

HIST B242: American Politics and Society: 1945 to the Present
Fall 2026

Syllabus updated August 30, 2026

Monday/Wednesday 10:10 to 11:30 am
Dalton 119

Professor Stephen Vider
svider@brynmawr.edu
Office: Old Library 242

Office Hours

Mondays 2:15 to 4 pm (sign-up on Moodle), and by appointment

This course examines transformations in American culture, politics, and society from World War II to the present, focusing on flashpoints of government policy, popular culture, and social activism. We will trace this history with a focus on four central themes: (1) U.S. domestic and foreign policy and the fear of annihilation, from the Cold War, the specter of nuclear warfare, and the War in Vietnam to the War on Terror and climate change; (2) the growth and convergence of movements for social justice, including African American, Latinx, Asian American, indigenous, feminist, and LGBTQ+ rights and liberation; (3) the rise of the New Right, neoliberalism, the reshaping of party politics, and their impact on social welfare, healthcare, and the environment; and (4) the politics of popular culture, especially television, music, and digital media. Across these themes, we will consider where government leaders and popular culture have worked to reinforce social norms and sharpen political divides and how social movements have reshaped American politics and society.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- 1) Students will learn about key events, people, and movements in United States history since the 1945, and consider their impacts and resonances both in their own time and in ours.
- 2) Students will learn to read, contextualize, and analyze historical, primary sources.
- 3) Students will learn to read and analyze secondary sources by scholars, to consider how historians build and support arguments about the past.

GRADES

Attendance & Participation (25%)

Midterm (15%)

Paper 1 (20%)

Paper 2 (20%)

Final exam (20%)

ASSIGNMENTS

- 1) **Paper 1:** 1000-1250 word essay, based on a choice of primary sources, due Sunday, October 4, 11:59 pm (prompts posted online ten days before)
- 2) **Midterm:** In class, Monday, October 26; combination of identifications (identify key terms, events, and/or groups and explain their significance) and a short essay, based on choice of primary source; covers all lectures and readings through 10/21
- 3) **Paper 2:** 1000-1250 word essay, based on a choice of primary sources, due Sunday, November 22, 11:59 pm (prompts posted online ten days before)

- 4) **Final exam:** In class, Monday, December 7; combination of identifications (identify key terms, events, and/or groups and explain their significance) and a short essay, based on choice of primary source; covers all lectures and readings from 10/28 to 12/2

LATE ASSIGNMENTS/EXTENSIONS/MISSING WORK

Assignments turned in late will be reduced by a 1/3 of a grade per day (for example, an A becomes an A-). Requests for extensions will be considered up to 48 hours before an assignment is due—please email Professor Vider with a brief explanation of why you are requesting an extension.

Students must submit all written work to receive a passing grade for the course.

ATTENDANCE/ PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend all class sessions. If you expect to miss a class session, please notify Professor Vider in advance, and plan to ask another class member to share and discuss their notes.

Please come to class prepared to discuss the day's readings actively and thoughtfully. That might mean helping us break down the major ideas or arguments of a reading; posing a question about something you're confused or curious about; responding to someone else's question; pointing to a passage in the reading you would like to discuss more; or making a connection between two texts. Please remember that active participation includes actively listening to your classmates.

ACADEMIC HONESTY / AI

Be sure to cite your sources, whether you are quoting verbatim or summarizing information, an idea, or an argument. Representing someone else's words or ideas (including AI-generated text) as your own, is a serious intellectual and academic offense and may result in a failing grade for the assignment or course.

The goal of this class is to help you learn to think and analyze the world around you in historical terms. Writing – organizing and expressing our ideas on the page – is an essential way in which we learn to think. And while AI may be a helpful tool, it can also mean missing out on opportunities to practice thinking for ourselves. *I am much less interested in reading a perfect paper than helping you to work through your ideas and strengthen your skills as a writer and thinker.*

I encourage you to make use of the Bryn Mawr and Haverford Writing Centers:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/offices-services/writing-center>

<https://www.haverford.edu/writing-center>

CELL PHONES/ELECTRONIC DEVICES

As all of our readings are online, you may use your laptop or a tablet during class for taking notes and looking back at readings. Please, however, do not use your phone during class, as this can be very distracting for you, for other students, and for the professor. And please take note of when your use of laptops or tablets are becoming a distraction for you.

ACCOMODATIONS

Bryn Mawr College and I are committed to ensuring equal access to learning opportunities for all students. Students who require accommodations should contact Access Services at

accessservices@brynmawr.edu, or please reach out to me if you would like to discuss any specific concerns. Students may not record the class without prior approval from Access Services.

STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Your mental health is important. If you are feeling in distress, struggling with anxiety, or just need someone to talk to, I encourage you to reach out to the Bryn Mawr College Health and Wellness Center at 610-526-7360 (or 610-526-7778 after hours); or the Haverford College Counseling Service at 610-896-1290. **If you are struggling to complete work for the course, please reach out and let me know so we can come up with a plan together.**

Note on readings:

All readings for the course are available online through Moodle. Each week includes a combination of *primary (archival) sources*—written at the time we are looking at—and *secondary (scholarly) sources*—written by historians looking back.

Class discussion of the readings is a key part of class participation, so please be sure to complete the readings *in advance* of class and take some notes in response to the reading questions posted on Moodle.

Some general questions to keep in mind as you read: What keywords, phrases, sentences, or passages jumped out to you as especially important or revealing? What do you understand as the author's key point or argument? How does the secondary source for the day help to contextualize the primary source? And how would you connect or compare the different primary sources within and across weeks.

SCHEDULE

Week 1. Introduction / Readjustment

M 8/31: Introduction

No readings

W 9/2: Readjustment and Citizenship After World War II

Primary Sources

- Beatrice Berg, "When GI Girls Return," *New York Times*, April 22, 1945

Secondary Sources

- Robert F. Jefferson, "'Enabled Courage': Race, Disability, and Black World War II Veterans in Postwar America," *The Historian* 65, no. 5 (2003): 1102–1124.

Optional

- Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *The American Yawp*, Chapter 23, "The Great Depression" and Chapter 24, "World War II" (Stanford University Press, 2019), 190-256.
 - Suzanne Mettler, Introduction and Chapter 1, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G. I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-23.
-

Week 2. Cold War, Red Scare

M. 9/7: No Class (Labor Day)

W 9/9: Communist Containment and the 1950s Red Scare

Primary Sources

- Excerpt from President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, March 12, 1947 ("Truman Doctrine" speech)
- Joseph McCarthy speech delivered in Wheeling, West Virginia (1950)

Secondary Sources

- Nick French, "The Red Scare Deformed the New Deal by Purging Its Radical Civil Servants," *Jacobin*, January 17, 2023.

Optional

- Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *The American Yawp*, Chapter 25, "The Cold War" (Stanford University Press, 2019), 256-287.

Week 3. Gender, Sexuality and Race in the 1950s

M. 9/14: Gender, Sexuality, and the Family in the Age of Anxiety

Primary Sources

- "Duck and Cover" educational film, dir. Anthony Rizzo, Archer Productions, 1951.
- Excerpt from Betty Friedan, Chapter 1, *The Feminine Mystique* (W.W. Norton, 1963)

Secondary Sources

- Elaine Tyler May, Chapter 1, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (Basic Books, 2008), 16-36.

Optional

- John D'Emilio, "The Homosexual Menace" in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (Routledge, 1992).

W. 9/16: Civil Rights Activism in the 1950s

Primary Sources

- Rosa Parks, Conversation at Highlander Folk School, March 4, 1956.

Secondary Sources

- Francesca Polletta, Chapter 2, "It was Like a Fever," in *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 32-52.

Optional

- Michael Walzer, "The Young: A Cup of Coffee and a Seat," *Dissent*, Spring 1960
- Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *The American Yawp*, Chapter 26, "The Affluent Society" (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 288-313.

Week 4. The Great Society

M 9/21: NO CLASS

W 9/23: The Great Society and its Limits

Primary Sources

- Lyndon Johnson, excerpt from “Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty,” March 16, 1964.
- Excerpt from Dolores Huerta, speech at National Farm Workers Association march and rally in Sacramento, April 10, 1966.
- *With No One to Help Us* (1967), director unknown, produced by Office of Economic Opportunity [21 minutes]

Optional

- Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *The American Yawp*, Chapter 27, “The Sixties” (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 314-342.
 - Ana Elizabeth Rosas, “Love as Mirror and Pathway: The Undocumented Emotive Configuration of Mexican Immigration,” in *A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered: US Society in an Age of Restriction, 1924-1965*, ed. Maddalena Marinari, Madeline Y. Hsu, and María Cristina García (University of Illinois Press, 2019), 255-272.
-

Week 5. The Counterculture and the New Left

M 9/28: Beats to Hippies: The Rise of Counterculture in the 1950s and 1960s

Primary Sources

- Allen Ginsberg, *Howl* (1955)
- “The Post-Competitive, Comparative Game of a Free City,” from *The Digger Papers* (1968)

Secondary Sources

- Stephen Petrus, “Rumblings of Discontent: American Popular Culture and Its Response to the Beat Generation, 1957-1960,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 20, no. 1 (1997): 1-17.

Optional

- Blake Slonecker, “The Counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (2017).

