

History 3653, America and the 1960s: History and Legacy

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Office Hours: Monday, 5:30-6:30, Wednesday and Friday, 4-6

BAC #407

585-1377

This long decade profoundly influences contemporary America life and culture, but our grasp of its historical significance is clouded by myth, distortion, and ideology. This course seeks to strip away some of those misconceptions so that we can better understand the defining political and cultural developments of the turbulent 1960s. It also seeks to examine “the sixties” in its historical context. We aim to explain the economic and demographic forces that made this era possible, and to understand how this tumultuous period fit into the longer saga of American democracy, social reform, the struggle for individual liberties, and foreign intervention. The rise of student protests, the emergence of the New Left, the development and impact of the black freedom struggle, the coalescence of the counterculture, and the descent into the quagmire of Vietnam form the key historical landmarks of our investigation. Just as important, however, is the “other 1960s”—the rise of a conservative movement that would dominate American life in the late twentieth century. There was more than one “1960s,” and this course will explore those distinctions. It will examine cultural developments, but it is not simply an excursion into popular culture. Most importantly, it will investigate the social and political upheavals that defined the era. Our ultimate objective is to understand the legacy of the 1960s and why it continues to be so divisive in contemporary America.

A few important caveats are in order. First, considering that this course relies extensively on lectures, it is vital that you take **detailed notes**. I cannot emphasize this enough. Relying exclusively on the brief notes made available to you on the Powerpoint slides will yield disappointing results and a shallow education. You should quickly get into the habit of taking 2 and ½ to 3 **single-spaced** pages of notes in each class. These will be indispensable to you on assignments and the final exam. Second, please be advised that *the use of the laptop for any other reason than note-taking is strictly prohibited*. The illicit use of the laptop—or cellphone or tablet or text-messaging device—in class invites distraction, irritates the professor, and detracts from the atmosphere of intellectual inquiry that should prevail in each class. Please respect this guideline. Finally, while lectures are important, they are necessarily interactive. That requires your participation, and your participation is only made possible by *reading the assigned material*. Class discussions provide an exceptional opportunity for active learning. In order to benefit fully, you must read for class and arrive prepared to discuss the ideas you encounter. *Class interaction is also the key route to earning class participation marks*. The professor reserves the right to make minor adjustments to the reading schedule. Finally, requests for a re-write will be considered on a case-by-case basis and only during a live visit to office hours.

Required Books

Brian Ward, *The 1960s: A Documentary Reader*

Joseph Palermo, *Robert Kennedy and the Death of American Idealism*

Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season of 1964*

Michael Herr, *Dispatches*

Assignments

Test on Watson’s *Freedom Summer* and the civil rights movement in Mississippi, 15%
(October 4th).

Analytical essay, 30% (**November 8th**). This essay will require you to address both Robert Kennedy and the Death of American Idealism and The 1960s: A Documentary Reader. You should examine themes, ideas, and issues germane to each book, but you are expected to frame your own essay. For example, the essay may focus on the New Left, the antiwar movement, the trials of American liberalism, the black freedom struggle, the challenge of poverty, or the Kennedy campaign. You need not focus exclusively on RFK, however. Whichever topic you choose, make sure to address at least two interviews from The 1960s: A Documentary Reader and a substantial section of Palermo's book. At the minimum, this essay should also include an additional two books and three articles. It should be 10-12 pages in length, double-spaced, and feature *proper footnotes or endnotes* (Chicago Manual of Style), and is due in class on the assigned day. Late assignments are assessed at 2% a day. The essay is due on Friday, March 19th. *One more stylistic note*: all assignments should be double-spaced, feature a title page, and have page numbers in the bottom right corner.

Class participation, 15%. This will include class discussions, presentations, periodic reading commentaries, short quizzes, a commentary on the film "Berkeley in the Sixties." Note: students who miss more than three classes without justification should expect disappointing results in this category.

Book commentary on Dispatches, 10%, 3-4 pages (November 22nd)

Final exam 30%.

Reading and assignment schedule

Week of September 5th: Welcome to the class and an introduction to the pre-history of the 1960s. Brian Ward, The 1960s: A Documentary Reader, chapter one; Bruce Watson, Freedom Summer, chapters 1-4.

Week of September 10: The promise and discontent of the postwar era; intellectual dissent in the age of conformity; the allure of Camelot, crises in Cuba. War, The 1960s, chapters two and three; Watson, Freedom Summer, chapters 5-8.

Week of September 17th: The building of a civil rights movement, anti-nuclear, anti-HUAC protest and the origins of the New Left student movement. Ward, The 1960s, chapters four and five; Watson, Freedom Summer, chapters 9-11 and epilogue.

Week of September 24th: Lyndon Johnson and the Search for a Great Society, the entanglement of Vietnam, civil rights breakthroughs, student protest and the coalescence of a New Left.

Week of October 1st: The origins and significance of the counterculture, the surprising and little-known achievements of postwar liberalism. "Investigating U.S. History," LBJ and Vietnam exercise, <http://investigatinghistory.ashp.cuny.edu/m10.html>.

Week of October 8th: The Vietnam debacle and the development of a larger movement for peace. Ward, The 1960s, chapter six.

Week of October 15th: The other 1960s: the origins of a modern conservative movement, popular culture and the 1960s. Ward, The 1960s, chapter eight; James Hijiya, "The Conservative 1960s."

Week of October 22nd: The Fire This Time: The Summer of Love, the Long Hot Summer of 1967, and the Kerner Commission; the challenge of black power and the white response. Ward, The 1960s, chapter ten; Palermo, Robert F. Kennedy and the Death of American Idealism.

Week of October 29th: Year of Decision, Year of Disaster: 1968.

Week of November 5th: The New Left in crisis, the anti-war movement crests, the counterculture in (apparent) decline.

Week of November 12th: Women and the dream of equality; Latinos and the effort to organize; the rise of Richard Nixon; the counterattack on American dissent on university campuses. Ward, The 1960s, chapter seven; Michael Herr, Dispatches.

Week of November 19th: The international 1960s; environmental awakenings, the economic crisis of the 1970s.

Week of November 26th: Descent into Watergate, retreat from Vietnam, the last hope of democratic reform in 1972, the 1960s in historical memory.

Week of December 3rd: exams.