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HIST 231:
“The State of the Union is Not Good”
The United States in Crisis in the 1970s

1:45-4:45 PM

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Office Hours:

M. 3:30-5:00 PM and by appointment

Overview

This seminar immerses students in the decade that brought us the modern United States. The 1970s were years of transition and crisis, cultural richness and political breakthroughs. It was also a decade of profound economic dislocation and political upheaval, the reverberations of which continue to define the contours of American politics and culture today. In fact, the course’s title – “The state of the union is not good” – is a direct line from President Gerald R. Ford’s 1975 State of the Union address. While Ford had many reasons to be anxious about the United States’ precarious circumstances and uncertain future, as we will see, Americans of all walks of life negotiated these and other crises in a variety of ways, creating new forms of politics and culture that continue to shape the way Americans think about our cultures, our selves, and our government.

Weekly Assignments:

By noon on the day of class, each student will select a quotation or a short series of quotations from a single primary or secondary source and post them to our Canvas discussion board for

that week. Beneath these quotations, students should include a couple of bullet points briefly explaining why you found these selections interesting (e.g., “White male anger and frustration at XYZ seems central here and seems similar to the kind of rage expressed by white men in ABC. Would be worth comparing?”). I have also posted a google doc via Canvas in which I encourage students to post **anonymous “nuts and bolts” questions** about historical developments, events, and facts. These are intended to be basic sorts of questions that would be useful to know before having a more detailed discussion (e.g., “Why was the United States involved in Vietnam in the first place?” or “I don’t really understand inflation and why and how it happens”). I will begin each class by briefly addressing these nuts and bolts questions, and then your quotations will help anchor our discussions and give me an opportunity to let you speak more about your chosen quotations.

Class Presentations:

Beginning in week three, when everyone will give a low-stakes, *ungraded* practice version, students will form small groups and deliver a 12-15-minute presentation based on a close reading of some of the week’s primary sources. The presentation will offer a brief (2-3 minute) background on the author or historical context for the source(s); identify and explain key arguments in reference to the broader historical or literary context (~5 minutes); and discuss the significance of the document(s) in terms of our themes and historical developments (~5 minutes). Rather than attempt to be comprehensive in covering all of the week’s sources, I encourage the groups to think synthetically, to find contrasts, and, in general, to fit the sources into *your own analysis* of the week’s themes. Throughout, students are encouraged to integrate discussion of various forms of media – music, movies, etc., both on the syllabus and not. The presentations should conclude with 2-4 questions for discussion that expand out from the specific sources and ask bigger questions linked to previous weeks, broader developments in US history, or, if well-conceived, shed light on more recent events. Ultimately, the goal of these presentations is to practice the skills of integrating analysis of a variety of sources grounded in a close reading of a particular document. We will divvy up these assignments in week three. **All students are responsible for reading all documents, whether presenting or not.**

Each presentation should employ a strong visual component (PowerPoint, Prezi, Keynote, etc.), and, while I encourage you to use various forms of media, those sources should be limited to no more than 1 minute of content each, with a reasonable total comprising less than 20% of the overall presentation. Finally, be sure to practice your presentation, and if you have a number of moving parts (e.g., starting and stopping videos), please make sure you get to class early to set up and run through those aspects in advance rather than during the presentation.

COVID Masking and Attendance Policies

For the first month of the semester (thru September 28), I will ask all students to mask during class except when speaking, presenting, asking questions, sipping, etc. I will reassess the policy once we’re through the first few weeks of everyone being back together. I so appreciate your

willingness to tolerate if not support this policy. I hope very much to be done with it soon and that, while in effect, it might help limit or avoid disruptions to our continuity and community building over the crucial first few weeks of class.

Students are entitled to one “no questions asked” absence without penalty to your participation grade. Regardless, I urge you to be in touch with me should you be ill, need to travel, or otherwise need to miss a class and are seeking to be excused. After the one unexcused absence, each subsequent unexcused absence **will result in a five-percentage point reduction of your participation grade** (which amounts to 25% percent of your overall assessment).

Projects:

Class assessments are organized around the development and execution of two projects, one due at the midterm and the other major project due at the end of the semester.

The first is based upon a close, contextual reading of Marabel Morgan’s book, *The Total Woman*, a best-selling self-help book for married, evangelical Christian women. The goal of the project is to situate the book, its argument, and / or its author in the context of the mid-1970s by making analytical connections to a range of other primary sources in light of our other readings. Your group presentations are, in part, designed to prepare you for this and the final project.