W 9/30: The New Left, American Empire, and the Antiwar Movement

Primary Sources

- Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement” (1962)
- Susan Sontag, “What’s Happening in America,” *Styles of Radical Will* (Picador, 1969), originally published in *The Partisan Review* (1966)
- Statement by John Kerry of Vietnam Veterans Against the War (1971)

Optional

- Michael Kazin, “The Port Huron Statement at Fifty,” *Dissent*, Spring 2012
 - Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *The American Yawp*, Chapter 28, “The Unraveling” (Stanford University Press, 2019), 314-342.
 - Thomas Borstelmann, Chapter 1 (to page 36), *The 1970s: a New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality*, (Princeton University Press, 2012), 19-36.
-

Week 6. Liberation Movements

M 10/5: The Black Panther Party, the American Indian Movement, and the Meanings of Liberation

Primary Sources

- Black Panther Party, “Ten Point Program” (1966)
- The Alcatraz Proclamation (1969)
- Excerpt from Amy Uyematsu. “The Emergence of Yellow Power in America,” *Gidra*, Oct. 1969: 8–10.

Secondary Sources

- Edward D. Castillo, “A Reminiscence of the Alcatraz Occupation,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 18, no. 4 (1994), 111-122.

Optional

- Robyn C Spencer, Chapters 1 and 2, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Duke University Press, 2016) 7-60.

W 10/7: Gay and Trans Liberation

Primary Sources

- Carl Wittman, “Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto” (1969)
- Third World Gay Revolution, “What We Want, What We Believe” (1970)
- “Transvestite and Transexual Liberation” from *Philadelphia Gay Dealer* (1970)

Optional

- Richard Meyer, “Gay Power circa 1970: Visual Strategies for Sexual Revolution,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 3 (2006): 441-464
- Jessi Gan, “‘Still at the back of the bus’: Sylvia Rivera's struggle,” *Centro Journal* 19, no. 1 (2007): 124-139.

Week 7. NO CLASS / FALL BREAK

Week 8. Feminism and Community Health Activism in the 1970s

M 10/19: The Women’s Movement

Primary Sources

- Carol Hanisch, “The Personal is Political” (1968)
- Radicalesbians, “Woman-Identified Woman” (1970)
- “Combahee River Collective Statement” (1977)

Optional

- Sara M. Evans, Chapter 2, “Personal Politics,” *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century’s End* (Free Press, 2003), 18-60.

- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “Introduction,” *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Haymarket Books, 2017).

W 10/21: Women’s Health and Community Health Activism

Primary Sources

- Susan Brownmiller, “Everywoman’s Abortions: ‘The Oppressor Is Man’”

Secondary Sources

- Wendy Kline, Chapter 1, “Transforming Knowledge: The Making of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*,” *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women’s Health in the Second Wave* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 9-40.
- *Takeover: How We Occupied a Hospital and Changed Public Health Care*, dir. Emma Francis-Snyder (2021) [38 minutes]

Optional

- “Abortion Was Illegal. This Secret Group Defied the Law,” *Retro Report* (2018), 8 minutes
- Marcela Valdes, “When Doctors Took ‘Family Planning’ Into Their Own Hands,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2016.

Week 9. In-class Midterm / Anti-Psychiatry and Disability Activism

M 10/26: In-class midterm

W 10/28: Anti-Psychiatry and Disability Activism

Primary Sources

- Gary Alinder, “Gay Liberation Meets the Shrinks” (1970)

Secondary Sources

- *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution*, dir. James Lebrecht and Nicole Newnham (2020) [1 hr 46 min]

Week 10. Nixon, Environmentalism, and the Rise of the New Right

M 11/2: Nixon, Environmental Activism, and the White Working Class

Primary Sources

- *New York Times*, “Earth Day” advertisement, January 1970.

Secondary Sources

- Jefferson Cowie, “The ‘Hard Hat Riot’ Was a Preview of Today’s Political Divisions,” *New York Times*, May 1, 2020.
- James Morton Turner, excerpt from “‘The Specter of Environmentalism’: Wilderness, Environmental Politics, and the Evolution of the New Right,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 1 (2009), 123–129.

Optional

- Thomas Borstelmann, Chapter 1 (pages 36-72), *The 1970s: a New Global History from Civil Rights to Economic Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 36-72.

- Finis Dunaway, "Gas Masks, Pogo, and the Ecological Indian: Earth Day and the Visual Politics of American Environmentalism," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2008): 67–99

W 11/4: The Rise of the New Right: Antifeminism and Discophobia

Primary Sources

- Phyllis Schlafly, "What's Wrong with 'Equal Rights' for Women?" (1972)
- Richard Dyer, "In Defence of Disco," *Gay Left*, 1979

Optional

- Marjorie Spruill, Chapter 4, *Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Rights and Family Values That Polarized American Politics*, 71-92.
- Gillian Frank, "Discophobia: Antigay Prejudice and the 1979 Backlash against Disco," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, no. 2 (2007): 276-306.

