THE VIETNAM WAR & AMERICAN SOCIETY

This course will investigate our nation's longest and most controversial war, and how it fostered profound changes in America's society and culture. Many argue the war was the seminal event of the past fifty years, and that though long over still shapes America today.

While the war was a powerful agent for change all by itself, its effect was intensified by other forces. The 1960s were an amazing blend of forces converging to forever upset and alter America including: a variety of civil rights movements, the women’s and youth movements, crime, assassinations, riots, and of course Watergate.

Class discussions will examine a variety of questions about how these forces, but especially the war, affected American society and culture. Discussion is central to this course so you must read the assignments ahead of time and be prepared to enter into the class dialogue.

TEXTS:

Caputo, A Rumor of War;

Farber, The Age of Great Dreams;

Franklin, The Vietnam War in American Stories, Songs, & Poems

Bloom & Brienes, Takin it to the Streets

Young, The Vietnam Wars

Herr, Dispatches

REQUIREMENTS:

DISCUSSION: ACCOUNTS FOR 40% OF YOUR FINAL GRADE.

RESPONSE: ON THE MAJOR READINGS & FILMS EACH 30%

ESSAY: ONE MAJOR ESSAY WHICH WILL BE WORTH 20%

ESSAY DRAFT & CRITIQUE: IS WORTH 10%
August 26  Intro; Post WWII America: Stasis & Good Times?

This section covers 1950s US culture emphasizing the dominant suburban society and the absence of any racial or ethnic diversity, as well as the restrictions placed upon women. The main point is to investigate a 1950s America suffering under a “Pleasantville” experience that is soon to be shattered in the 1960s by the war, but also by the unleashed forces pressing for civil rights.

Sept 2  A Time of Change 1960s
[Farber 7-66]

This class period covers the early 60s and the cultural and societal tensions that defined it. First, we discuss the ongoing Civil Rights Movement, and then the increasingly complex and volatile situation for minorities, women, and young people as the Kennedy years start to challenge the Pleasantville complacency and homogeneity.

Sept 9  War in Vietnam Overview
[Young 1-280]

Sept 16  "In Country" experience I
[Caputo]

Sept 23  "In Country" experience II
[Platoon & One Other]

Sept 30  Rights Movements
[Farber 67-116, 199-211, 239-262
Bloom 15-27, 43-49, 105-111, 125-128, 130-133,

This class covers the Women’s Movement, Civil Rights Movement, Chicano Rights, American Indian Movement and Gay Power struggle.

Oct 7  “In Country” experience III
[Herr]
Oct 21 “In Country” experience IV
[Apocalypse Now & One Other]

Oct 28 The Student Rebellion & Counter Culture
[Farber 138-141, 153-165, 190-198, 167-190, 215-238;
Bloom 50-61, 81-92, 100-103, 333-335, 467-474, 237-242,
264-283]

This section not only examines the Student Movement but also how that movement
played role in the development of the Women’s Movement.

Nov 4 Back in the World
[Born on 4th July & Coming Home or One Other]

Nov 18 War & American Culture
[Two films from List]

Through the examination of selected films, this section examines race and gender and the
effect of the war and the Rights Movements on American identity.

Nov 25 War & American Culture
[Franklin all
Bloom 242-245, 508-511]

Through the examination of selected sources, this section examines race and gender and
the effect of the war and the Rights Movements on American identity.

Dec 2 The Left and Right Collide
[Bloom 165-166, 174-184, 186-191, 199-201, 219-222,
358-369, 375-383, 294-302, 324-333, 476-489]
[Draft Papers Due]

Dec 9 Legacies: Vietnam & Today’s Culture
[Article/film/song & Young 280-end & Bloom 529-533]
[Critique Due]

This section is a review of how the war era altered American culture politically but also
socially and culturally.

Dec 12 [Papers Due 5pm]

**Silver Core:**

This class satisfies the following objectives:

CO 13: Students will be able to integrate and synthesize Core knowledge, enabling them to analyze open-ended problems or complex issues. HIST 406 asks students to analyze and reflect upon the myriad social factors that influenced and, in turn, were impacted by the Vietnam War. Students will analyze a variety of sources and films and write integrative responses as well as research and write a paper on a topic of their choice.

HIST 406 also builds upon:

CO 1:
Students will be able to effectively compose written, oral, and multimedia texts for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes. In HIST 406, students write response papers and a research paper. They are also must participate in class discussions.

CO 3: Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information.

HISY 406 integrates:

CO 10: Students will demonstrate an understanding of diversity through courses that focus on topics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, physical ability, language, and/or social class with an emphasis on the analysis of equity. Students will apply and evaluate approaches or modes of inquiry used to analyze diversity and equity and the social barriers to these goals.

