

American Studies 360B
American Cultural Periods: 1950s
Tisch Learning Center 307

Fall 2008
Prof. M. C. Lynn
W,F 10:10-11:30



COURSE DESCRIPTION: An interdisciplinary analysis of the decade of the 1950s in America. Using a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, generally including fiction, film, music, biography, autobiography, poetry, sociology, drama, and social criticism, the course explores the distinctive culture of this decade. It focuses on the ways different groups of Americans experienced the period, studying conformity and consumerism, the beatniks, rock and roll, and the silent generation, as well as the roots of the protest movements and the counterculture of the 1960s.

This course is organized as a seminar, with classes in which students and professor will share the responsibility for discussion and analysis of our subject. Course assignments include substantial reading, critical viewing of several period films and television programs and more recent documentaries, research in primary sources for special assignments, oral presentations, and a research paper. There will be no formal examinations, but class attendance and informed participation are so important that class work will be graded.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available in the Skidmore Shop)

Elaine Tyler May, *HOMEWARD BOUND*

Richard Fried, *NIGHTMARE IN RED*

Allen Ginsberg, *HOWL*

Karal Ann Marling, *AS SEEN ON TV*

Vance Packard, *AMERICAN SOCIAL CLASSES IN THE 1950s* (Daniel Horowitz, ed.)

Jo Ann Robinson, *THE MONTGOMERY BUS BOYCOTT & THE WOMEN WHO STARTED IT*

Sloan Wilson, *THE MAN IN THE GRAY FLANNEL SUIT*

FILMS:

"Atomic Café"

"Red Nightmare"

"Eyes on the Prize" (series 1)

OBJECTIVES: 1. By the end of the term you should be familiar with the main social, political, and cultural events of the decade of the fifties, and have a fuller understanding of the complex cultural context of the period between 1945 and 1963. In particular you should have a better understanding of American family patterns, the Cold War and McCarthyism, social class, the civil rights movement, the beats, youth culture, and visual culture.

2. You should be able to distinguish between the way in which the fifties is nostalgically remembered and the way it actually was, and you should also be aware of the insights into the culture of the period provided by historical distance—i.e. what was going on at the time that most Americans did not fully understand or recognize.

3. Your research skills should be further developed, and you should be able to use both primary and secondary sources and analytical techniques from a variety of disciplines in order to study problems from several different perspectives.

4 Your writing and oral presentation skills should also have been refined, and you should have strengthened your ability to revise initial drafts of your work. (I will be happy to review and comment on rough drafts of papers up until one week before their due date; I will also listen to dry runs of oral reports.)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class attendance and informed participation in class discussion. If speaking in class is an issue for you, please speak to me during the first week of class to work out a system of regular weekly comments to the Am360B-list. Good electronic comments can make up for relatively quiet participation in class, but more than two or three absences will have a negative impact on your final grade.

2. Oral presentations: First, a ten minute oral report with appropriate visual aids and an accompanying 4-5 page handout on one specific year in the decade of the nineteen fifties; your report will summarize and illustrate the major events of that year and analyze their significance to the development of American culture. You should include an annotated bibliography. Years will be chosen during the first class session; the first report will be on September 17. Second, groups of three students will prepare and deliver fifteen minute presentations based on recent scholarly analyses of the decade assessing its importance in the development of American culture. These group presentations will be made during the final class session, on December 10.

3. Short papers: You will write two short (3-4 page) essays, one comparing Robinson's account of the Montgomery boycott with the account presented in the documentary *Eyes on the Prize*, and the other a report which involves interviewing someone (a member of your family or your circle of friends and acquaintances who lived through the 1950s) about her or his memories of the Bomb. The Bomb report is due 9/19 ; the Montgomery essay is due 10/10.

4. Research project: Choosing some aspect of American life in the fifties, you will devise a research project which explores the topic and explores the differences between the culture of the fifties and the culture of the twenty-first century. You will submit a topic statement on September 26, a bibliography on October 3, and an outline on October 17. The key to an effective research paper is often receiving helpful feedback on the first draft, so one-third of your grade on this paper will be earned for that draft, which will be due in class on Friday, October 31. I will meet with you to go over your rough draft between November 3 and November 7. You will then have until Friday, November 21 to revise your rough draft and complete the final version of the paper. (No electronic submissions please.) And late submissions—including late submission of the rough draft--will be penalized by a grade reduction. Your grade on this paper (1/3 for the first draft, 2/3 for the second) will constitute about 40% of your final grade.

