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Generations in Conflict

Does every generation reject the one that came before it? Does identification with the new (and against the old) somehow make us who we are? From the children of the Founding Fathers to the Young America movement of the mid-nineteenth century to the Beats, hippies, and punks of the post-WWII middle class, rising generations of Americans have struggled to define themselves against the past, against parents and their prescriptive values, and against social expectations. This class explores generational conflict from the early nineteenth century through the generation gap of the 1960s and on to the present. We will consider changes in the ways generations have interacted over time as well as broad questions about generations, families, and social power.

Course materials range from works of psychoanalytic theory, cultural history, and feminist sociology to memoirs, fiction, films, and songs by rebel sons and daughters of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Special attention will be given to the role of generational relations in the process of cultural change.