

The University of Western Ontario
Department of History
2011-2012 (Fall Term)

HISTORY 3396F:
ATOMIC AMERICA: The United States during the 1950s

Wednesdays 9:30-11:30am
WL 259 (Weldon Library)

Instructor: Professor Aldona Sendzikas

E-mail: asendzi2@uwo.ca

Office hours: Wednesdays, 12:00-2:00 p.m. (and by appointment)

Office: Lawson Hall 1222

Telephone: 661-2111, x84377

Course Description:

Films and television tend to depict the 1950s as “happy days”: a decade of widespread affluence and stability, close-knit families, and a new teen culture which embraced drive-in restaurants, poodle skirts, and sock hops. Other portrayals, however, present the 1950s as a period shaped by anxiety and marked by conformity and hypocrisy. While many Americans enjoyed the benefits of a strong and affluent post-war society, they also struggled to learn to live in the shadow of the newly-developed atomic bomb. It was a decade of new homes and appliances, but also of backyard bomb shelters, blacklists, and worries about Communist expansion. Meanwhile, Americans such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., challenged the racial status quo and inspired a movement for civil rights. American women began to question their role in the nuclear family and in society as a whole. Anti-heroes such as James Dean, Jack Kerouac, and Lenny Bruce who resisted conventional norms of society became seen as role models by American youth.

In this course, we will examine some key aspects of political, social, and cultural life in the United States during the 1950s, looking primarily at the state of California as a microcosm of the nation. In California of the 1950s we see striking examples of the best and the worst trends and developments of the decade. Rapid urban growth, sprawling suburbia, the freeway system and the car culture, Disneyland, Hollywood, booming aerospace and defence industries, the expansion of education systems, in-migration from the other states—all of these suggested the idea of America as the land of the future, the land of possibility. At the same time, however, in 1950s California we see evidence of more negative developments, including the destruction of the environment, the ending of urban street car systems, the intensification of urban ghettos, and the excesses of the anti-Communist fervour.

In examining some of the key events, trends, and developments of this period as they took shape in the state of California, we will consider their relevance to and effects on the nation as a whole. Finally, we will compare the California of the 1950s with the California of today in an attempt to determine the legacy of the 1950s.

Each class will consist of a seminar-style discussion of the assigned readings for that day, followed by a lecture providing the historical context for the following week’s readings and discussion.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will have:

- developed a detailed knowledge of key events and issues of 1950s American society
- familiarized themselves with several significant primary documents of the period and evaluated their historical value and significance, alone and in relation to other primary sources
- critically analyzed various historical interpretations of the decade
- examined some of the cultural artifacts of the period and learned to understand their significance (music, film, poetry, media coverage)
- developed a research question and answered it in a written assignment, integrating both primary and secondary sources in formulating the argument.
- developed presentation and communication skills through class discussion and presentations

Required Texts:

- Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Daniel Horowitz, editor, *American Social Classes in the 1950s* (1st edition) (Bedford/St. Martin's Press)
- Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *Brown v. Board of Education: A Brief History with Documents* (1st edition) (Bedford/St. Martin's Press)
- Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (2nd edition) (Bedford/St. Martin's Press)
- Occasional online documents and articles (to be assigned).

The books listed above will be available for purchase at the UWO bookstore. In addition, three copies of Starr's book will be placed on one-day loan at Weldon Library, along with one copy of each of the other three books. Keep in mind that these course readings are mandatory.

Assignments and marks distribution:

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| ➤ Biographical book review (5-6 pages in length) (10%)
and short presentation (based on book read) (5%): | 15% |
| ➤ Primary document analysis (5-6 pages in length) (10%)
and short presentation (based on primary document analysis) (5%) | 15% |
| ➤ Research essay (13-15 pages in length;
on a topic of the student's choosing, in consultation with the instructor): | 25% |
| ➤ Final exam (covering all lectures, readings, and class discussions;
to be held during the December final exam period): | 25% |
| ➤ Class participation: | 20% |

Written assignments must be submitted in paper form to the instructor at the start of class on the due date, and in electronic form to www.turnitin.com by the same date and time.

Further instructions regarding the above assignments will be provided in class.

Late assignments: A late penalty of 5% for the first day, and 2% for each day after the first day (including Saturdays and Sundays) will be incurred for all written work submitted after the due date and time. Late papers should be submitted at the History Department (Lawson Hall 2201) drop box, as well as electronically to www.turnitin.com. Keep a copy of each of your written assignments until you receive the grade for it.

Dates for presentations will be determined after the first class session. In the case of absence on an assigned presentation date, the student will have the choice of either re-scheduling the presentation, or forfeiting the marks for the presentation.

Expectations:

- Regular attendance.
- Completion of all assigned readings and active, informed participation in class discussion, based on those readings.
- Courtesy and respect towards other members of the class.
- Be present: turn off cell phones and other technological devices. Laptops are allowed if they are used to take notes or access online readings; NOT for other purposes.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sept. 14th): Introduction.
Review of syllabus.
Lecture: “Duck and Cover”: The dawn of the atomic age.

Week 2 (Sept. 21st): Urban America: the postwar growth of San Diego.
Subthemes: the defense industry; the Mexican border; arts and culture.
Readings for this week: Starr, Chapter 3 (pp. 57-87)
Discussion of book review assignment.

Week 3 (Sept. 28th): Postwar San Francisco.
Subthemes: neighbourhoods; the workforce; politics and unions; religion.
Readings: Starr, Ch. 4 (pp. 88-130).

