

HISTORY 302 s.4 FALL SEMESTER 2010

Reagan's America: Society, Culture and Politics in the 1980s

Scheduling number: 447010
Class meets Tuesdays 6-9 in 003 Ferguson

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The Course

This course considers the political and cultural counter-revolution of the 1980s, the social movement that is closely associated with the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Reagan-era conservatism was in many ways an attempt to reverse the radical changes of the 1960s. Though conservatives failed to achieve many of their goals, we can see a marked impact on US politics and foreign policy, as well as on matters as diverse as religion and family life, on attitudes towards gender and sexuality, on law enforcement and internal security. Throughout, we will make extensive use of popular culture, particularly literary and cinematic representations, to understand and illustrate political and social developments.

The thought of doing a course on this period might initially seem odd, not least because in so many history departments, “American history” almost seems to end around 1975, with the closing phase of the Vietnam War. This is odd, since people were already offering courses on “the sixties” within a couple of years after the end of that over-hyped decade. As we will see though, a case can be made that the modern-day US is far more a product of the eighties era than of the better-known 1960s. How should our view of the 1980s be affected by what we know of subsequent events – of the Clinton and Bush presidencies, of 9/11, of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan – and perhaps most tellingly, by the financial crises of 2008-2009?

The advantage of studying the later period is that the issues are so much less defined in scholarly terms, giving us a chance to undertake some pioneering work.

Course Requirements

The course will take the format of a reading and discussion seminar. I expect that each week, students will come to class having read a text or a common set of chapters. In addition, I will be allotting particular books to people, either as individuals or small groups, so that they can be responsible for leading discussion about those particular issues. Each student should come to class with open-ended questions around which the discussion of the readings should be organized.

Each student will write a major paper on a topic related to problems and controversies raised in the readings. The paper (about 25-30 typed pages, fully referenced) will analyze some issue related to the politics, culture, thought or social developments of the period under discussion. Please note that this period is quite under-worked, and there are substantial opportunities to make an original contribution to knowledge, so choose a topic in which you can make substantial use of primary sources and popular culture materials.

One extraordinarily important source is Congressional hearings and committee transactions: I will discuss these in detail, but you will be impressed how many useful incidental texts and miscellaneous materials are often attached to testimony. Choose your topic wisely, and a few such hearings should give you a well-documented account of a particular issue.

My earnest (and quite realistic) hope is that your written work will be good enough to be submitted to a journal for publication. I will be asking each participant to make a presentation based on the paper to the whole group towards the end of the course. Each student will have half an hour to present his/her research and the questions raised.

Please note that the “draft” to be handed in on November 16 is a full-length version of the paper, fully referenced, as opposed to a two or three page “concept paper”, and it should thus be in connected prose, not in point form. In fact, *this draft should be what you believe the final version of the paper should look like*. That then gives you a couple of weeks to do any necessary fine-tuning.

One note about choice of topics. Though this is a history course, that does not mean that people have to apply strictly historical methodologies, still less political history. I am open to a wide range of themes – social, cultural, rhetorical, gender, and so on.

In addition to the main research paper, I want you to write a paper of about 1,500 words on any one *fictional* work published in the period 1980-89, describing the content of the work, and discussing it critically as a historical source for the period in question. By this, I mean either a film or a book. As to selecting a book or film, excellent places to start would be the works referred to in my *Decade of Nightmares* book: I cite a LOT of books and films. So does Graham Thompson in his *American Culture in the 1980s*. As to what to say about the fictional work: you might comment, for example, on how the work reflects the mood of the society at the particular time it was written; what it reveals about attitudes towards race, class or gender; and/or what it suggests about the political attitudes of the time. Basically, I want to know what a historian studying this period might learn from this film or book.

If you choose to write on a book, please note that I have none of the novels on reserve, since they should all be easy to get in cheap editions from any good bookstore, or of course from amazon.com. If you cannot get hold of a library copy, please be sure to order a copy of your own in lots of time.

