

History 395
American Political History in the Twentieth Century
Fall 2010
Hamilton Hall 570
Tuesdays, 2 – 4:50 PM

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 10 AM to 12 PM and by appointment

Course Description

This undergraduate seminar in history will explore the major developments in American public life during the twentieth century. Defining both “politics” and “political history” as broadly as possible, we will examine how citizens, parties, interest groups, and social organizations interacted with their state and defined the path of American domestic and foreign policies during a tumultuous century. Among the themes we’ll explore are social and economic policy, America’s presence on the international stage, legal and Constitutional developments, political battles between labor and business, the importance of grassroots social movements, and the tortured trajectories of liberal and conservative political ideologies.

The course’s fundamental aim is to introduce students to the methods and techniques that political historians use to make sense of the past and interpret contemporary events in historical context. To that end, students will write a polished and sophisticated work of original historical scholarship based on primary source research on a topic of their choosing.

Assignments and Requirements

This is a seminar course, which means there will be no lectures. Our class time will be divided between reading/discussion sessions and workshop sessions, all of which will be geared toward understanding American political history and the challenges of research and writing in the field. This syllabus lists the required reading and writing assignments for each class meeting.

The success of our reading sessions will depend on every student actively engaging the assigned readings. This means taking notes and preparing specific points you would like to raise and discuss. The regular (relatively brief) writing assignments are designed to help you engage the readings more closely. Your class participation and thoughtful completion of the writing assignments count heavily toward your course grade.

Attendance Policy

Attendance at scheduled class meetings is mandatory. Unexcused absences will lead to a reduction in your participation grade.

Research Paper

All students in History 395 will submit a 20–25 page final research paper (double-spaced; Times New Roman 12-point font; 1 inch margin on all sides) on **December 7, 2010**. For style and footnote guidelines, students should consult K. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations* (Chicago: 1996).

In part of the process of writing this paper, students will choose a research topic, in consultation with the course instructor, and submit a one-page written prospectus (proposal) on **September 20**. On **October 19**, students will submit an annotated bibliography of at least 8 sources. In Weeks 12 and 13, students will participate in small-group presentations of their works-in-progress, where they will both present and evaluate their peers; during Weeks 13 and 14, students will participate in rough-draft workshops. (See below for more detail.) Timely completion of all written assignments and preliminary deadlines on the research paper (prospectus, presentation, rough draft) is expected, and late assignments will be marked down one-half letter grade for each day after the due date.

Please Note: The Honor Code will be vigorously enforced in all aspects of this course.

Grade Breakdown

In-Class Participation:	10%
Writing Assignments for Class (for Discussion Weeks):	10%
Prospectus (Week 7):	5%
Annotated Bibliography (Week 9):	5%
In-Class presentation of Primary Source (Week 9/10):	5%
Introduction and Outline (Week 11):	5%
Presentation (Weeks 10/11)*:	12.5%
Rough Draft Workshop (Weeks 14/15)*:	12.5%
Final Research Paper (Week 16):	35%

* Grade reflects both your own work and your active evaluation of others during group work.

Required Readings

The Democratic Experiment, Meg Jacobs, William Novak, Julian Zelizer, eds.

The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism, Sidney Milkis and Jerome Mileur, eds.

Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, William Leuchtenburg

Debating the American Conservative Movement, Donald Critchlow and Nancy MacLean

The Age of Reagan, Sean Wilentz

NOTE: Writing assignments for Discussion Weeks are due **by email** the night before class. (“Night” = “Before I wake up in the morning.”)

Week 1, August 24: Introduction to Course

Class Discussion: What is Political History? How do we “do” it? What are primary and secondary sources? What is historiography?

Week 2, August 31: Discussion – The New Deal

Reading Assignment 1: William Leuchtenburg, *Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal* (Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10)

Writing Assignment: Identify 4 discrete instances (with page numbers) where Leuchtenburg argues that FDR refrained from taking a more radical path, but rather pursued a middle ground between more extreme possibilities. Write **2 or 3 sentences about each instance** you identify. What were FDR’s choices? Why does Leuchtenburg think he made the choice he did?

Week 3, September 7: Discussion – Patterns & Problems in 20th c. Politics

Reading Assignment 2: *Democratic Experiment* (Chapter 1 (skip pages 9 to 12), Chapters 10 – 13)

Writing Assignment: As you read, explain what the authors mean by the following terms in **1–2 sentences each** (indicating page numbers):

antistatism	purchasing power
new institutionalism	suburban strategy
sociocultural political history	wage-price spiral
liberal synthesis	earmark
localism	New South

Week 4, September 14: Discussion – The Great Society and Liberalism

Reading Assignment 3: *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism* (Chapters by Milkis (pp. 1 – 37), Shribman (pp. 233 – 249), Fox Piven and Cloward (pp. 253 – 266), Baxandall (pp. 270 – 286), and Melnick (pp. 387 – 410)).

Writing Assignment: Based on this reading, write a **2 or 3 paragraph** explanation of what the word “liberalism” meant in the context of mid-20th century American politics. Think about both high politics and social movement activism. Reference at least 4 examples from the reading.

Week 5, September 21 Discussion – Conservatism

Reading Assignment 4: *Debating the American Conservative Movement* (all)

Writing Assignment: In a **2–3 paragraph response**, explain what you take to be the most fundamental differences between Critchlow’s and MacLean’s interpretations of conservatism. Reference 2 or 3 of the primary sources, in addition to the essays, to support your points.

In Class: Working with partisan primary sources.

Week 6, September 28 Research – Preliminary Discussion and Library Visit

In Class: Discussion of preliminary ideas about topics and sources. Discussion of online source material; Schedule 15 minute meetings for next week.

