

DePaul University
School for New Learning
Spring 2009

Syllabus:
AI 189 Social Conflicts of the Kennedy Years

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Day/Time: Tuesdays, 6:30-9:30 pm
Location: Naperville campus

Course description:

“Where were you when Kennedy was shot?”: Even if you can’t answer that question—and many of us can—you’ve heard it asked repeatedly and that says something. It speaks to the popular sense that John Kennedy’s victory at the ballot in 1960 and his felling by bullets in 1963 mark turning points in American history. As the youngest person ever elected to the office and the first president to be born in the twentieth century, Kennedy projected an image of youth, vigor and heroism which inspired Americans eager to see their society become both more equitable and more adventurous than it had seemed in the conservative, conformist nineteen fifties. In calling his administration “The New Frontier,” Kennedy invoked one of the oldest and most powerful myths in American culture—that of the nation progressing (or fighting its way) westward toward unlimited horizons. With Kennedy’s violent and mysterious death, American horizons seemed to narrow, hopes of progress dimmed and popular myths lost much of their resonance.

Popular images “the Sixties”—think, say, of hippies, Black Panthers, soldiers fighting in Vietnam, protesters working en masse to stop the war—actually correspond to the 10 or so years that follow Kennedy’s death in 1963. But much of what occurred in that remarkable decade had its seeds in the Kennedy years. This course will closely at American political and cultural history from the late fifties moment through JFK’s “thousand days” in office, concentrating on some key social conflicts and their popular and artistic representations. Topics to be studied include the Cold War, anti-communism and the atomic bomb; the Cuban revolution; the civil rights movement and Martin Luther King; the rise of protest singers and soul music; the administration and assassination of JFK; the beginnings of the US’s full-fledged military incursion into Vietnam; and the advent of new and radical cultural forms in the wake of the assassination.

Faculty:

John Kimsey received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois and serves as a member of the SNL resident faculty at the rank of Associate Professor. He specializes in modern literature and cultural studies and has published articles, both scholarly and popular, on aspects of sixties culture and politics. The words “duck and cover” still make him wince.

Competencies offered:

H1X: Competence in the study of Communities and Societies. Statement to be composed by student in consultation with instructor

H4: Can analyze power relations among racial, social, cultural or economic groups in the US.

A1X: Competence in Interpreting the Arts. Statement to be composed by student in consultation with instructor.

A3X: Competence in Reflection and Meaning. Statement to be composed by student in consultation with instructor.

The H-X competency addresses the course focus on important movements and individuals of the period. The H4 competency addresses the course focus on sociopolitical movements of the period which emphasize race, gender and class factors in relation to issues of activism and community-building. The A1X competency addresses the course focus on works of fiction, film and popular music from the period. The A3X competency addresses the course focus on ethical and philosophical issues raised by events and ideas of the period.

Learning experience:

A variety of learning strategies will be employed, including textbook readings; film screenings; classroom lectures and discussions; journals of the readings; and short papers.

Required texts:

E Reserves at DePaul Library Website

All readings for the course (except *Cat's Cradle* by Vonnegut) are posted on Electronic Reserve at the DePaul Library website. Just go to <http://library.depaul.edu> and click on Course Reserves. Then use the Instructor pulldown menu to find “Kimsey” and when the Kimsey page comes up, click on the title of this course. The password is AI189. (Please note: There are more readings posted on E Reserve than we will actually use; some readings posted there are supplemental or optional.)

Book

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Cat's Cradle*. Dell, 1998 (originally published 1963), ISBN-10: 038533348X; ISBN-13: 978-038533481. Available at DePaul Bookstore, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc.

Evidence students will submit:

Class Participation

Students are expected to do the appropriate readings for each class session in a timely fashion. They are also encouraged to demonstrate that they've done so by participating in class

discussion. In addition, students will submit the following pieces of written work.

Journal Entries

All students will compose journal responses (about 1 page in length) to 10 readings listed on the syllabus. With the exception of Session I, students should do a journal entry per session on one of the readings scheduled for that particular session. This totals to ten journal entries. A suggested format for journal entries appears at the end of this syllabus. These will be collected at each session.

Two Short Papers

Students will submit a short paper (5-7 pages long) addressing each competency for which they're signed up. The first of these will be at our Week Six meeting and the other at our Week Eleven meeting. Students will choose paper topics from an array of essay questions prepared by the instructor. The instructor will see to it that the essay questions are attuned to specific competencies. Also, it's always possible for a student to write on a topic of his/her own choosing, provided the instructor approves it.

In sum, students are expected to participate in class discussion; compose 10 journal entries; and compose two short papers. Percentage-wise, the breakdown is as follows:

Class participation	10%
Journal	30%
Midterm paper	30%
Final Paper	30%

Incomplete policy:

See attachment at end of syllabus.

Plagiarism policy:

See attachment at end of syllabus.