Class Participation

Do note that this class is a *seminar*, based on extensive discussion and writing, in which your involvement is essential at every stage.

“Attendance and participation” carry a significant 20 percent of your grade. What this means in practice is that I expect you to do the readings for every class, and I will be calling on people individually through the term to comment or respond on particular texts, or issues arising from them. Pretty much every class will revolve around detailed readings of books or texts, and you must come prepared to discuss this and give your reactions to it – and to think of your own questions.

If you do the readings, and take a full and regular part in class discussions, then that will have a major positive impact on your grade. On the other hand, consistently not participating, not doing the readings - or being absent from class without adequate excuse - is equivalent to missing an exam or failing to do the term paper. Consistent non-attendance and/or non-participation will have serious consequences. It does not just mean that you will receive a slightly lower grade: just like refusing to do a paper or an exam, it means that you would simply have not completed the class, and would therefore receive a grade of F for the entire course.

It's important to spell out that expectation from the outset. If you are not prepared to do the readings and participate fully in discussions, then please drop the class now.

One other thing - deadlines matter, and I intend to enforce them strictly. If you miss a deadline without getting an extension in advance, you get a non-negotiable grade of F on that particular paper or project. Do not get in touch with me after the fact to explain why you missed a deadline, unless you produce a proper medical note. Excuses must always be supported by documentation. Valid reasons include medical problems and the like.

In summary, the grade will be derived as follows:

Research paper	- 50%
film/book review	- 20%
attendance and participation	- 20%
presentation	- <u>10%</u>
	<u>100%</u>

Required Readings

all are in paperback, except where indicated

Martin Anderson and Annelise Anderson, *Reagan's Secret War* (Three Rivers Press, 2010)
ISBN: 0307238636

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books 1995)
ISBN: 0441569595

Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares* (Oxford University Press, 2006)
ISBN: 0195341589

William Kleinknecht, *The Man Who Sold the World* (New York: Nation Books, 2009)
ISBN: 1568584423

Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007)
ISBN: 0748619100

Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
ISBN: 0195187873

The web-page for the course can be found at:

<http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/j/p/jpj1/reagan.html>

The links here should lead you to rich documentary sources, especially through the various Presidential libraries. DO please find your way around this page. As you must know by now, websites change and shift all the time, so don't be amazed by blind links.

Throughout the course, I will also be distributing various other readings, mainly electronically: all of these should, of course, be considered as required reading. You'll find copies of most at the web-page listed above.

SYLLABUS OF CLASSES

Work assignments will vary week by week. Some weeks, we will all read a single text, and make that the basis for discussion. Other classes, I will be expecting people to read books drawn from a list of readings to be announced, and to present those to the class. As a rough guideline, I will expect people to read one book – or the equivalent - each week of the semester.

1. August 24

Introduction: Going Too Far.

The Sixties and afterwards. Visions, myths and stereotypes of the 1970s. In what senses do the seventies mark a “cultural earthquake”? How is popular culture transformed? Is this really a “Me Decade”? Why is the decade so well remembered for its fads and foolishness?

2. August 31

Reagan's America

Was there a Reagan Revolution, or was it more of the same? What did the Reagan administration want to achieve? How far did it succeed? What forces or contradictions prevented it from achieving its goals, domestic and foreign? What constituencies was it bound to disappoint? What motivated the new Right? Was it so new? Was it a “politics of resentment”?

DISCUSS: Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, chapters 1 through 6

3. September 7

The Politics Of Morality: Confronting Evil

How does America reverse the seemingly limitless tolerance for drugs that prevailed in the mid-1970s? What is the social impact of the drug war? How are social problems reconfigured to emphasize individual guilt and sin? What are the consequences for public policy? The age of threatened children. How did children's issues play such a critical role in

this process? How do attitudes towards children change in this era? How do fears over children feed into concerns over social change?

