

The Present Past: U.S. Society, Culture and Politics Since 1945 History 164

Spring, 2016
Tues., Thurs. 3-4:30

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The past is, in many ways, still with us. This is all the more clearly true of our recent history. In this course, as we examine American history from the end of World War II to the present, we will explore both major political, social and cultural events and trends, and what it means to study the recent past. As we consider many of the themes that have run through the last seventy years, we will reflect on how those themes have helped to shape the current United States. We will particularly trace the development of five contested, shifting and enduring themes: the place of the United States in the world; economic opportunities and inequalities; the role of government in people's lives; the struggle to come to terms with a diverse society; and gender, sexuality and challenged certainties. Through this, we will consider how studying recent history can provide insights and the limitations of historical perspectives. And we will consider how we know and make sense of the past.

This course requires your active participation. The course will encourage you to develop a better understanding of recent U.S. history, as well as help you to strengthen your abilities to make sense of diverse sources and to think with the past. That requires your active engagement: both in class – through participatory lectures, discussions and classroom source activities – and outside the classroom – through short essays, take-home exams, and a mini-research project.

Topics to cover will likely include:

1. Studying the Recent Past and America in 1945
2. The Cold War Abroad and at Home
3. Consensus Culture and Affluence
4. The Civil Rights Challenge
5. The Promise of Liberalism: the 1960s
6. Vietnam: the Cold War Gets Hot
7. The Feminist Transformation
8. Liberalism Unraveling
9. Malaise: the Transition of the 1970s
10. The Reagan Revolution
11. The Age of Reagan
12. The Conservative Consensus: the 1990s and 2000s
13. Culture Wars
14. The War on Terror: a New War Without an End?
15. The New Economy
16. Looking Backward from Today