Criteria for assessment:

In assessing work like that described above, I look for a) basic knowledge and comprehension of pertinent events, individuals and institutions; b) a scope of discussion or (where appropriate) research that goes beyond material covered in class; and c) thoughtful engagement with the material, i.e., with questions and conflicts raised or implied by the material. Evidence of one of these elements equated roughly with a C; evidence of two with a B; and evidence of three with an A. Other factors, such as class participation, can also affect final grades. I expect such papers to conform to college-level standards of mechanics and presentation. I am happy to work with students on these points, on a draft/revision sort of basis, if students so desire. In making such assessments, I strive to be clear, forthright, flexible and empathetic.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

[Note: This is a tentative schedule, as of 2/6/09.]

All the readings listed below (except *Cat's Cradle* by Vonnegut) are posted at the DePaul

University Library website as Electronic Reserves. Just go to <http://library.depaul.edu> and click on Course Reserves. Then use the Instructor pulldown menu to find “Kimsey” and when the Kimsey page comes up, click on the title of this course. The password is AI189.

Week One: 3/31

Introduction to course; Backgrounds to the period; Screening of *Seeds of the Sixties*; In-class reading: Ferlinghetti, “I Am Waiting” & Hargis, “Political Planning for Victory Over Communism”; Eisenhower’s farewell speech

Week Two: 4/7

Cold War, Anti-communism and the Bomb; Screening of *Fail Safe*

Read:

Two Historians Debate the Dropping of Atom Bombs on Japan
Erikson, “Of Accidental Judgments and Casual Slaughters”
Meyer, “Principles and Heresies”
Galbraith, “The Fatal Competition”

Listen to:

Dylan, “Masters of War”; “Blowin’ in the Wind”

Week Three: 4/14

Overview of Kennedy’s presidency; Notes from Underground; Screening of *Dr. Strangelove*

Read:

Farber, “The World As Seen From the White House 1960-1963”
Porro, “The Policy War: Brodie vs. Kahn”
O’Neill, “The Beats”
Jabour, “The Flowering of the Folk Revival”

Listen to:

Dylan, “A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall”; “Talking World War II Blues”

Week Four 4/21

Civil Rights and American Dreams; Screening of *The Staple Singers*

Read:

Zinn, “Or Does It Explode?”
King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
Unger, “Brown vs. Board of Education”
Sanford, “The Shadow”

Listen to:

Dylan, “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll”; “Only A Pawn in Their Game”
Cook, “A Change is Gonna Come”

Week Five 4/28

Three writers: Flannery O’Connor; James Baldwin; Tom Wolfe

Three musicians: Miles Davis; John Coltrane; Brian Wilson

Read:

O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"
Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues"
Wolfe, "The Last American Hero"
Ehrenreich, "The Revenge of the Lower Class"

Week Six 5/5

The Mass Culture Debate; Theories of Media; Screening of *Twilight Zone: The Monsters Are Coming to Maple Street*

Midterm Papers due

Read:

Slotkin, "The Significance of the Frontier Myth in American History"
Mailer, "Superman Comes to the Supermarket"
Friedan, Excerpt from *The Feminine Mystique*
Lee & Shlain, Excerpts from *Acid Dreams*

Week Seven 5/12

Kennedy, War and Peace; The Bay of Pigs and the Berlin Crisis

Read:

Rubin, "Kennedy As Ideal Leader/Kennedy As Showy Opportunist"
Morley, "Operation Success"
Talbot, "1961"
Warren Commission, "Summary and Conclusions"

Week Eight 5/19

The Missile Crisis as Turning Point; What Happened in Dallas?; the Single Bullet Theory and its Discontents; Screening of the Zapruder film and excerpts from *Nova: the Kennedy Assassination*

Read:

Douglass, "A Cold Warrior Turns"
Epstein, "The Vulnerability of Facts"
Posner, "The Sniper's Nest"
Oglesby, "Evidence of a Conspiracy"

Week Nine 5/26

The HSCA investigation; Who killed Kennedy?: "Motive, Means and Opportunity"

Read:

Summers, Excerpt from *Not In Your Lifetime*
Morley, "Spy As Poet"
Newman, "Oswald's Cuban Capers"
Summers, "Aftermath"

Week Ten: 6/2

The World Turned Upside Down: Post-Assassination Culture

Read:

Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle*

Week Eleven 6/9

Some Notes on the Johnson Administration; Foreign Entanglements; Myths of Kennedy;
Conclusion of course

Final Papers dueRead:

Unger, "The War on Poverty"

Zinn, Excerpt from "The Impossible Victory"

Mailer, "A Speech at Berkeley on Vietnam Day"

Ehrenreich et al, "Beatlemania: A Sexually Defiant Consumer Subculture?"

Suggested Format for Journal Entries

For a given reading, fill up about a page responding to the following questions:

1. What is the reading about? (Be concrete and literal at this stage; try not to jump to "interpretation.")
2. Describe something from your own experience you are reminded of by the reading.
3. What is the most important passage in the reading? Why?
4. Which other reading seems most to agree with this one? Which other reading seems most to disagree with this one? Explain your choices.
5. Pretend the reading is *not* about whatever you said it was about in #1. Pretend it's about something else, something hidden or unstated. What is this other thing that the reading is "really" about?