

skidmore college's

AMERICAN STUDIES

department /am360c

am 360c—american cultural periods: 1960s

Gregory M. Pfitzer

MW, 4:00-5:20 p.m., TLC 307



A consideration of the major events of the 1960s, including the New Frontier, the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the war in Vietnam, the civil rights movement, the sexual and gender revolutions, the rise of rock and roll, the counterculture, the moon landing and other landmarks of the decade. The course considers not only what happened during those climactic years, but why such events were so important to American development, and how perceptions about the 1960s have changed over time.



American Studies 360C
Cultural Periods: The 1960s

Pfitzer
Spring '08

The 1960s remains the most intriguing and controversial of American decades. In a short ten years, America experienced the dream of a New Frontier, the Cuban Missile Crisis, a presidential assassination, a devastating armed conflict in southeast Asia, a Civil Rights revolution, a transformation of sexual attitudes, a reconsideration of gender relations, a countercultural movement, an alteration in family structure, a man on the moon, and much more. Some of these events appealed to American sensibilities and gave renewed hope for national eminence and world dominance-- hopes borne of the nationalism of the post-World War II period. Others created severe psychological doubts and awakened Americans to the need to redefine national and international priorities. The goals of this course are: 1) to chronicle and examine what happened during those climactic years, 2) to document how such events affected subsequent American development, and 3) to suggest from an historiographic perspective how perceptions about the 1960s have changed over time in accordance with these subsequent developments.

Research on the 1960s is still "recent" in the historical sense of the word. Hence, this seminar is subject to all the advantages and disadvantages of contemporary historical endeavors. On the one hand, events are still fresh, participants are still alive, and documents are still available. On the other hand, critical distance has not been achieved, participants are too attached to events to be objective, and materials are too numerous and scattered to evaluate completely. In order to deal with these methodological conditions, students in American Studies 360C will be exposed to a wide variety of sources-- magazines, television programs, oral histories, records, videotapes, newspapers, photographs, movies, government documents, etc.--and will be asked to consider these sources as both would-be participants and detached critics. The course is structured as a seminar to facilitate this process, and students will be responsible for determining the direction of much of their own learning. Each Monday, students will complete selected readings and a short written assignment. We will spend some time discussing these materials and introduce the important thematic and methodological issues relevant to them. Each Wednesday, students will then take part in participatory activities related to the topic for the week, ranging from mock trials to conducting surveys to producing a live radio program.

Unlike courses covering other historical decades, we are fortunate enough to have a visual record of the events we will be describing, so American Studies 360C will also make heavy use of visual evidence, including videotapes and films, and we will be doing some taping of our own as well.

In addition to the short Monday assignments, students are required to write three papers: 1) a civil rights paper (5-7 pages); 2) a critique Maurice Isserman's America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s (5-7 pages); and 3) an oral history in conjunction with Tom Brokaw's BOOM!--questions, interview and analysis, (20 pages). There is also a required oral final exam. There will be no midterm exam. Class participation is a crucial component of the seminar and will constitute an important part of the final grade.

Grades will be apportioned as follows: Weekly assignments (15%); Civil Rights Paper (15%), Isserman Paper (15%); Oral History (20%); Final Exam (20%); Class Participation (15%).

Students should purchase the following books:

Maurice Isserman, America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s
Alexander Bloom/Wini Breines, ed., "Takin' it to the Streets"
Larry Berman, Planning a Tragedy
Terry Wallace, Bloods
James S. Olson and Randy Roberts, My Lai
Hunter Davies, The Beatles
Tom Wolfe, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test
Tom Brokaw, BOOM!

There is no assigned textbook for the course, but for those students who desire a more comprehensive background to events, a copy of Brinkley and Freidel, America in the Twentieth Century has been placed on reserve in Scribner Library.