N.B. Due dates are non-negotiable: late submissions will result in a lowering of your grade by one full grade for each day your work is late, including weekend and vacation days.

GRADING STANDARDS:

Class participation: 20%
Oral presentation: 10%
Group presentation: 10%
Two short papers 10% each
Research paper: 40%

OFFICE HOURS

Tuesday 9:00-11:00
Wednesday 1:30-3:30
Thursday 9:00-11:00
and by appointment
TLC329, x5025
Emergency? 587-0193

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND ASSIGNMENTS

Wednesday, September 3	Introduction: The Bomb: "The Atomic Café"
Friday, September 5	American Families: May, intro, 1-2
Wednesday, September 10	War & Cold War: May, 3-4
Friday, September 12	Finding a Job TBA
Wednesday, September 17	1946 & 1947; Sex and Marriage: May, 5 & 6
Friday, September 19	1948 & 1949; Consumers and Compromise: May, 7 & 8

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT DUE (THE BOMB)

Wednesday, September 24	1950 & 1951; McCarthyism: Fried, ch. 1 & 2
Friday, September 26	1952 & 1953; Truman & the Cold War: Fried, 3 & 4

RESEARCH PAPER TOPIC DUE

Wednesday, October 1	1954 & 1955; Korea & the Communist Threat: Fried, 5 & 7; "Korean War"
Friday, October 3	1956 & 1957 Anti-communism: Fried, 7 & epilogue "Red Nightmare"

BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE

Wednesday, October 8	1958 & 1959; The Beat Generation: Ginsberg, pp. 7-30,
Friday, October 10	1960 & 1961; Civil Rights: Robinson, 1-3

MONTGOMERY PAPER DUE

Wednesday, October 15	1962 & 1963; Boycott and Protest; Robinson, 4-6
Friday, October 17	Law & Victory: Robinson, 7-9

OUTLINE DUE

Wednesday, October 22	Social Class: Packard, pp. 1-56
Friday October 24	STUDY DAY

Wednesday, October 29	Defining status: Packard, pp. 57-97
Friday, October 31	Consequences Packard, pp. 97-142

ROUGH DRAFT DUE

Wednesday, November 5	Status & Democracy Packard, pp. 142-195
Friday, November 7	"Rebel Without a Cause"

ROUGH DRAFT CONFERENCES THIS WEEK (Monday 11/3-Friday 11/7)

Wednesday, November 12	Wilson
Friday, November 14	Wilson

Wednesday, November 19	Wilson
Friday, November 21	Visual Culture: Marling, ch. 1 & 2.

FINAL DRAFT OF PAPER DUE IN CLASS TODAY

Wednesday, December 3	Leisure & Culture: Marling, ch. 3, 4, & 5
Friday, December 5	Food and Politics: Marling 6 & 7

Wednesday, December 10	GROUP PRESENTATIONS: Assessing the Decade
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USEFUL 1950s POPULAR PERIODICALS IN THE SKIDMORE LIBRARY

Atlantic Monthly
Fortune
Harpers
House and Garden
House Beautiful
Ladies' Home Journal
Life (on microfilm)
Nation (on microfilm)
New Republic (some on microfilm)
Partisan Review
Saturday Evening Post
Scientific American
Time (on microfiche)

Best-Selling Fiction: 1950-1959

1950 Henry Morton Robinson, The Cardinal
1951 James Jones, From Here to Eternity
1952 Thomas B. Costain, The Silver Chalice
1953 Lloyd C. Douglas, The Robe
1954 Morton Thompson, Not As a Stranger
1955 Herman Wouk, Marjorie Morningstar
1956 William Brinkley, Don't Go Near the Water
1957 James Gould Cozzens, By Love Possessed
1958 Boris Pasternak, Doctor Zhivago
1959 Leon Uris, Exodus

Other Important Fiction Published in the 1950s

James Baldwin, Go Tell It On the Mountain
Saul Bellow, Seize the Day
Raymond Chandler, The Long Good-bye
Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man
Edna Ferber, Giant
Jack Kerouac, On the Road
Grace Metalious, Peyton Place
Carson McCullers, The Ballad of Sad Cafe
V. Nabokov, Lolita
Bernard Malamud, The Natural
Flannery O'Connor, Wise Blood
Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged
Philip Roth, Goodbye, Columbus
J.D. Salinger, Catcher in the Rye
John Steinbeck, East of Eden
John Updike, Rabbit, Run
Sloan Wilson, Man in the Grey Flannel Suit