Week 4 (Oct. 5th): Los Angeles as supercity.
Subthemes: the LAPD; arts and society; religion.
Readings: Starr, Ch. 6 (pp. 131-188).
**Book titles due.*

- Week 5 (Oct. 12th):** Suburbia: homes and happiness in residential subdivisions.
 Subthemes: the San Fernando Valley; architecture and design; social class.
 Readings: Starr, Chs. 1 & 2 (pp. 3-53); excerpts from Vance Packard's *The Status Seekers* in Horowitz (Chs. 1, 2, 5 and 6).
- Week 6 (Oct. 19th):** Freeways to the future.
 Readings: Starr, Ch. 9 (pp. 245-266).
- Week 7 (Oct. 26th):** Freeway culture: automobiles, drive-ins, and Disneyland.
 Readings: online, to be assigned.
 ***Book reviews due. In-class presentations on book reviews.**
- Week 8 (Nov. 2nd):** The Cold War campus.
 Subthemes: the universities and the aerospace industry; HUAC.
 Readings: Starr, Ch. 8 (pp. 217-244); Schrecker, pp. 1-37.
Discussion of Document Analysis assignment.
- Week 9 (Nov. 9th):** "Father Knows Best": the roles of men, women, and children in the "nuclear family."
 Subthemes: teen culture; the Rosenberg case.
 Readings: Starr, Ch. 13 (pp. 352-380); Schrecker, pp. 155-170.
- Week 10 (Nov. 16th):** Literature, Film, Music and Comedy in the 1950s.
 Subthemes: Hollywood and HUAC; the Beats.
 Readings: Starr, Ch. 11 (pp. 285-313) and Ch. 14 (381-410); excerpts from Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti (to be assigned); Schrecker, pp. 229-236 and pp. 242-249.
- Week 11 (Nov. 23rd):** Race and civil rights in the 1950s.
 Subthemes: school integration; Montgomery bus boycott.
 Readings: Starr, Ch. 16 (pp. 436-465); excerpt from Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* in Martin, pp. 102-109.
 ***Document analyses due.**
- Week 12 (Nov. 30th):** Civil rights.
 Subthemes: women's rights; gay rights; immigrants' rights.
 Readings: Martin, pp. 1-41
 ***Presentations re: document analyses.**
- Week 13 (Dec. 7th):** Conclusion: California then and now.
 Readings: Starr, Ch. 17 (pp. 466-480).
 ***Essays due.**

Please contact the course instructor if you require material in an alternate format or if you require any other arrangements to make this course more accessible to you. You may also wish to contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at 661-2111 x 82147 for any specific question regarding an accommodation.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

PLAGIARISM

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offense (see Scholastic Offence Policy in the Western Academic Calendar).

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

The following rules pertain to the acknowledgements necessary in academic papers.

A. In using another writer's words, you must both place the words in quotation marks and acknowledge that the words are those of another writer.

You are plagiarizing if you use a sequence of words, a sentence or a paragraph taken from other writers without acknowledging them to be theirs. Acknowledgement is indicated either by (1) mentioning the author and work from which the words are borrowed in the text of your paper; or by (2) placing a footnote number at the end of the quotation in your text, and including a correspondingly numbered footnote at the bottom of the page (or in a separate reference section at the end of your essay). This footnote should indicate author, title of the work, place and date of Publication and page number. Method (2) given above is usually preferable for academic essays because it provides the reader with more information about your sources and leaves your text uncluttered with parenthetical and tangential references. In either case words taken from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks or set off from your text by single spacing and indentation in such a way that they cannot be mistaken for your own words. Note that you cannot avoid indicating quotation simply by changing a word or phrase in a sentence or paragraph which is not your own.

B. In adopting other writer's ideas, you must acknowledge that they are theirs.

You are plagiarizing if you adopt, summarize, or paraphrase other writers' trains of argument, ideas or sequences of ideas without acknowledging their authorship according to the method of acknowledgement given in 'A' above. Since the words are your own, they need not be

enclosed in quotation marks. Be certain, however, that the words you use are entirely your own; where you must use words or phrases from your source; these should be enclosed in quotation marks, as in 'A' above.

Clearly, it is possible for you to formulate arguments or ideas independently of another writer who has expounded the same ideas, and whom you have not read. Where you got your ideas is the important consideration here. Do not be afraid to present an argument or idea without acknowledgement to another writer, if you have arrived at it entirely independently. Acknowledge it if you have derived it from a source outside your own thinking on the subject.

In short, use of acknowledgements and, when necessary, quotation marks is necessary to distinguish clearly between what is yours and what is not. Since the rules have been explained to you, if you fail to make this distinction, your instructor very likely will do so for you, and they will be forced to regard your omission as intentional literary theft. Plagiarism is a serious offence which may result in a student's receiving an 'F' in a course or, in extreme cases, in their suspension from the University.

MEDICAL ACCOMMODATION

The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet his/her academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Please go to https://studentservices.uwo.ca/secure/medical_accommodations_link_for_OOR.pdf to read about the University's policy on medical accommodation. Please go to <http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/medicalform.pdf> to download the necessary form. In the event of illness, you should contact Academic Counselling as soon as possible. The Academic Counsellors will determine, in consultation with the student, whether or not accommodation is warranted. They will subsequently contact the instructors in the relevant courses about the accommodation. Once a decision has been made about accommodation, the student should contact his/her instructors to determine a new due date for term tests, assignments, and exams.

If you have any further questions or concerns please contact, Rebecca Dashford, Undergraduate Program Advisor, Department of History, 519-661-2111 x84962 or rdashfo@uwo.ca

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