**Skills-Based Curriculum**

The history program at UNR helps students to develop proficiency in broadly applicable skills while mastering specific subject areas. In addition to learning about American society, film and culture, students in this class will have opportunities to practice and improve the following skills:

- critical thinking (through reading and analyzing written documents and cultural sources, formulating arguments supported by historical evidence, and organizing
information in a clear and logical manner)
• historical research (through finding information about historical topics in short assignments and a research project)
• written communication (through writing short assignments, a research presentation, and an integrative essay)
• primary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented historical documents and cultural artifacts created during the time periods we are studying)
• secondary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented in books and articles written by scholars about the time period we are studying)
• cultural text analysis (through thinking about the significance of cultural texts such as films and placing them in historical context)
• oral expression (through small group and whole class discussions and student presentations)
• using the internet (through research assignments and guidance on how to evaluate internet sources)

**Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

Students successfully completing this course will be able to:

1. Examine the ethical principles, belief systems, and social contexts that have shaped modern American during the Vietnam War era, 1954-1975.

2. Identify how different groups and cultural interests were shaped and altered American culture during this era.

3. Analyze a variety of historical scholarship and sources to answer a research question connected to how a variety of social forces and groups transformed society and the war

4. Present ideas in a clear and persuasive manner both orally and in writing

**Participation:**

This course will be taught in a lecture/discussion format. Short lectures will provide historical background and explain key concepts, but much of your learning will occur through discussion of the assigned readings and other class activities. Therefore, regular attendance and participation are essential. If you are not present, you cannot participate, so excessive absences will lower your final grade. It is also very important that you complete the readings before the days they are assigned. Students who have not done the reading will find it hard to fulfill the class participation requirement, and this makes up a significant part of your grade.

You will not acquire the knowledge and skills you need to pass this course through
passive reading or listening. Instead, you will need to take an active role in the learning process. This means working through the assigned texts carefully and critically, analyzing the information and not just summarizing it, and coming to class prepared to share your own thoughts and interpretations of the material.

Written Responses:

In and out of class assignments are designed to encourage you to keep up with the reading and help you to prepare for class discussions and activities each week. In addition, the research and writing exercises required by the assignments provide opportunities to practice skills related to studying American culture. Developing these skills through short assignments will help you to do well on the longer research and writing assignments required later in the course. Although the assignments will not be cumulative, you must try and link materials and ideas and draw comparisons or make other connections to the current week’s material. This is another reason why regular attendance and paying close attention to lectures and discussions are essential.

Paper: (SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Students will analyze and synthesize the ideas and information presented in lectures, readings, assignments, discussions, student presentations, and their own research throughout the semester to answer one of the following questions:

Grading Criteria

F (less than 60%)  
F is for work that is not acceptable. It demonstrates that the student has no idea what the course material is about, suggesting a lack of interest or effort and possibly some absences from class.

D– (60–62%), D (63–66%), D+ (67–69%)  
D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It suggests that the student has not been paying much attention to the course or is having problems understanding the material.

C– (70–72%), C (73–76%), C+ (77–79%)  
C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material and is mostly accurate, but the paper lacks detail or effective organization. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence, or it might be merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis.

B– (80–82%), B (83–86%), B+ (87–89%)  
B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with an introduction,
a thesis, and a conclusion.

A– (90–94%), A (95–100%)  
A is for work of exceptional quality. This grade is for essays that present a clear thesis supported by persuasive evidence and analysis, logically organized, and free from typing or grammatical errors. The A essay does more than just competently summarize material from the readings or lectures. It shows the student has thought things through on a deeper level and offers his or her own perspective on the topics under consideration.

**Deadlines and Policies Regarding Missed Work**

Assignments are due in class on the dates indicated in the course Schedule. Makeups are possible but they are limited to three each term save for extreme situations or if pre-approved. Missing class destroys the grade you earn in many ways.

**Students with Disabilities**

The History Department is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

**Academic Dishonesty**

The university’s Academic Standards policy states:

Academic dishonesty is against university as well as the system community standards. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following:

Plagiarism: defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one's work to be used in this fashion.

Cheating: defined as (1) obtaining or providing unauthorized information during an examination through verbal, visual or unauthorized use of books, notes, text and other materials; (2) obtaining or providing information concerning all or part of an examination prior to that examination; (3) taking an examination for another student, or arranging for another person to take an exam in one's place; (4) altering or changing test answers after submittal for grading, grades after grades have been awarded, or other academic records once these are official.

Sanctions for violations of university academic standards may include the following: (1) filing a final grade of “F”; (2) reducing the student’s final course grade one or two full grade points; (3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question; (4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper.