

PSC 219/AMS 294
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Youth as a Social Movement

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SYLLABUS

This topic, while forming one specific theme in American cultural studies, extends to the very meaning of the U.S. as the first modern nation. As a revolutionary society which was determined to replace the traditional order of Europe, it imagined itself as a young nation engaged in a generational struggle. Symbolized in the polarity between the Old World and the New World, the U.S. – as expressed by Paine, Jefferson, Melville and others – stood for the rights and independence of those just coming of age. As such, the self-image of the nation, represented by the protagonists in its early literature, is almost always young adults struggling to overcome the past and shape their own future identities and social realities.

A major cultural outgrowth of this progressivist vision of the national history was a transformation of the historical dynamic between the generations. In American culture, in case after case, the young are idealized as moral embodiments of the millennial hopes for the future over and against the limited powers, vision and achievements of the adult world. This dynamic culminated in the post-World War II era, as children became increasingly seen as more powerful competent and self-realized than adults, who were in turn portrayed as functionally inadequate, morally compromised and instinctually repressed.

Reaching a breaking point with the youth rebellion of the 1960s, this dynamic has for the first significant time in American history undergone a dramatic shift since that period. While some aspects of the old idealization persist, the young are increasingly pictured in radically deidealized, dysfunctional and even morally corrupt ways. In other words, they seem to have lost or been stripped of their iconic power as the harbinger of a transcendent American future to the point where they are perhaps even at this point the scapegoat for national doubts about its expansive moral claims and global aspirations as a revolutionary project.

Because of the powerful connection this theme represents between the larger dreams and ideals of American culture and the lives that the American young are promised and permitted, this course will explore this theme historically and as it impacts contemporary youth and the American social process. It will first identify the earlier patterns of idealization and politicization followed by consideration of the post-War shifts, employing a variety of mediums including literature and film, and culminating in a consideration of Occupy and the potential for future mobilizations. It will then engage the students in a reflective journey in the effort to connect the larger cultural forces operating both in the past and today with their own self-understanding of their life trajectories and the broader framing of possibilities and limits, directions and prohibitions, permissions and sanctions, within contemporary culture.

MECHANICS: The format of the course is meant to be a discussion seminar. This course will be such a discussion course in every class meeting from the beginning of the course to the end of the term. I proceed in the course by means of the Socratic method with some variations which I will explain, which involves a continual process of questions and responses, followed by more questions and responses on a continuing basis. There are no right answers in this discussion. It is meant to be a forum for the participation of each class member, and for the questioning of assumptions and the clarification of ideas. I do not offer my own clarification at the end of class, but continue the process where we left off in the next class. Not only is there no right answer expected by participants, there are often many right answers depending on the experiences, backgrounds and values of each participant. That means that much of our work in class is tentative in nature, provisional hypotheses that can be added too and altered as the course proceeds. This course as a result requires a tolerance for ambiguity, for leaving issues linger and working them out in discussion, reflection, paper writing and life experience.

I further expect that each member of the class will participate in each and every class meeting, and I work hard both to ensure and encourage full participation and the broadest expression of ideas and reflections. This means that the reading or other work necessary, specifically viewing movies and writing papers, to prepare for the class **must be finished before the class meeting**. Moreover, since this class is taught mostly by Socratic method, it is evident immediately whether the work has been done. There will no credit given for attendance in a class in which the work was not done in advance. Moreover, more than one class without preparation or without excused absence will have a significant impact on the final grade and will likely result in failure in the course.

TEXTS: There have been eight books ordered for the course which is available and should be purchased in the edition available at the DePaul Bookstore.

Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*
 Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*
 Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*
 Emerson, *Self-Reliance and Selected Essays*
 Melville, *Billy Budd*
 Shulman, *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen*
 Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*
 Rodriguez, *Always Running*

This is **by no means** the only work. There will also be many articles handed out in class as well as a number of films needing to be viewed in advance. These films will be on reserve in the Lincoln Park library and some will be available streaming (the instructions will be passed out in class), and arrangements to see the films in advance, whether in the library, from Netflix, or from rental must be worked out **well in advance**. There can be **no excuses** that the films are unavailable!!!

