HIS 490: 002: Modern American Thought: Civil War to Culture Wars

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David M. Wrobel, Spring 2004

Credit Hours: 3
Office: CDC 2-206
Class Time: TTH, 11:30-12:45
Hrs: TTH, 2-4pm
Location: CBC C213
Phone: 895-0810

DESCRIPTION
Ideas shape attitudes, which in turn shape actions. This is not a course on political and economic history, but one on the intellectual developments that provide a broader perspective on the American past. The course examines American history in the century and a third since the Civil War with a special emphasis on how ideas have shaped society. More than an esoteric history of ideas, the course focuses on the relationship between American thought and culture, between intellectuals and the public, between ideologies and policies. The course includes coverage of American social thought, political ideology, theology, legal thought, and the arts.

The course is divided into three parts:

Part One: “From Civil War to World War.” We begin with the theme of the Civil War as an intellectual crisis. Next, we will examine the impact of Darwinism on American thought in the period 1860-1890, and then turn to the impact of Pragmatism in the period 1890-1914.

Part Two: “From Relativism to Absolutism,” covers the period 1914-1945, and is also divided into three chronological segments: “Rejecting America, 1917-1930,” “Rediscovering America, 1930-1939,” and “Rediscovering Sin, 1939-1945.”

Part Three: “From Cold War to Culture Wars,” brings our coverage of American thought and culture into the contemporary period. This section of the course is also divided into three chronological/thematic blocks: “Cold War Consensus, 1945-1960,” “Exploding the Vital Center, 1960-1980,” and “Culture Wars, 1980-2004.”

COURSE GOALS
The course is designed to provide you with a set of intellectual frameworks for better understanding political, economic, and social developments in America, and to enhance your critical thinking skills.

REQUIREMENTS
There is a midterm (20%), a final exam (30%), an essay (30%), and daily discussions of course readings (20%).

The +/- grading system will be used. The grading scale is as follows:

A  93-100  B+  87-89  C+  77-79  D+  67-69
A-  90-92  B   83-86  C   73-76  D   60-66
    B-  80-82  C-  70-72  F   00-59
REQUIRED READINGS

David A. Hollinger and Charles Capper, eds., The American Intellectual Tradition, Vol. II: 1865 To the Present, Fourth Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). This book is the best available collection of readings on American intellectual history and includes selections from many of the key intellectuals we will examine. Selections from the book will be assigned every week and the book will serve as the core text for the course.

Lisa McGirr, Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001). McGerr helps us rethink popular notions of the 1960s as a decade of liberalism and even radical revolution. In this study of Orange Country, CA, she emphasizes the grass roots origins of contemporary American conservatism and provides background for our discussion of “Culture Wars.” This will be our main text for Part Three of the course.

Louis Menand, The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001). Menand’s Pulitzer Prize-winning study is structured around the lives of four of America’s most significant intellectuals, the pragmatists Oliver Wendell Holmes, William James, Charles Sanders Pierce and John Dewey. The book is a wonderful example of how accessible and compelling the history of ideas can be when it is well told. This will be our main text for Part One of the course.

Roderick Nash, The Nervous Generation: American Thought, 1917-1930 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1990; originally published 1970 by Rand McNally). Nash’s classic study re-examines the popular stereotypes of intellectuals as a “Lost Generation,” and the general public as participants in a revolution in manners and morals. Instead, he offers a nuanced picture of anxious intellectuals and an anxious public searching for meaning in the modern age. This book will serve as the central text for our coverage of the 1920s in Part Two of the course.

John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle, with an Introduction and Notes by Warren French (New York: Penguin Books, 1992; originally published in 1936 by Covici-Friede, Inc.). Steinbeck’s incredible commercial and critical success in the second half of the 1930s centered largely around three publications—the novella, Of Mice and Men (1937), the short story collection, The Long Valley (1938), and the monumental epic novel The Grapes of Wrath (1939). Less well known is Steinbeck’s 1936 “strike” novel, In Dubious Battle. But critics, including Warren French, have begun to rediscover this important work with its important insights on American social thought in the depression era. We will use the novel as an entrée into our discussions of American thought and culture in the 1930s, in Part Two of the course.

Occasional Xeroxed Handouts
The five required course books will be supplemented with short Xeroxed handouts that will be distributed only occasionally and with plenty of lead-time for you to examine them. These handouts include primary sources and scholarly essays and are listed in the Key to Readings section of the syllabus.
ATTENDANCE
Attendance is expected in this class. Non-attendance impairs one’s ability to contribute to discussions and leaves one unfamiliar with the topical coverage provided in class, consequently leading to poor performance on exams and paper assignments. If the number of unexcused absences exceeds more than twice the number of weekly meetings (i.e. four absences) you can be administratively dropped from the course; at the very least your discussion grade will be lowered by poor attendance.

