

Decade in American Studies: The 1970s

American Studies 303

Fall 2007

TTh 5:35-6:55 PM

Office hours: T/Th 3:45-4:45 (and by appt)

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RAB 205D

This course surveys 1970s America, with emphasis on major trends in cultural and intellectual life, broadly defined. We will touch on many of the central 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 both works by historians and a variety of primary sources, including social criticism, memoir, film, literature, and music, with an eye toward honing our 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)

Martin Duberman, *Midlife Queer* (1996)

Ron Formisano, *Boston Against Busing* (1991)

Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979)

Amiri Baraka and William J. Harris, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader* (1991)

Additional required readings (marked by “*” in the syllabus) are available through 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 40% of final grade), two in-class assignments (10%), a midterm exam (20%), and a final exam (30%). The first paper (due 11/13) will be a review of a novel or film from the 1970s. For the second paper (due 12/11) 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. The in-class assignments

will be brief responses to photographs. I will provide details on all assignments and on the midterm (10/23) and final (12/19) 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 Dean's office. 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

Week One: Introduction and background

Tues. 9/4: Introducing the 1970s
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, Introduction

Thurs. 9/6: 1968 and Before
Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 3-50
Baraka, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 51-99

Week Two: The Meanings of Counterculture

Tues. 9/11: The Dream is Over?
Film: "Gimme Shelter" (1970, Albert and David Maysles, 91 min)

Thurs. 9/13: Post-60s culture
Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*

Week Three: The Personal Politics of Liberation

Tues. 9/18: Women's Liberation, Part 1
Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, chaps. 3 and 4
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 7

Thurs. 9/20: Gay Liberation
Duberman, *Midlife Queer*, Preface and chaps. 1-3

Week Four: Race Relations and Identities

Tues. 9/25: Black Power, Black Nationalism, Black Pride; Chicano Nationalism
Baraka, *The Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, 161-224, 240-249

Thurs. 9/27: Desegregation and Affirmative Action
Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, chaps. 1, 4, 5, 7

Week Five: Vietnam and Violence

Tues. 10/2: 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.
In-class assignment #1

Thurs. 10/4: Vietnam and American Identity
Film: *Taxi Driver* (1976, Martin Scorsese, 113 min)

Week Six: Environments

Tues. 10/9: The City
Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, chap. 6
*Carlo Rotella, "Grittiness," chap. 3 from *Good with Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesman, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt* (Berkeley, 2002), 105-166.

Thurs. 10/11: Environmentalism
*Introduction to *New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (1975).

Week Seven: Corruption, Crisis, Fear

Tues. 10/16: The Imperial Presidency, from Vietnam to Watergate
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 1
*Selections, "The Pentagon Papers"

Thurs. 10/18: 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

Week Eight: The Therapeutic and the Self

Tues. 10/23 **Midterm exam**

Thurs. 10/25 Self-exploration: est, the East, and beyond
Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, parts 1, 2, and 4

Duberman, *Midlife Queer*, chap. 4
Film: *Annie Hall* (1977, Woody Allen, 93 min)

Week Nine: Sexuality

Tues. 10/30 The Sexualized 70s: Porn to Disco
Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, parts 8, 9, and 10
Alice Echols, "'Shaky Ground': Popular Music in the Disco Years," from *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and Its Aftershocks* (New York, 2002).

Thurs. 11/1 Critiques of Heterosexuality; Women's Liberation, Part 2
Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, chaps. 5 and 6
Duberman, *Midlife Queer*, chap. 7

Week Ten: Malaise

Tues. 11/6 Age of Decline
Film and Discussion: "Hippie Elegy" (2006, Headlong Dance Theater).

Thurs. 11/8: The Aesthetics of Malaise
*Joseph Heller, selections from *Something Happened* (New York, 1974)
*Kurt Vonnegut, Review of *Something Happened* by Joseph Heller, *New York Times* (Oct. 6, 1974).

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

Week Eleven: The end of modernity? Religion and Postmodernism

Tues. 11/13: God of the 70s, from fundamentalism to liberation theology
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 6
Paper #1 Due

Thurs. 11/15: 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.

Week Twelve: Neo-Conservatism

Tues. 11/20: Racial, Economic, and Cultural Backlash
Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 8
Formisano, *Boston Against Busing*, chap. 8
*Irving Kristol, from *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York, 1978)
In-class assignment #2

Thurs. 11/22: **No Class, Thanksgiving Break**

Week Thirteen: Hollywood and the Culture Industry

Tues. 11/27 The New Wave

Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 9

*Robert Ray, *A Certain Tendency of the Hollywood Cinema* (Princeton, NJ, 1985)
296-318, 326-360.

Thurs. 11/29 The Blockbuster

Film: Excerpts from *Jaws* (Stephen Spielberg, 1975) and *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977)

Week Fourteen: Popular and Alternative Cultures

Tues. 12/4: Television and Advertising

Berkowitz, *Something Happened*, chap. 10

Thurs. 12/6: 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 and 30

Tues. 12/11: Conclusions

Paper #2 Due

Final Exam will be on 12/19, from 9:00 to 11:00 AM