Part I: A More Congenial Spot? (1950s-1963)

Week 1: The Age of Complacency

Wednesday

January 23 -- Introduction: Seeds of the Sixties: 50's
America

Reading: Alexander Bloom, "'Past as Prologue':
The 1950s as an Introduction to the 1960s," in
"Takin' it to the streets," pp. 1-12

Exercise: Constructing a Portrait of the 50s by
Deconstructing "Father Knows Best"

Week 2: The New Era

Monday

January 28 -- Kennedy and the New Frontier

Reading: John F. Kennedy, Selections from Profiles in
Courage and "Inaugural Address" (xerox)

Assignment #1: Before Martyrdom--Newspaper Reviews
of the Kennedy Administration

Wednesday

January 30 -- Camelot Destroyed: The Assassination

Reading: Excerpts from The Warren Commission
Report on the assassination of the President;
Theodore H. White, "Camelot," (xeroxes)

Exercise: "Who Killed JFK?: The Case for
Conspiracy": A Hearing

Week 3: The Early Civil Rights Movement

Monday

February 4 -- SCLC and the Emergence of Dr. King

Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr., Why We Can't
Wait, Introduction, Chaps. 1-5 (xerox).

Assignment #2: The "Real King?" FBI reports on
the Life and Times of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Wednesday

February 6 -- Sit-ins, Freedom Rides, and the March on
Washington

Reading: "Keep on Walkin', Keep on Talkin'": Civil Rights, 1965, Bloom, Takin' it to the streets, pp. 17-44.

Exercise: Workshop on Strategies of Protest: The Oxford, Ohio Model

* * * Civil Rights paper due (Friday, February 8)

Part II: The Unraveling of America (1963-1967)

Week 4: The Johnson Era

Monday

February 11 -- Conspicuous Consumption and the War on Poverty

Reading: Selections from Michael Harrington, The Other America, (xerox); Lyndon Johnson, "The War on Poverty" (xerox).

Wednesday

February 13 -- Lyndon Johnson's Great Society

Reading: Lyndon Johnson, "The Great Society"; Fiscal Budget for the Year 1966 (xerox)

Exercise: Funding Social Programs--A Budget and Management Meeting of the Government Accounting Office, 1965-1966

Week 5: The Vietnam War

Monday

February 18 -- Vietnam: Why We Were There

Reading: David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, Chapters 4, 13-15, 19-20, 25-27 (on reserve).

Assignment #3: Military Advisory Reports on Entry into War (1945-1963)

Wednesday

February 20 -- Armageddon: Johnson's Momentous Decision

Reading: Larry Berman, Planning a Tragedy: The Americanization of the War in Vietnam, pp. 79-129, appendix.

Exercise: Role Play: Advising the President on the Escalation of the War, July 1965)

Week 6: The Vietnam War

Monday

February 25 -- A Foot Soldier's Vantage Point

Reading: Wallace Terry, Bloods, pp. 1-78, 186-200.

Assignment #4: Oral History: Designing the Oral Interview--Questions Due

Wednesday

February 27 -- My Lai: The Case of William Calley

Reading: Olson and Roberts, My Lai; Paul Meadlo, "My Lai," in Bloom, "Takin' it to the streets", pp. 261-65.

Exercise: The People's Verdict: A Mock Trial of William Calley

Week 7: The War at Home

Monday

March 3 -- Student Unrest: Anti-War Protest

Reading: Tom Hayden, "The Port Huron Statement";
Casey Hayden, "Raising the Question of Who
Decides," in Bloom, "Takin' it to the streets",
pp. 61-75 and 82-85.

Assignment #5: Documenting Unrest at Skidmore:
Evaluating Back Issues of The Skidmore News,

Wednesday

March 5 -- Blowin' in the Wind: The Weather Underground

Reading: James Simon Kunen, The Strawberry Statement:
Notes of a College Revolutionary (xerox); "The Anti-War
Movement," in Bloom, "Takin' it to the streets", pp.
214-239.

