

**AMERICAN SOCIAL THOUGHT, 1915-PRESENT
HIST 314F**

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The purpose of this course is to introduce students to key concepts and ideas in the history of American intellectual life from 1915 to the present. In order to delve into ideas and understand them better, the course will combine lecture – providing context, background, and concepts for students – with discussion of key, primary texts.

Requirements:

Attendance Policy: The old saying goes, “Showing up counts for 80%” (or something like that). So it is with this class. If you miss class (without legitimate excuses), you are in serious threat of lowering your grade. If you miss more than three without a proper excuse, you can fail the class. Since this course relies upon discussion of texts, your participation in classroom discussion is crucial. Participation in classroom discussion will count towards your grade.

Hand-Ins: Every day a reading is due, you will hand in, *at the beginning of the class*, a one-page summation of the reading and be prepared to discuss the reading with fellow students. Hand-ins will not be graded per se, though they will be reviewed and a record kept. Your record of hand-ins will help determine your final grade. They will also help you in preparing for essays and examinations.

Essays and Exams: You will turn in, on the day of the mid-term, an answer to a question assigned to you prior to that date. That will count for fifty points. The in-class mid term will count for fifty points and will be made up of short identifications and answers to questions (add the essay and the exam, and you get 100 points). The same goes for the final. Your answers to essay questions are expected to be word-processed. Be warned: Plagiarism leads to failure. If anything is handed in late, your grade will automatically be lowered. Advanced undergraduate students (seniors especially) are allowed to bypass the two written essays (though not the exams) by doing a fifteen page essay about some topic that is agreed upon by the professor and student. That agreement has to be made prior to the first essay being due.

Your final grade for the class will consist of your performance on the essays, exams, one-page summations, and class participation.

All of the readings that you will do for this course will come from David Hollinger and Charles Capper, eds., *The American Intellectual Tradition*, Volume Two and from a set

of readings available via electronic reserve. You also need a copy of George Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*. Copies of the Hollinger book and the Tindall book have been ordered at Little Professor.

The course will proceed as follows. Wherever there is discussion of readings mentioned, you must have read that selection and have your one-page summation ready at the beginning of class. When a lecture is noted, there are no readings.

Introductions:

January 3: Introductions, Syllabus Explained, etc.

The Supposed Jazz Age: The 1920s

January 4: The 1920s as a decade and Corporate Capitalism: Lecture

January 8: Discussion of Reading: Samuel Strauss, "Things are in the Saddle" (Electronic Reserve)

January 9: The End of Progressivism and the Question of Democracy in Light of Mass Culture: Lecture

January 10: Walter Lippmann, Selections from *Public Opinion*; John Dewey, Review of *Public Opinion* and selections from *The Public and Its Problems* (Electronic Reserve)

January 11: The Jazz Age and Pessimistic Modernity: Lecture

January 15: No class

January 16: Discussion of Joseph Wood Krutch, Selections from *The Modern Temper* (Electronic Reserve)

January 17: *Graduate student only* discussion of Dumenil and other readings up now

Read by now: Tindall through the 1920s and Lynn Dumenil on Electronic Reserve

The Great Depression and Social Thought: The 1930s

January 18: The Crash, the Great Depression, the New Deal, and Intellectual Life: Lecture

January 22: Discussion of David Lilienthal, Selection from *TVA: Democracy on the March* (Electronic Reserve)

January 23: Lecture on Marxism and Discussion of Hook, “Communism without Dogmas”

January 24: Part-Lecture/Part Discussion of James Agee, Selections from *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Electronic Reserve)

January 25: Discussion of Clifford Odets, “Waiting for Lefty” (Electronic Reserve)

January 29: Popular Frontism and Intellectual Life, Leading to World War II: Lecture

January 30: *Graduate student only discussion* of Denning, *The Cultural Front*

January 31: Showing of “Arguing the World” Part I

By now, read Tindall through World War II and read Richard Pells I (Electronic reserve)

*****February 1: IN-CLASS EXAM and first paper due*****

The Post-War Period: the Brooding 1940s and Beyond:

February 5: The New World After the War: Discussion of Reinhold Niebuhr, Selection from *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* and Dwight MacDonal, “The Responsibility of Peoples” (on Electronic Reserve: See HIST 415 for this)

February 6: The Dawn of Totalitarianism and Mass Society: Lecture

February 7: Discussion of Whittaker Chambers, Selection from *Witness* and Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror”

February 8: Graduate Students only: Discuss Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*

Read: Graebner (Electronic Reserve) and Tindall through 1940s

**The 1950s: Conformity and Pathos or More?:
The Rise of the “New York Intellectuals” and Others**

February 12: Questions of Conformity and Social Criticism: Lecture

February 13: Discussion of Daniel Bell, “The End of Ideology in the West”

February 14: Discussion of Lionel Trilling, “On the Teaching of Modern Literature”

February 15: Second Part of “Arguing the World” shown

February 19: Beyond Conformity: How the 1960s began in the 1950s: Lecture

February 20: Discussion of C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left”

February 21: The Civil Rights Movement as an Intellectual Project: Lecture

February 22: Discussion of Martin Luther King, “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and Malcolm X, “Ballot or Bullet”

Read: Pells II (Electronic Reserve) and Tindall through the 1950s

The 1960s and Intellectual Life:

February 26: The New Left as an Intellectual Movement and the Rise of the Woman’s Movement: Lecture and Discussion of Betty Friedan, Selection from *The Feminine Mystique* (Both in book and on electronic reserve)

February 27: Graduate Student only Meeting: Howard Brick, *The Age of Contradiction*

February 28: Chaos and Breakdown or Good Things Happening?: Lecture

Read: Howard Brick (Electronic Reserve) and Tindall through 1960s

Does the Center Hold?: American Intellectual Life after the 1960s

March 1: Neoconservatism Defined: Discussion of Samuel Huntington, Selection from “The Democratic Distemper” and Daniel Bell, “Beyond Modernism, Beyond Self” (both Electronic Reserve)

March 5: Postmodernism and Intellectual History: Lecture

March 6: Discussion of Susan Sontag, “Against Interpretation” and Richard Rorty, “Science as Solidarity”

March 7: Graduate Student Only Meeting: George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America*

March 8: Review for Exam; Evaluations

Final Exam