Class Visit to Southern Historical Collection at Wilson Library, meeting with archivist Laura Brown.

Week 7, October 5 Research – Individual Meetings on Paper Topics

Research Deadline #1: Email me Paper Prospectus (**1 page typed**) by *Monday night, September 20*.

15 minute individual meetings in 422 Hamilton between 1 PM and 5 PM.

Week 8, October 12 Writing Modern Political History—The Age of Reagan

Reading Assignment 5: Wilentz, *Age of Reagan*
(required: Chapters 1–7; suggested: Chapters 8 – 9)

Writing Assignment: According to a review of this book, Wilentz (whose previous scholarship concerned 19th century history) is generally “perceived more as an erudite spokesman for the Democratic Party than as a judicious analyst of the Republican agenda” and yet, in this book, he “largely abandons partisanship in favor of

professionalism.”¹ Do you agree? In a **1-to-2 page response**, consider what happens when a historian writes about issues about which he holds a pronounced political opinion. Cite at least 3 specific instances in book where Wilentz leans toward *either* partisanship *or* professionalism (or, if you’re *very* observant, both simultaneously!).

Week 9, October 19 Research – Primary Source Workshop I

Research Deadline #2: Annotated Bibliography Due
Bibliography should include at least 4 primary and 4 secondary sources. Please see Turabian’s *Manual for Writers* in Davis Reference for proper citation forms.

In-Class Presentations I: Each student will give a **10 minute** oral presentation analyzing one primary source that he or she plans to use. [NB: Half the class will present today; the other half will present next week.]

Week 10, October 26 Research – Primary Source Workshop II

In-Class Presentations II: Those students who did not give an oral presentation of a primary source last week will go this week.

Week 11, November 2 The Age of Reagan, Part II

Research Deadline #3: Introduction (**approx. 2 pages**) and outline of final research paper.

Reading Assignment 6: Wilentz, *Age of Reagan*
(required: Chapters 10 – 14; suggested: Epilogue)

Writing Assignment: In a 2 to 3 page essay, discuss how Wilentz’s treatment of the Bush and Clinton presidencies compares with his treatment of the Reagan presidency. What are similar and different about his arguments, biases, content focus (foreign and domestic policies; scandals; electioneering), and sources (flip to the back to check out the sources)? What are the ups and downs of President-based historical writing?

¹ Douglas Brinkley, “The Long Shadow,” *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, 18 May 2008.

For the next four weeks, we will divide the class into four groups (I – IV) of four students and meet for 1-hour sessions during class time (and one hour before or after class, to be scheduled). For two weeks, the groups will give presentations (2 students from each group present in the first week; the other 2 present in the second week). For the second two weeks, the groups will conduct reviews of rough drafts (2 students give rough drafts the first week; 2 the next). All students are expected to actively engage in both the presentations and rough draft reviews, whether or not it is your turn to “go.” We will reconvene as a class for the final submission of the papers on [DATE TBD], when our group discussion will focus on the challenges, successes, joys, and frustrations of the process of historical writing.

Week 12, November 9: Presentations I

Two students from each group will present for 30 minutes (15 minutes presentation; 15 minutes group discussion). These presentations should summarize your research so far. What major question are you addressing? Why is it important? What have other scholars said about this issue? What types of sources are you engaging? What are their strengths and limitations? What’s frustrating or encouraging you most at the moment? Students will be graded on the organization and thoughtfulness of their presentations, the breadth of their research, and the sophistication of their analysis. In addition, grades for these presentations will reflect the contributions, insights, critiques, and suggestions of the three non-presenting students during the “group discussion” period.

- 1 – 2 pm: Group I (students 1 and 2)**
- 2 – 3 pm: Group II (students 1 and 2)**
- 3 – 4 pm: Group III (students 1 and 2)**
- 4 – 5 pm: Group IV (students 1 and 2)**

Week 13, November 16: Presentations II

- 1 – 2 pm: Group I (students 3 and 4)**
- 2 – 3 pm: Group II (students 3 and 4)**
- 3 – 4 pm: Group III (students 3 and 4)**
- 4 – 5 pm: Group IV (students 3 and 4)**

Week 14, November 23: Rough Draft Workshop I

“1” and “2” students from all groups should email me their rough drafts by **Friday, November 19** at noon. I will send these on to your groups by Friday evening. All group members should read and critique the two drafts in advance of Tuesday’s meeting. Prepare to comment on the drafts, and to respond to comments about your own draft (if you are submitting it). As with the presentations, grades for these workshops will reflect both the work of the presenting student and the critiques and participation of the non-presenting students during the workshop period.

1 – 2 pm: Group I (students 1 and 2)

2 – 3 pm: Group II (students 1 and 2)

3 – 4 pm: Group III (students 1 and 2)

4 – 5 pm: Group IV (students 1 and 2)

Week 15, November 30 Rough Draft Workshop II

“3” and “4” students from all groups should email me their rough drafts by **Friday, November 26** at noon. I will send these on to your groups by Friday evening. **[NB: This deadline occurs during Thanksgiving break; please plan accordingly.]** All group members should read and critique the two drafts in advance of Monday’s meeting. Prepare to comment on the drafts, and to respond to comments about your own draft (if you are submitting it). As with the presentations, grades for these workshops will reflect both the work of the presenting student and the critiques and participation of the non-presenting students during the workshop period.

1 – 2 pm: Group I (students 3 and 4)

2 – 3 pm: Group II (students 3 and 4)

3 – 4 pm: Group III (students 3 and 4)

4 – 5 pm: Group IV (students 3 and 4)

Week 16, December 7 Final papers due

Debriefing, discussion of process, snacks.