The final project invites students to pick a topic of their own choosing and to use it as a lens on key developments during the decade. In the past, students have developed projects on horror films, the rise of consumer investment instruments, Jimmy Carter’s Christianity, the impact of Jamaican immigrant culture, the politics of the Vietnam War in Philadelphia, and much more. These will be developed as StoryMaps (see our online syllabus for an example).

Both project assignment guides will be posted on Canvas in the “Files” tab.

To help you develop your ideas for the final project, each student will also write *three* 2 page reflections over the course of the semester in which you dig more deeply into themes and events of interest to you. This is an especially good time to extend your thinking on readings, to reflect on our class conversations, and to pose questions. Based on these responses, I will suggest sources, topics, and other material to help you further hone your thinking. These will be graded cumulatively and need not be polished nor fully developed ideas: they are meant to help you begin to develop ideas. The entries can be completed anytime that suits your schedule provided the first is completed by **Friday September 30** and all three are completed by **Friday, November 18**.

Books to purchase (mandatory):

Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman* (1973) (buy this used from Amazon or another source – regardless of where you get it, be sure to read the review comments on Amazon . . . !)

Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (MacMillan, 2012)

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007)

Movies we will watch together (Location and times TBD):

Harlan County USA (week of 9/19)

Network (week of 10/3)

TBD (week of 11/7 – TBD as in to be determined, not the name of a movie!)

Assessments:

- Marabel Morgan (*The Total Woman*) project & presentation (15%)
- Weekly questions, comments, and participation in class (25%)
- Short group presentations (1 / student) (10%)
- Three synthetic reflections on themes and sources of interest (15%)
- Final Project + presentation (equiv. of 8-10 pgs and 10 min. pres.) (35%)

A note on Technology in the Classroom

I strongly urge you to simply turn off your cell phone while in class. Not to vibrate. Not to silent. Just off. Do yourself the favor of focus. I reserve the right to embargo any devices that become a distraction during class.

I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand and on paper during lectures. As many recent reports from experts have found, using a computer, phone, or tablet for notes in class is not unlike smoking cigarettes: it not only limits your performance, but it also has deleterious second-hand effects on those around you. “Psychological studies have found that undergraduates who multitask on laptops comprehend less of what has been covered in a lecture than do other students. They have also examined students who were taking notes— with some students sitting next to those who were multitasking on their laptops. Those next to a laptop multitasker also saw drops in what they picked up from the lecture.” —*Inside Higher Education*

But, it’s also important to remember that Penn is committed to equal access to education and if you have a compelling reason or a confirmed need, please feel free to use your laptop for notes. If you have a disability or need accommodation, i.e., a note taker, please consult the

Office of Student Disabilities Services, and we can ensure that you receive the proper support and accommodation. Their website is: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/>

A note on Academic Honesty & Integrity

Students' work must be completed in line with Penn's Code of Academic Integrity, <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>.

The library has pulled together a useful guide to avoiding plagiarism, here: http://gethelp.library.upenn.edu/PORT/documentation/plagiarism_policy.html

I am always happy to discuss these matters in order to help you avoid costly mistakes. Violations – cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating others' dishonesty, etc. – will almost certainly result in failing the course.

SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS

UNIT I: THINKING THROUGH DECADES

W. Aug. 31 Course Introduction, the Problem of Decades, and the 1960s

Joan Didion, "On the Morning After the Sixties" (in class)

First week discussion board posts are personal introductions (see Canvas discussion board for details)

How we read history and discussion of what makes this a "reading" seminar

W. Sept. 7 Short Primer on the 1970s

Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire*, Introduction and ch. 1

Kevin Kruse & Julian Zelizer, *Fault Lines*, 7-87

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, introduction

Primary source and annotation workshop (James Fallows, "Daddy, what did you do in the class war")

UNIT II: CONFRONTING LIMITS

W. Sept. 14 Intersectionality and Feminism(s)

Recommended listen: *Slow Burn: Roe v. Wade*, "[Get Married or Go Home](#)" (Season 7: Episode 1)

Robert Self, *All in The Family*, chs. 4 & 5

Introduction, Combahee River Collective Statement, and **Barbara Smith interview with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor**, in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*

Introduction, Nancy MacLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000*

**Short practice presentations using sources from Nancy MacLean, *The American Women's Movement, 1945-2000*:

- National Organization for Women, "Statement of Purpose"
- Margaret Cerullo, "Hidden History: An Illegal Abortion"
- National Organization for Women, "Why Feminists Want Child Care"
- Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman"
- First National Chicana Conference, Workshop Resolutions
- Johnnie Tillmon, "Welfare is a Women's Issue"
- Chicago Women's Liberation Union, "Socialist Feminism: A Strategy for the Women's Movement"

**Marabel Morgan Projects Assigned and StoryMaps primer

View in Class: *Town Bloody Hall* (1979)

W. Sept. 21 New Worlds of Work and New Cultures of Class

VIEW (Date and Time TBD): *Harlan County USA* (1976)

Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, Intro, chs. 1 and 4

Gabriel Winant, *The Next Shift*, ch. 5

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, ch. 3

W. Sept. 28 Vietnam & New Conservatism

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, ch. 1

Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home*, chs 1-2

Thomas Sugrue and John Skrentny, "The White Ethnic Strategy"

Christian Appy, *American Reckoning*, ch. 7

Jefferson Cowie, "[The 'Hard Hat Riot' Was a preview of Today's Political Divisions,](#)" *New York Times*, May 11, 2020 (online)

W. Oct. 5 Global Shocks

VIEW (Date and Time TBD): *Network* (1976)

Charles S. Maier, "Malaise" and Matthew Connelly, "Future Shock," from *The Shock of the Global*

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, ch. 2

****GROUP 1 PRESENTATIONS ON:**

- "Can You Afford . . . Anything?" Ladies Home Journal, October 1978
- Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (ch. 1)
- Hal Lindsay, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (selections)

W. Oct. 12 Born Again Cultures and Religious Right Rising

Robert Self, *All in The Family*, chs., 10, 11, 12

****GROUP 2 PRESENTATIONS ON:**

Anita Bryant, "When Homosexuals Burn the Holy Bible in Public . . . How Can I Stand By Silently" (1977)

Jerry Falwell, "Homosexuality: Is It an Acceptable Lifestyle?" (1978)

Phyllis Schlafly on the ERA (1978)

Francis Schaeffer, "A Christian Manifesto" (1981)

****Marabel Morgan project meetings outside of class all week; have sources ready for one-on-one meetings to discuss. SIGN UP FOR A TIME [HERE](#).**

W. Oct. 19 Marabel Morgan Project Presentations

Final projects due via Canvas **Friday, October 21 at 11:59 PM**

UNIT III: CULTURAL REVOLUTIONS

W. Oct. 26 Authenticity, Self-Help, and the Transformations of the Radical 60s

Grace Elizabeth Hale, *A Nation of Outsiders*, ch. 6, and selections from ch. 7 (stop at p. 254)

Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home*, ch. 5

Dylan Gottlieb, "[Rat Race](#)" (online)

****GROUP 3 PRESENTATIONS ON:**

Richard Bach, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*

"Latest Rage: Getting People to 'Tune Into Themselves,'" US News and World Report, February 16, 1976

Jimmy Carter campaign material

W. Nov. 2 Urban Crises / Urban Renaissance

View: *All in the Family*, Season 1, "[Lionel Moves into the Neighborhood](#)" (1971)

Elizabeth Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, ch. 5

Marcia Chatelain, *Franchise: The Golden Arches in Black America*, ch. 5

Bench Ansfield, "The Crisis of Insurance and the Insuring of the Crisis: Riot Reinsurance and Redlining in the Aftermath of the 1960s Uprisings," *Journal of American History* (2021)

****GROUP 4 PRESENTATIONS ON:**

Rebecca Solnit, *Nonstop Metropolis*, "Burning Down and Rising Up: The Bronx in the 1970s" (map [here](#)); Marshall Berman, "New York City: Seeing Through the Ruins," and interviews with Valerie Capers, Grandmaster Caz, Grandwizzard Theodore, and Mellie Mel

W. Nov. 9 Liberation?

View: *Movie TBD* (Date and Time TBD)

Robert Self, *All in the Family*, ch. 8

Alice Echols, *Hot Stuff*, chs. 1, 2 & 6

W. Nov. 16 The Triumph of the Market?

View: Milton Friedman *Free to Choose* episode ("[The Power of the Market](#)")

Darren Grem, "The Marketplace Missions of S. Truett Cathy and Chick-Fil-A"

Angus Burgin, "Age of Certainty: Galbraith, Friedman, and the Public Life of Economic Ideas," *History of Political Economy* (2013)

Robert Self, *All in the Family*, Epilogue

GROUP FIVE PRESENTATIONS ON:

NYTimes articles on Dewey Burton
Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits,"
New York Times, September 13, 1970
Friedman fan mail

W. Nov. 30 Project Meetings and StoryMaps Workshop

W. Dec. 7 Project Presentations

Reminder: These presentations are of your work *in progress* rather than a final presentation of your findings. Part of the goal will be to invite your audience to help think through your argument, find other sources, receive suggestions on your narrative and argument structure, etc. The more "final" the presentation feels, then, the less helpful we can be!

F. Dec. 16 Final Projects Due by 11:59 PM