ASSIGNMENTS:

This course will involve a series of shorter papers, perhaps four or more, that will be timed to enable class members to write about upcoming issues for a particular class, both to encourage reflection in advance and to facilitate the conversation in class. For these reasons, **these papers will not be accepted late**. Furthermore, they must be turned in as a hard copy – not email copies will be accepted (I do not accept emailed assignments as a rule). If a class is missed, it is the class member’s responsibility to get the assignment well before the next class. These papers are not noted in advance in the schedule, because they will come out of the class process as it unfolds. These papers are moreover initiated by some provocation or other, and certainly can – and perhaps should – be responded to if you choose with alternative themes and provocations in fulfillment of the assignment. This we can talk about as we go forward.

In addition, there will be a mid-quarter reflection essay, a longer and more comprehensive end of quarter reflection essay, and an essay or other project of your choosing which elaborates on and/or advances the themes of the course. While percentages are not my thing (can’t do the math), class participation will surely count for a substantial part of the course work, something like 20% of the grade. For those who find class participation to be a problem for them in spite of their best efforts, you should see me to work out an additional means for indicating your involvement and understanding. Not every member of the class can excel at each and every part of the course -- a dedicated performance in some areas can indeed offset the work in areas. The short papers will together account for 25%, the mid-quarter essay 15%, the concluding essay 25%, and the individual project 15%.

TOPIC OUTLINE:

The materials below are arranged by topic and not by date to allow a flexible schedule. Each member of the class is expected to **review the materials from the point we leave off in the preceding class**, and to prepare up to the point we agree on at the end of the that earlier class.

I. INTRODUCTION: YOUTH AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

--Introducing themes through a variety of materials

II. AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM I

READ: Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (selections)
 Franklin, *Autobiography* (selections)
 Paine, *Common Sense* (selections)
 Irving, “Rip van Winkle” (handout)
 Melville, *Redburn* (selection) (handout)

III. AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM II

READ: *Cane Ridge* (handout)
 Emerson, “Self-Reliance”

Little Women (movie)
 Whitman, “Starting from Paumanok” (handout)
 Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (selection) (h-out)

IV. EMERGING GENERATIONAL STRUGGLE

READ: Melville, *Billy Budd*
 Bourne, essays (handout)
 Dell, *Intellectual Vagabondage* (selection) (handout)
 Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful* (selection) (handout)

V. EMERGING YOUTH

READ: Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young* (selection) (handout)
 De Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America’s Long Struggle for Civil Rights* (sel’n)(h-out)
 Shulman, *Memoirs* (selections)
 Keniston, selected essays (handout)
 Cheever, selection (handout)
 Kerouac, *On the Road* (selection) (handout)

VI. YOUTH AS A MOVEMENT

READ: *Port Huron Statement* (handout)
 Keniston, selected essays (handout)
 Malcolm, *Generation of Narcissus* (selection) (handout)
 Marcuse, *Essay on Liberation*
Little Buddha (movie)
 Rodriguez, *Always Running* (selections)
Commune (movie)
 Farson/Holt on Children’s Rights (handout)

VII. WAR ON KIDS

READ: *River’s Edge* (movie)
Thirteen (movie)
Reality Bites (movie)
Ghost World (movie)
 Brooks, “Organization Kids” (handout)
 Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep* (selection) (handout)
 Falludi, *Terror Dreams* (selection) (handout)
 Chua, “Tiger Moms” (handout)
 Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (selection) (handout)
 Anarchist Manifesto (handout)

VIII. OCCUPY AND BEYOND

READ: Graeber, *The Democracy Project* (selection) (handout)
 Block, “Youth as a Post-Industrial Proletariat” (handout)
Charlie Bartlett (movie)
Goodbye World (movie)