History 372W/472 Prof. Joan Shelley Rubin

Twentieth-Century American Culture Fall, 2024

What ideas, values, and anxieties found expression in the United States during the twentieth century? This seminar will pursue that question by exploring fiction, social commentary, the visual arts, and music in relation to such developments as the conduct and aftermath of war; the emergence of modern consumer culture; changing gender roles; economic hardship and affluence; and technological innovation. Reading will include both primary and secondary sources.

The books included on the syllabus (please see page 3) are available for purchase at the UR Barnes & Noble bookstore. Graduate students are expected to read books in their entirety; undergraduates will have the option to read selected chapters. Books will also be on reserve at Rush Rhees Library.

Participation in class discussion is the heart of a seminar. If you feel uncomfortable voicing your views for any reason, please meet privately with the instructor. Office hours are Tuesdays, 2-4 in 363, 3rd floor of Rush Rhees. Meetings at other times can be arranged by email: [joan.rubin@rochester.edu](mailto:joan.rubin@rochester.edu).

Participation depends on completing weekly assignments! For every class, students will generate two or three questions about the assigned material to share during the conversation.

**Written work:**

1. Two 2-3 pp. papers focused on part or all of an assigned reading. Students may choose the texts about which they wish to write but must complete both by October 31. These short papers must be written before the class discussion of the material takes place.
2. A research paper on a subject related to the topic of the course. Undergraduates’ papers should be 20-25 pages in length; graduate students’ papers should be 25-30 pages. More guidance about these projects will be offered later in the course, but please keep these deadlines in mind:

**October 31** Everyone must turn in a brief statement of their research paper topic and two or three sources that they expect to use.

**December 5** Undergraduates must submit a draft of their papers. They will be returned for revision asap. Graduate students are welcome to submit drafts as well.

**December 16** Final versions of papers due. Hard copy preferred, placed in instructor’s Department mailbox, but email will be accepted.

**Grades:**

Grades will be determined roughly according to the following percentages. Improvement will be rewarded!

Class participation 40%

Research paper 40%

Short papers 20%

**Practices and policies:**

Pronouns: The instructor’s pronouns are she, her, hers. Students may volunteer to tell the instructor and other course members their preferred pronoun at the first class meeting, or inform the instructor by email of their preference. Students who do not wish to share pronoun preferences will not have to do so.

The College’s credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIS 372W are expected to devote at least one hour each week to identifying the main lines of argument in course readings, working alone or in groups, and carrying out writing assignments.

The University of Rochester respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds and abilities. In the event you encounter any barrier(s) to full participation in this course resulting from the impact of disability, please contact the Office of Disability Resources. The access coordinators in the Office of Disability Resources can meet with you to discuss the barriers you are experiencing and explain the eligibility process for establishing academic accommodations. You can reach the Office of Disability Resources at: disability@rochester.edu; (585) 276-5075; Taylor Hall.

All assignments and activities associated with this course must be performed in accordance with the University of Rochester's Academic Honesty Policy. Cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be treated as such. Anyone who engages in such activities will be turned over to the College Board on Academic Honesty for disciplinary action, as outlined at http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/. For a helpful discussion of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association’s ‘Defining Plagiarism,’ <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/plagiarism-curricular-materials-for-history-instructors/defining-plagiarism>.

**Tentative schedule of topics and assignments:**

August 29 Introduction

Edward Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok* (1920)

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3538/3538-h/3538-h.htm>

“An Explanation,” Chapter II, Chapter III (to be looked at in class)

September 5 Harold Stearns, ed., *Civilization in the United States* (1922)

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/68385>

Preface, essays by Van Wyck Brooks and Deems Taylor

Use e-reader for original book (easier to read)

12 Becoming Modern

Booth Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918)

[https://www.globalgreyebooks.com/magnificent-ambersons-ebook.html#downloads](https://urldefense.com/v3/__https:/www.globalgreyebooks.com/magnificent-ambersons-ebook.html*downloads__;Iw!!CGUSO5OYRnA7CQ!ZyvbVWO2EA1jw6fqzsmFVUhDcab9ZlhmMC2QWJX1D9Ka_yB4ZeLHxqVj6GBHIe4sISF1OZKZlz4fJLKC10iAXnQ_XQ$)

19 Culture and Consumption

Timothy D. Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the*

*Conquest of Culture*

Undergraduate assignment: Chapters 1-5

October 26 Cultural Consequences of the Great Depression

Edmund Wilson, *American Jitters: A Year of the Slump* (1932)

Undergraduate assignment: Select sections you want to read

In Hathi Trust through Rush Rhees database

3 No class

10 World War II and Its Aftermath

Elizabeth Samet, *Looking for the Good War* (2021)

17 Beyond “Leave It to Beaver”

James Gaines, *The Fifties: An Underground History* (2022)

24 Gender, Work, and Place in the 1950s and ‘60’s

*Collected Stories of John Cheever*

Selections TBA

31 Varieties of 1960s Experience

*The Port Huron Statement* (1962) <https://images2.americanprogress.org/campus/email/PortHuronStatement.pdf>

TV/film examples shown in class

November 7 “Race Relations”

*The Moynihan Report* (1965)

<https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/webid-moynihan>

14 Youth, Music, and the New York Scene

Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (2010)

21 Feminism in the 1990s

Lisa Levenstein, *They Didn’t See Us Coming: The Hidden History of*

*Feminism in the Nineties* (2020)

December 4 Representations of Indigenous People

Philip DeLoria, *Playing Indian* (1998)

The Department of History has a fund to support book purchases for undergraduates. Please contact [Jacqui.Rizzo@rochester.edu](mailto:Jacqui.Rizzo@rochester.edu) for more information.