DISCUSSION
This is an upper division course and you should come to each meeting prepared to discuss the assigned readings. There is, of course, a direct causal relationship between one’s ability to discuss the readings intelligently and one’s actually having read them. I may, on an impromptu basis, call on individuals to introduce us to the key themes of any particular chapter; please be prepared for this. You will deliver a brief presentation on your essay and your performance will be factored into your discussion grade. 20% of your grade for the course is based on your contributions to class discussion.

MIDTERM & FINAL EXAMS
The midterm covers the material in Part One of the course—weeks I-V. The final covers Parts Two and Three of the course—weeks VI-XV. The final is not comprehensive (though it may include an optional comprehensive essay). Exams are designed to gauge understanding of the material and the degree to which you have reflected on it, not merely your memorization skills. The exams consist of essays and triads.

PAPERS
Your paper must be typed, double-spaced, grammatically sound, and carefully proofed. Direct quotations, and/or paraphrasing should be cited in footnotes or endnotes. The paper should be 8-10 pages long (2,400-3,000 words). Please refer to Appendix: Writing Techniques. Your paper can explore any topic covered in Parts I and II of the course and should draw on at least two of the required course books in addition to outside sources. Your paper must link the primary topical coverage to contemporary issues. You will develop your topic in consultation with the instructor and will present to the class on your topic (April 1) and on your paper at the end of the semester (May 6).

ACTIVE READING
It is important that you take the time to read the assigned materials carefully and actively. It is often helpful, for example, to make marginal comments in the books. If you disagree with a particular point that an author is making, then make a note to that effect in the margin. You will find it helpful to write a brief summary of each chapter as you complete it. Consider the following questions:
1) What major points is the author trying to make?
2) What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her arguments?
3) What are the author's biases, preferences, and viewpoint?
4) How does the author's coverage compare with in-class lectures and other readings?
PLAGIARISM
To use someone else’s ideas and/or language as if they were your own is plagiarism. To engage in such an act in a course on the history of ideas would be particularly unconscionable, as well as deeply ironic. Plagiarism has absolutely no place in an institution of higher learning. Plagiarism and any other acts of academic dishonesty—e.g. cheating on an exam—will be rewarded with an “F” for the assignment, in all probability an “F” for the course and reporting of the incident to the College Dean. For further details concerning academic dishonesty please refer to the Student Handbook.

DISABILITIES
If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you will need to contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) for coordination of your academic accommodations. The Disability Resource Center is located in the Reynolds Student Services Complex, Room 137. The DRC phone number is 895-0866 or TDD 895-0652.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS
Students who miss a class assignment because of observance of a religious holiday shall have the opportunity to make up missed work. In order to be assured of this opportunity it is the student’s responsibility to inform me of anticipated absences by the last day of late registration, January 26.

REVISED TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Part I: From Civil War to World War, 1860-1917

Wk 1: T, Jan 20: Course Introduction: American Thought & Culture
Th, Jan 22: The Civil War & Reconstruction as Intellectual Crises (MC, Pt. 1)

Wk 2: T, Jan 27: The Darwinian Mind (AIT, 20-29)
Th, Jan 29: The Darwinian Mind, Part II

Wk 3: T, Feb 3: The Ideology of Content (MC, Pt. 2)
Th, Feb 5: NO CLASS

Wk 4: T, Feb 10: The Ideology of Discontent (AIT, 30-38, 39-44, 45-51)
Th, Feb 12: The Pragmatic Mind, I (MC, Pt. 3; AIT, 5-15, & 65-78)

Wk 5: T, Feb 17: The Pragmatic Mind, II (AIT, 109-122, & 137-140)
Th, Feb 19: The Frontier & Frontier Anxiety (MC, Pt. 4; AIT, 84-92, 123-130)

Wk 6: T, Feb 24: Progressivism & Radicalism (AIT, 123-136, 141-161)
Th, Feb 26: The Great Debate: Bourne V Dewey (MC, Pt 5; AIT, 162-189)

Wk 7: T, Mar. 2: The Metaphysical Club (MC, Epilogue; AIT, pp. 93-105)
Th, Mar 4: Midterm Exam

Part II: From Relativism to Absolutism, 1917-1945

Wk 8: T, Mar 9: The Twenties: Stereotypes (NG, pp. 1-32; RS 1 & RS 2)
Th, Mar 11: The Twenties: Intellectuals and the Public (NG, pp. 33-125; AIT, 190-206)
Wk 9: T, Mar 16: The Twenties: The Public & Heroes (NG, pp. 126-163; KKK, MP, BB)
Th, Mar 18: The Thirties: Depression & New Deal (AIT, 207-218, 244-48)

Wk 10: T, Mar 23: Radicalism & Rediscovering America (AIT, 219-228)
Th, Mar 25: In Dubious Battle, Discussion (IDB, 9-179)