DISCUSS: Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, chapters 7 through 11

4. September 14

Conservatives

DISCUSS: Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties*, 1-50, 125-138, 167-80

*I NEED TO KNOW THE TOPICS OF YOUR TERM PAPERS TODAY

5. September 21

Gender and Sexuality. Love in the Age of AIDS

How do feminist issues develop following the early 1970s? What subsequent issues move to the forefront? How do gay issues develop in this era? Why do both gays and feminists suffer such a political backlash?

DISCUSS: Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties*, 85-124

6. September 28

Shifting Economic Foundations

How did America shift so dramatically into the new information economy? Problems of regulation. Were the administrations of the 1980s sowing the seeds of a later collapse?

William Kleinknecht, *The Man Who Sold the World*, whole book

*FILM/BOOK REVIEW IS DUE TODAY

7. October 5

The Media and Popular Culture

DISCUSS: Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s*, whole book; Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties* 152-66

8. October 12

The Politics of God

America in the 1970s and 1980s seems to have been in the throes of a major religious revival, a shift towards spirituality, and especially in fairly orthodox Christian forms. Why did this happen? How was this manifested?

DISCUSS: Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties*, 181-98

*PLEASE WRITE A TWO PAGE SYNOPSIS OF YOUR PROPOSED PAPER, WITH ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY. TODAY, I WANT YOU TO CIRCULATE COPIES OF THIS TO EVERYONE IN THE SEMINAR (PREFERABLY ELECTRONICALLY) AS A BASIS FOR IN-CLASS DISCUSSION.

9. October 19

Against the Tide

Liberals, populists and Democrats; opposing the new Reagan order. What issues caused the greatest strain to the old New Deal coalition? Who were the "Reagan Democrats"?

DISCUSS: Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties*, 51-84

10. October 26

Evil Empires: Neo-Cold War and Military Reconstruction; Nuclearism And Exterminism

President Reagan's nuclear policies were bitterly criticized, especially on the grounds of his (allegedly) stark apocalyptic vision of good and evil, and charges that he failed to understand the complexities of international affairs. In retrospect, how do such charges hold up? Did Reagan take too many risks to achieve his goals? In the long run, was Reagan right?

DISCUSS: Martin Anderson and Annelise Anderson, *Reagan's Secret War*, whole book.

11. November 2

Triumphs and Disasters of the Reagan Doctrine: Afghanistan, Iran, Lebanon, and Central America

How was "Vietnam syndrome" put to rest? What was the Reagan Doctrine? How does it stand in relation to earlier US policies towards enemy states? How does it relate to the idea of restoring masculinity? How does the Reagan Doctrine relate to the "Terror Network" debate of the early 1980s? Is there a fundamental contradiction between the quest for security and for legality? And finally: can we see a direct line of causation (or even a not-so-direct line) from the conflicts of the 1980s through 9-11?

DISCUSS: Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties*, 139-151

12. November 9

Visions of Present and Future

DISCUSS: Gibson, *Neuromancer*

13. November 16

Overview, Revision, Analysis.

This is not a review session in the customary sense, since the class has no final examination. This is more in a sense of a debriefing to assess what we have learned about the period, and furthermore, we will pursue a general discussion arising from the research you have done for your term papers.

*PAPER DRAFTS DUE

November 22-28 THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS

14. November 30

Class presentations

15. December 7

Class presentations

PAPER IS DUE FIRST DAY OF FINALS PERIOD

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY ON THE REAGAN ERA

This bibliography is in no sense meant to be exhaustive or comprehensive, but is rather a useful working list of some current authors and titles. Rather it is a collection of recent books, mainly those that appeared after the appearance of my own *Decade of Nightmares*, with all the books I cite there. In the list that follows, I don't necessarily vouch for the quality of every single work named; nor does the fact of inclusion mean that I agree with the conclusions of any particular book.