Exercise: Starting the Revolution: The Mark Rudd
Strategy Session at Columbia

*** * * Maurcie Isserman, *America Divided: The Civil War of the
1960s* (due Friday, March 7)**

Part III: Sex, Drugs and Rock n' Roll (1967-69)

Week 8: Spring Break (March 10-14); conduct interviews

Week 9: The Gender and Sexual Revolutions

Monday

March 17 -- The Feminist Movement

Reading: "Liberal Feminism" in Bloom, "Takin it to
the streets", pp. 459-81.

Wednesday

March 19 -- The Sexual Sixties

Reading: "Our Bodies, Our Sexuality," in Bloom,
"Takin' it to the streets", pp. 504-20.

Exercise: Changing Sexual Mores: Surveying the Sixties
The Virginia Slims Women's Survey

Week 10: The Counterculture

Monday

March 24 -- Dropping Out: The Hippies and the Haight

Reading: "Hippies, Yippies and Communes" in Bloom,
Takin' it to the streets, pp. 310-334.

Assignment #6: Utopia U.S.A.: The Commune Movement

Wednesday

March 26 -- The Psychedelic Vision: Drug Culture

Reading: Timothy Leary, Selections from The
Politics of Ecstasy (xerox).

Exercise: Leary's Laboratory on Psychedelic Perception

Week 11: The Sights and Sounds of the Countercultural Revolution

Monday

March 31 -- On the Bus with the Hippi Movement

Reading: Tom Wolfe: Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,
Chaps, 1-6, 13-16.

Assignment #7: Films of the 1960s

Wednesday

April 2 - The Rock n' Roll Revolution

Reading: "Rock Around the Clock," in Bloom,

"Takin' it to the streets", pp. 294-303.

Exercise: Managing Motown: A Rock n' Roll Marketing Seminar

*** * * Oral History Transcripts Due (Friday, April 4)**

Week 12: "There's Something Happenin' Here"

Monday

April 7 -- The Beatles and the British Invasion

Reading: Hunter Davies, The Beatles, pp. 210-24, 294-323.

Assignment #8: Programming for Sixties Revival Radio Show

Wednesday

April 9 -: The Media is the Message: Music of the Late 1960s

Reading: Mikal Gilmore, "A Long, Unforgettable Season," Rolling Stones

Exercise: Live Radio Program--WSPN: "The Sixties Revival"

Part IV: Toward the "Me Decade" (1969-1974)

Week 13: "Love It or Leave It": Countering the Counterculture

Monday

April 14 -- The Death of the Counterculture: 1968

Reading: "Opposing the Students," in Bloom, "Takin' it to the streets", pp. 338-357; "The Chicago Democratic Convention," etc., 428-444; Lance Morrow, "1968" *Time*.

Assignment #9: Retrospective critiques of 1968

Wednesday

April 16 -- Cambodia, Kent State and Collapse

Reading: Nixon and Kissinger in Marcus & Bruner, America Since 1945, xerox; "Kent State, The President's Commission on Campus Unrest," in Bloom, "Takin' it to the streets", pp. 574-583

Exercise: The Blame Game: An Inquiry into the Kent State Affair

Week 14: The "Center Held?"

Monday

April 21 - Black Militancy and Black Studies

Reading: "Black Nationalism and Black Pride," in Bloom, "Takin' it to the streets", pp. 138-176.

Assignment #10: Designing the Black Studies Curriculum

Wednesday

April 23 -- Watergate and the Loss of Confidence

Reading: selections from Woodward and Bernstein, The Final Days and Richard Nixon, RN (xerox).

Exercise: The Identity of an Informant

*** * * Final Oral History Paper Due (Friday, April 25)**

Week 15: The Legacy of the 1960s

Monday

April 28 -- From Yippie to Yuppie: Remembering the Sixties

Reading: Joan Didion, "On the Morning After the Sixties"; Morris Dickstein, "Remembering the Sixties, Surviving the Seventies, The Gates of Eden (xeroxes).

Wednesday

April 30 -- Human Be-in at the Pfitzers

Exercise: "Where Are They Now?": A Sixties Revival

* * * Oral Final Exam

To Be Scheduled