Wk 11: T, Mar 30: In Dubious Battle, Discussion (IDB, 180-349)
Th, Apr 1: Rediscovering Sin & War (AIT, 258-265; GW; AIT, 249-257)
T, Apr 6: NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK
Th, Apr 8: NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Part III: From Cold War to Culture Wars, 1945-2004

Wk 12: T, Apr 13: The Vital Center & Cold War Consensus (AIT, 273-297)
Th, Apr 15: The Fifties: Happy Days or Suburban Nightmare? (AIT, 338-344, 384-390)

Wk 13: T, Apr 20: The Intellectual Odyssey of Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK; AIT, 266-272, 376-383, 398-405)

Wk 14: T, Apr 27: Suburban Warriors, Discussion (McGerr, pp. 3-146)
Th, Apr 29: Suburban Warriors, Discussion (McGerr, pp. 147-273)

Wk 15: T, May 4: Culture Wars (AIT, 416-481)
Th, May 6: Paper Presentations
T, May 11: Final Exam, 10:10.am-12:10.pm

KEY TO READINGS (Readings are listed in parenthesis after topical listings)

Books
AIT = Hollinger and Capper, The American Intellectual Tradition
MC = Menand, The Metaphysical Club
NG = Nash, The Nervous Generation
IDB = Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle
SW = McGerr, Suburban Warriors

Essays
RS 1 = A. Mitchell Palmer, “The Red Scare” (1920)
KKK = “Klansman’s Manual, 1925”
MP = Henry Pratt Fairchild, “The Argument Against the Melting Pot” (1926)
BB = “Buck V Bell” (1927)
GW = Charles C. Alexander, “The Good War”
MLK = Hamby, “The Politics of Prophesy: Martin Luther King, Jr.”
Appendix 1: Writing Techniques:

I: Theme Development (Pre-writing):
Essays should be driven by a key theme or argument. Effective theme construction is possible only after reflection on the topic.

1) Consider what you want to say before you begin; do not “make it up” as you go along.

2) Consider developing a paragraph-by-paragraph outline for the paper.

3) Think of an appropriate title. Considering titles can assist in theme construction and development.

4) Do not worry if there are loose ends in your thought processes before you begin writing. Writing the paper is part of the creative process, too.

II: Draft Writing:
Having reflected on the theme of your paper and appropriate content coverage, and having constructed a detailed outline, you should begin writing a first draft.

1) Make sure your opening paragraph clearly outlines both the scope of your paper (the general content/issues to be covered) and its central theme or argument.

2) If your essay draws on the work of other scholars, then be sure to demonstrate to the reader that you understand the themes/arguments presented in those works.

3) The bulk of your paper should present the relevant information/evidence necessary to flesh out the theme, or lend weight to the argument that you are making.

4) This presentation of evidence may include quotations from the sources. Effective quotation requires great care. To quote a few lines from a source simply because they sound good, without fully comprehending their meaning or context, is very unwise. Instead, you should quote material that provides a sure indication of the point of view, or of some key point, or integral element of the argument of the author. Avoid long block quotations whenever possible. Short quotations, interspersed into your own narrative are effective because they do not break up your narrative flow.

5) As you write the final paragraphs of your paper, make sure you have developed a strong conclusion. A concluding paragraph is most successful when it succinctly summarizes the information presented in the paper without sounding repetitious, and then closes with a strong, even memorable, sentence or two.

III: Rewriting:
Having reflected on the paper's theme and content and written a draft, you may be half way through the assigned task. Rewriting is the next vital stage.

1) Set aside your first draft for a day or two, or even an hour or two, and then come back to it. Distancing yourself from the paper will better enable you to assess its merits.

2) Read through the draft and check each of the guidelines under section II (above): Is your opening paragraph clear and effective? Have you demonstrated an understanding of the sources you draw on? Have you presented sufficient evidence/information to support your argument/develop your theme? Does the quoted material serve its proper purpose, i.e., does it illustrate key points/arguments/points of view? Does the paper's conclusion still seem convincing to you?

3) If you find any shortcomings in the draft then correct them. This redrafting process may include a thorough rewriting of the whole paper, or of a few sections, or the re-ordering of certain paragraphs. You may even find that you need to reconsider your title. You are correcting a draft, so be hard on yourself, find every weakness you can. Consider all the possible criticisms of your paper and how you can deflate them.
4) Also check the draft carefully for grammatical shortcomings. Use the spell check function on the computer, but remember that computerized spell checkers are unreliable; you should also proofread a printout of your paper. Are your tenses consistent? Is your sentence construction effective, i.e. do your sentences read smoothly and make perfect sense? Have you carefully divided material into paragraphs? Do you have strong transitional sentences to lead the reader from one paragraph to the next?

5) Now you should have a complete second draft of your paper in front of you. You could submit the second draft of your paper or go through the above process again. Generally, the more drafts a paper goes through, the more effective it becomes.

Appendix 2: Recommended Readings