Martin Anderson and Annelise Anderson, *Reagan's Secret War: The Untold Story of His Fight to Save the World from Nuclear Disaster* (New York: Crown, 2009)

Karl Gerard Brandt, *Ronald Reagan and the House Democrats: Gridlock, Partisanship, And The Fiscal Crisis* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

Will Bunch, *Tear Down This Myth: How the Reagan Legacy Has Distorted Our Politics and Haunts Our Future* (New York: Free Press, 2009)

Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 And the Rise of the Right* (University Press of Kansas, 2005)

Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics And Culture In The Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Harvard University Press 2007)

Donald T. Critchlow and Nancy MacLean, *Debating The American Conservative Movement: 1945 To The Present* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

John Patrick Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007)

Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010)

Brian Domitrovic, *The Rebels Who Sparked the Supply-Side Revolution and Restored American Prosperity* (New York: ISI, 2009)

John Ehrman, *The Eighties* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

John Ehrman and Michael W. Flamm, *Debating the Reagan Presidency* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

Beth A. Fischer, *The Reagan Reversal: Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Univ of Missouri Press, 1997)

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books 1995)

- Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counterrevolution, 1980-1989* (New York: Crown Forum, 2009)
- Andy Hertzfeld, *Revolution in the Valley: The Insanely Great Story of How the Mac Was Made* (O'Reilly Media, 2004)
- Cheryl Hudson and Gareth Davies, eds., *Ronald Reagan and the 1980s: Perceptions, Policies, Legacies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)
- Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (Rutgers University Press, 1994)
- Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares* (Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Paul Kengor and Patricia Clark Doerner, *The Judge: William P. Clark, Ronald Reagan's Top Hand* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007)
- Paul Kengor and Peter Schweizer, ed., *The Reagan Presidency: Assessing The Man And His Legacy* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005)
- William Kleinknecht, *The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street America* (New York: Nation Books, 2009)
- Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse, 1970-2000*, Updated Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007)
- Kyle Longley, Jeremy D. Mayer, Michael Schaller and John W. Sloan, *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President* (M.E. Sharpe, 2006)
- James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (New York: Penguin, 2009).
- Alan Nadel, *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams* (Rutgers University Press, 1997)
- Peggy Noonan, *What I Saw at the Revolution: A Political Life in the Reagan Era* (originally 1991 – New York: Random House, 2003)
- Peggy Noonan, *When Character Was King: A Story of Ronald Reagan* (Penguin, 2002)
- Stephen Prince, *American Cinema of the 1980s: Themes and Variations* (Rutgers University Press, 2007)
- Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007)

- Richard Reeves, *President Reagan: The Triumph of Imagination* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005)
- Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life In The Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Peter Schweizer, *Reagan's War* (New York: Anchor, 2003)
- Gilbert T. Sewall, ed., *The Eighties: A Reader* (Da Capo Press, 1998)
- Craig Shirley, *Rendezvous with Destiny: Ronald Reagan and the Campaign That Changed America* (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2009))
- Graham Thompson, *American Culture in the 1980s* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007)
- Gil Troy, *Morning in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)
- Gil Troy and Vincent J. Cannato eds., *Living in the Eighties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Gil Troy, *The Reagan Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Bernard von Bothmer, *Framing the Sixties: The Use and Abuse of a Decade From Ronald Reagan to George W. Bush* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).
- Francis Wheen, *Strange Days Indeed: The 1970s - The Golden Age of Paranoia* (New York: Public Affairs, 2010)
- Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York: Harper, 2008)
- David C. Wills, *The First War on Terrorism* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2004)

SELECTED UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity Policy

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception and is an educational objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to) cheating, plagiarism, fabrication of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized prior possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, and tampering with the academic work of other students (see Policies and Rules for Students, Section 49-20). Academically dishonest students may be punished with a minor penalty, typically a zero on a quiz or test, or with a major penalty such as a grade of "F" in a course. Please note that

a student may not be forced to withdraw from a course for an academic integrity violation by the teacher alone. Students who are punished with major penalties may appeal the decision. Cases that are sufficiently serious to warrant disciplinary actions beyond academic sanctions may be referred by the faculty member to the Office of Judicial Affairs for further review.

Disability Access Statement

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified persons with disabilities to participate in this programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible.