

E55.1033, V57.0651
The “Culture Wars” in America: Past, Present, and Future
Dr. Jonathan Zimmerman

This course will examine the origins, development, and meanings of so-called cultural conflict in the United States. Why do cultural issues divide Americans? How have these issues changed over time? And how can Americans find common ground amid their stark cultural differences?

Course Requirements

1. Reading: For each week, I will assign 100-150 pages of reading, from the following books:

- Laura E. Huggins, Drug War Deadlock: The Policy Battle Continues (Hoover Institution Press, 2005); also available at <http://www.hoover.org/publications/books/online/3020361.html>
- James Morone, Hell-Fire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History (Yale University Press, 2004)
- Jon Shields, The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right (Princeton 2009)
- Alissa Torres, American Widow (Villard, 2008)
- Steven Waldman, Founding Faith: Providence, Politics, and the Birth of Religious Freedom in America (Random House, 2008)
- Jonathan Zimmerman, Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools (Harvard University Press, 2002)

I will also assign a small number of shorter articles, accessible on the Web via “JSTOR.” Please note: I expect you to do all of the assigned reading, on time. Please come to class (and to your sections with our Teaching Assistants) prepared to speak about the “prompt” in the Point of View Paper for that week.

2. Weekly Point of View (POV) Paper: Each week, I will ask you to hand in a SHORT (3 pages, maximum) Point of View Paper, responding to the prompt on the syllabus. My major criteria in evaluating these papers will be the *clarity* of your argument and the *evidence* that you offer in support of it.

Please note: *I do not accept late Point of View Papers.* But, given the heavy writing load in this course, we have decided to let each student “skip” one paper (of her/his choice) during the semester.

Please note: *even if you “skip” a paper, you are responsible for completing the reading for that week.* Also, please notify your T.A. if and when you decide to “skip.”

3. Final examination: The final examination will be comprehensive, drawing upon all of the themes and issues that we examine in the

course. I will give you a set of six essay questions beforehand; three of them will appear on the final exam.

Course Objectives

Students will

1. explain the historical roots of cultural conflict in the United States
2. describe contemporary American “culture wars,” including
 - a) the different issues or arenas of conflict
 - b) the parties to each conflict
 - c) the arguments and evidence they invoke
3. discuss the links between culture wars and national politics
4. frame their own theoretical positions about the origins, meaning, and possible solutions for America’s culture wars

Grading

Point of View Papers: 50%

Final Exam: 30%

Discussion/Participation: 20%

Course Schedule

I. THE PAST AS PROLOGUE: CULTURE WARS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

September 8: Course Introduction

September 13: Puritans in America: The First Culture Warriors?

READING DUE: Marone, *Hell-Fire Nation*, Part I

September 15: **POV PAPER DUE:** James Marone concludes the first section of his book with the assertion that “we remain Puritans all” (p. 116). What does he mean? Do you agree with Marone’s claim? Why or why not?

September 20: 1776 And All That: Religion and the Founding Fathers

READING DUE: Waldman, *Founding Faith*, pp. 1-106, 188-205

Class visitor: Steven Waldman

September 22: **POV PAPER DUE:** You have been asked to deliver a lecture entitled, “Lessons from the Past? What the ‘Founding Fathers’ Can Teach Us About ‘Culture Wars’ Today.” Please submit the first draft of your remarks, which should draw upon specifics from the Founding Fathers and explain their relevance—if any—for the present.

September 27: Slavery and Abolition

READING DUE: Marone, *Hell-Fire Nation*, Part II

September 29: **POV PAPER DUE:** According to James Marone, “[t]he struggle to curb dangerous others . . . shapes American political thought and culture in every era. Enforcing the lines between us and them turns American policies into their distinctive forms: a first-world

laggard in traditional social welfare programs, an international leader in government efforts to control (or improve or uplift its people” (p. 182). How did the “us-and-them” division develop in the first half of the nineteenth century? And does the history of this division gives us any clues about whether—and how—we might transcend it?

October 4: Culture Wars in Progressive America: Alcohol, and Some Sex

READING DUE: Marone, Hell-Fire Nation, Part III

October 6: **POV PAPER DUE: Suppose that your community proposed to name a local school after Frances Willard, the temperance and “purity” advocate. Would you vote to memorialize her in this fashion? Why or why not?**

October 11: NO CLASS

October 13: The 1920s: Evolution and Patriotism

READING DUE: Zimmerman, Whose America?, ch. 1

October 18: Culture Wars and the Great Depression

READING DUE: Zimmerman, Whose America?, ch. 3
Marone, Hell-Fire Nation, ch. 12

October 20: **POV PAPER DUE: According to one common claim about “culture wars,” they tend to diminish during times of economic hardship. Does the history of the Great Depression support that theory? And how might that history help us understand—or, even, bridge—today’s culture wars?**

October 25: Cold Warriors, Culture Warriors

READING DUE: Marone, Hell-Fire Nation, ch. 13
Zimmerman, Whose America?, ch. 4 and 6

October 27: **POV PAPER DUE: Many Americans continue to regard people who came of age in the 1940s and 1950s as the country’s “greatest generation.” Do you agree? Why or why not?**

November 1: The Sixties Smashup

READING DUE: Marone, Hell-Fire Nation, ch. 14
Zimmerman, Whose America?, chs, 5, 7

November 3: **POV PAPER DUE: In 1994, Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich made the following statement about the 1960s and its legacy:**

“From 1965 to 1994, we did strange and weird things as a country. Now we’re done with that and we have to recover. The counterculture is a momentary aberration in American history that will be looked back upon as a quaint period of Bohemianism brought by a national elite who taught self-indulgent, aristocratic values without realizing that if an entire society engaged in the indulgences of an elite few, you could tear the society to shreds.”

Please evaluate this statement. Do you agree? Why or why not?

II. INTO THE PRESENT: CULTURE WARS SINCE THE SIXTIES

November 8: Abortion

READING DUE: Shields, The Democratic Virtues of the Christian Right

November 10: **POV PAPER DUE:** Jon Shields defends the so-called Christian Right—including anti-abortion activists--for promoting democratic virtues in America. Do you agree with his argument? Why or why not?

November 15: Sex Education

READING DUE: Zimmerman, Whose America?, ch. 8

Susan Rose, "Going too Far? Sex, Sin and Social Policy," Social Forces 84 (2005), 1207-1232.

November 17: **POV PAPER DUE:** How does sex education in the United States differ from the sex-related curriculum in Denmark? What should Americans teach about sex in their public schools? Please draw upon both readings in framing your answer.

November 22: Gay Rights, Gay Marriage

November 24: NO CLASS

November 29: Drug Wars, Culture Wars

READING DUE: Huggins, Drug War Deadlock

December 1: **POV PAPER DUE:** How does our "war on drugs" compare to other culture wars in American history? How might this history cast new light upon the contemporary controversy over drug abuse and control?

December 6: September 11, 2001: The Culture Wars and American Memory

READING DUE: Torres, American Widow

History News Network Hot Topics: The Cordoba Mosque, at <http://www.hnn.us/articles/130381.html>.

December 8: **POV PAPER DUE: You have been asked to deliver a lecture entitled, "The 'Ground Zero Mosque' Debate: Historical Antecedents, Contemporary Arguments." Please write the first draft of your remarks, which should draw upon history to frame your own position on the question.**

December 13: Optional In-Class Review

December 15: FINAL EXAM