer today than it was in 2001?

IN-CLASS EXAM NUMBER TWO TAKES PLACE DURING LECTURE

Week 12 (December 1) Yes We Can? Race and America in the Age of Obama

Readings: *Major Problems in American History*, Chapter 13, 490-92; Documents 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; 510-26; Jonathan Fenderson, “Towards the Gentrification of Black Power (?),” *Race and Class*, volume 55, number 1, July-September 2013, 1-22 (available on Blackboard); Jason Parham, “It Is Time We Treat Police Brutality as a National Crisis,” *Gawker*, August 4, 2014 (available on Blackboard)

Discussion Questions: How has immigration created a different America since the one we saw in 1945? What struggles have resulted? Does Barack Obama’s presidency represent the triumph of the black freedom struggle, or its defeat? Is this a post-racial America?

REPARATIONS RESPONSE DUE IN LECTURE

General Course Policies and Guidelines:

-Use this syllabus regularly to stay on top of the work and expectations of the course. If you lose your syllabus, it will also be posted on Blackboard.

-Check your school email account regularly, because I will send announcements regarding the course to it.

-Bring your copy of *Major Problems in American History Since 1945* and your supplementary readings to lecture and seminar.

-If you have questions or concerns, talk to me! Come to my office hours or send me an email.

-It is very important that this course be safe, accessible and inclusive for everyone. If you have any concerns in this regard, please talk to me and we can discuss how to make the course a safe, inclusive, and accessible one for you.

-Please read Trent University’s accessibility policy:

Access to Instruction:

It is Trent University's intent to create an inclusive learning environment. If a student has a disability and/or health consideration and feels that he/she may need accommodations to succeed in this course, the student should contact the Student Accessibility Services Office (SAS), (BH Suite 132, 748 1281 disabilityservices@trentu.ca). For Trent University in Oshawa Student Accessibility Services Office contact 905-435-5102 ext.

5024. Complete text can be found under Access to Instruction in the Academic Calendar.

-Trent's Academic Skills Centre is an important resource that can help you with your reading, writing, research, critical thinking, presentations, and time management. They are located at Champlain College Suite 206. Their phone number is (705) 748-1720. They are online at <http://www.trentu.ca/academicskills/> and you can follow them on Twitter: @TrentUASC

-Set aside time to think. One important thing I have learned at university is that, with all the writing, reading, and online communication we do, we often fail to take the time to put aside distractions and simply *think* quietly about the material we are learning. Giving yourself time to think and reflect will improve your work and reduce your stress level.