

Decade in American Culture: The 1970s

American Studies 303
Summer 2008
M/W 6:00-9:45 PM
Office hours by appointment

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This course surveys 1970s America, with emphasis on major trends in cultural and intellectual life, broadly defined. We will touch on many of the key political and social developments of the period, including the Vietnam War, Watergate, the energy crisis, liberation movements, and battles over desegregation, as we look to understand how culture worked in this society. How did American artists, intellectuals, and other “culture makers” react to the political and economic problems of the 1970s? How did ordinary people of various classes, races, and backgrounds express themselves and interpret the world around them? And how did the cultural production of the period shape political and social discourse? The course features readings in historical scholarship as well as a variety of primary sources, including social criticism, memoir, film, literature, and music. Students will hone their skills in the close reading of cultural forms while at the same time gaining a sense of the sweep of a largely misunderstood decade. We will give special attention to the following themes: the meanings of liberation; the shifting boundaries of community; the search for self; and the power of culture.

Required Books

Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened* (2006)
Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971)
Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad* (1989)
Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions* (1973)
Amiri Baraka and William J. Harris, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (1991)
Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979)

Additional required readings (marked by “*” in the syllabus) are available on Sakai. You must print these out and bring them to class like any other assigned reading.

Assignments

The graded work for the course consists of two short papers (roughly 35% of final grade), class participation (15%), a midterm exam (20%), and a final exam (30%). The first paper (due 6/23) will be a review of a film from the 1970s. For the second paper (due 7/2) you will compile a brief oral history of the 1970s on a topic or theme of your choosing, based on interviews with two or more people. I will provide details on assignments and on the midterm (6/16) and final (7/2) exams in class.

Plagiarism

Your work on papers and exams must be your own. The words and ideas of others (if used in any form) must receive proper citation. Cheating on an assignment will result in failure on that assignment and most likely in the class. I will report any such cases to the Office of Judicial Affairs. I will provide further guidelines in class, but if you are uncertain at any time about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, you must come talk with me.

Schedule of Meetings and Topics

5/28: Introduction and background

- Introducing the 1970s
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, Introduction
- 1968 and Before
Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 3-50
Baraka, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 51-99

6/2: The Meanings of Counterculture

- The Dream is Over?
Film: *Gimme Shelter* (1970, Albert and David Maysles, 91 min)
- Post-60s culture
Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

6/4: The Personal Politics of Liberation

- Women's Liberation, Part 1
Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, chaps. 3 and 4
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 7
- Gay Liberation
*Duberman, *Midlife Queer*, Preface and chap. 1

6/9: Race Relations and Identities

- Black Power, Black Nationalism, Black Pride
Baraka, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 161-224, 240-249
- Desegregation and Affirmative Action

*Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, selections

6/11: Vietnam and Violence

- War, Experience, and Memory
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 2
*Tim O'Brien, "Spin" and "How to Tell a True War Story" from *The Things They Carried* (New York, 1990), 31-38, 67-85.
- Vietnam and American Identity
Film: *Taxi Driver* (1976, Martin Scorsese, 113 min)

6/16: Corruption, Crisis, Fear

- The Imperial Presidency, from Vietnam to Watergate
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 1
*Selections, "The Pentagon Papers"
- A Decade of Crisis
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 3
*David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton, 2006), chap. 1

Film: *The Conversation* (1974, Francis Ford Coppola, 113 min.)
On reserve, screening TBA

*****Midterm Exam*****

6/18: Environments

- The City
*Carlo Rotella, "Grittiness," chap. 3 from *Good with Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesman, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt* (Berkeley, 2002), 105-166.
- Environmentalism
*Introduction to *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (1975).

6/23: Sexuality, the Therapeutic, and the Self

- The New Consciousness
Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, parts 1, 2, and 4
Film: *Annie Hall* (1977, Woody Allen, 93 min)
- The Sexualized 70s: Porn to Disco

- Critiques of Heterosexuality; Women's Liberation, Part 2
Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, chaps. 5 and 6

*****Paper #1 Due in class 6/23*****

6/25: Malaise

- Age of Decline
Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, parts 8, 9, and 10

- The Aesthetics of Malaise
Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*

Film: *Nashville* (1975, Robert Altman, 159 min)
On reserve, screening TBA.

6/30: The end of modernity? Religion, Postmodernism, and Neo-Conservatism

- God of the 70s, from fundamentalism to liberation theology
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 6
- Postmodern art and theory
*Daniel Bell, "Beyond Modernism, Beyond Self" from *Art, Politics and Will: Essays in Honor of Lionel Trilling*, ed. Anderson *et al.* (New York, 1977), 213-253.
- Racial, Economic, and Cultural Backlash
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 8
*Alice Echols, "'Shaky Ground': Popular Music in the Disco Years," from *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York, 2002).
*Irving Kristol, from *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York, 1978)

7/2: Popular and Alternative Cultures

- The Cinematic 70s
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 9
*Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema* (Princeton, NJ, 1985) 296-318, 326-360.
- The Blockbuster, Television, and Advertising
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 10
- From Arena Rock to the Punk Revolt
*Lester Bangs, from *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*, ed. by Greil Marcus (New York, 1987)

*Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me* (New York, 1996), chaps. 22, 25, and 30.

*******Paper #2 Due in class 7/2*******

*******Final Exam in class 7/2*******