Week 11. Reagan and the Family in the 1980s

M 11/9: "Government is the Problem": Reagan, the Welfare Queen, and the Yuppie

Primary Sources

- Ronald Reagan: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1981
- "Year of the Yuppie" *Newsweek*, December 13, 1984.

Secondary Sources

- Laura Briggs, Chapter 2, "Welfare Reform: The Vicious Campaign to Reform 1 Percent of the Budget," *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics* (University of California Press, 2017), 47-74.

Optional

- Joseph L. Locke and Ben Wright, eds., *The American Yawp*, Chapter 29, "The Triumph of the Right" (Stanford University Press, 2019), 314-342.

W 11/11: Screen Cultures in the 1980s

Primary Sources

- Episodes of *Family Ties*, *The Golden Girls*, and *227*

Optional

- Deirdre Boyle, "From Portapak to Camcorder: A Brief History of Guerrilla Television," *Journal of Film and Video* 44, no. 1/2 (1992): 67-79.
- *Wild Style*, dir. Charlie Ahearn (1983)

Week 12. AIDS, the Culture Wars, and Neoliberalism

M 11/16: HIV/AIDS Activism and Government Neglect

Primary Sources

- "The Denver Principles" (1983)
- Vito Russo, "Why We Fight," (1988)

Secondary Sources

- *United in Anger*, dir. Jim Hubbard, produced with Sarah Schulman (2012) (1 hr 30 min)

Optional

- Sarah Schulman, Chapter 1, *Let the Record Show*

W 11/18: Bush, Clinton, and the Rise of Neoliberalism

Secondary Sources

- John Patrick Leary, “What is Neoliberalism?” *Teen Vogue*, March 14, 2023.
- Donna Murch, “The Clintons’ War on Drugs: Why Black Lives Didn’t Matter” in Robert T. Chase (ed.), *Caging Borders and Carceral States: Incarcerations, Immigration Detentions, and Resistance* (University of North Carolina, 2019), 342-351.

Optional

- Barbara Ehrenreich, “American style welfare reform: Inequality in the Clinton era,” in *Democratic Equality: What Went Wrong?*, ed. Edward Broadbent (University of Toronto Press, 2001): 148-161.

*****Paper 2 Due Sunday 11/22, 11:59 pm*****

Week 13. NO CLASS / THANKSGIVING BREAK

Week 14. Globalization and the War on Terror

M 11/30: Disaffection, Dissent, and the Early Internet in an Era of Globalization and Generation X

Primary Sources

- “Globalize Liberation, Not Corporate Power,” *Direct Action Network* (1999)

Secondary Sources

- “Radical Puppets Revisiting the 1999 Seattle WTO Protests” *State of the Human* podcast (2021).
- Claire Potter, “Electronic Democracy,” in *Political Junkies: From Talk Radio to Twitter, How Alternative Media Hooked Us on Politics and Broke Our Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2020).

Optional

- Spencer Beswick, “‘We’re Pro-Choice and We Riot!’: Anarcha-Feminism in Love and Rage (1989-98),” *Coils of the Serpent* 11 (2023): 148-171.
- Jill Lepore, “Democracy v. the Machine,” *Guardian*, August 18, 2026.

W 12/2: Bush’s War on Terror and the Security State

Primary Sources

- Susan Sontag, “9/11,” “A Few Weeks Later,” “A Year Later,” from *At the Same Time* (New York: FSG, 2007).
- Moustafa Bayoumi, “The Rites and Rights of Citizenship,” in *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror* (NYU Press, 2015), 121–127.

Secondary Sources

- Madeleine Carlisle, “How 9/11 Radically Expanded the Power of the U.S. Government” *Time*, September 11, 2021

Optional

- Saher Khan and Vignesh Ramachandran, “Post-9/11 surveillance has left a generation of Muslim Americans in a shadow of distrust and fear,” *PBS Newshour*, September 16, 2021.

Week 15. Final Exam / The Post-racial Myth

M 12/7: In-class final exam

W 12/9: Hurricane Katrina, Disaster Capitalism, and the Myth of a Post-Racial America

Primary Sources

- Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union” speech (2008)

Secondary Sources

- Ibram X. Kendi, “Our New Postracial Myth,” *The Atlantic*, June 22, 2021.

Optional

- Andy Horowitz, Chapter 4, *Katrina: A History, 1915-2015* (Harvard University Press: 2015), 115-137.
 - Bobbi-Jeanne Misick, “Immigrants Helped Rebuild New Orleans, Then They Set Down Roots. Under Trump, Some Worry They’ll Be Forced to Leave.” *Verite News*, Aug. 29, 2025.
-