

**United States history since 1945**  
**Social Studies Department**  
**Belchertown High School**  
**Academic Year 2008-2009**

Teacher: Mr. O'Brien

Location: Room 319

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After School Help Days – Monday and Wednesday (or by arrangement)

## **Course Description, Objectives, and Expectations:**

College Preparatory United States History since 1945 is designed to provide students with the analytical skills, factual knowledge and enduring understandings necessary to intellectually master problems and issues in U.S. history from the end of World War II until the present. An equally important objective of the course is to prepare students for first-year college level work by developing the critical reading, writing and thinking skills that will be expected of each student on her/his first day at any institution of higher learning. Students will learn to assess historical materials – their relevance to a given interpretive problem, their reliability, and their significance – and to evaluate the evidence and interpretations presented in historical scholarship. Furthermore, students will develop the skills necessary to formulate ideas and interpretations based on evidence and informed judgments and to present their ideas and interpretations clearly and persuasively in written and oral formats.

The content of this course provides an in-depth examination of what scholars refer to as modern United States history. Students will use primary and secondary sources to examine a variety of themes, including the rise and collapse of the post-war liberal consensus, the creation of a youth-centered mass culture, the “rights revolution,” successes and failures of the United States as a world power and the resurgence of the American conservative movement. In particular, students will be asked to read, write and analyze about two essential questions:

- 1. To what extent has individual freedom, equal protection under the law, opportunity for those in the working and middle classes to improve their condition in life, and the fundamental right of all persons to participate in our political system expanded in the United States over the last sixty years?**
- 2. To what extent has U.S. foreign policy been guided by idealism over the last sixty years?**

In order to help students successfully answer these questions, students will:

- 1. know a broad body of historical knowledge;**
- 2. demonstrate understanding of historical chronology and cause/effect;**
- 3. utilize higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation;**
- 4. analyze primary and secondary source documents;**

5. **construct thesis statements and interpretations of the past;**
6. **utilize secondary and primary source evidence to support an argument;**
7. **analyze, assess, and evaluate secondary historical research;**
8. **create original historical research.**

All of our coursework will be grounded in the philosophy set forth in the Belchertown High School Mission Statement: academic excellence and responsible citizenship will be fostered and pursued in a positive, safe, and respectful environment. In order to create a positive, safe, and respectful environment, students will be expected to follow and will be assessed on our school's Social and Civic Expectations, which are to:

- demonstrate respect for themselves and their school environment.
- contribute to a positive school climate.
- work cooperatively to achieve group goals or resolve conflicts.
- respect and appreciate the diversity of the entire BHS community.
- participate in activities that encourage leadership and service to school/community.
- understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democratic and multicultural society.

## **Required Materials and Texts:**

For this course, the following materials are required daily: a pen or pencil, a notebook (or section of a notebook devoted to this course), and a folder (or section of a binder devoted to the handouts for this course). The homework readings will be drawn primarily, though not exclusively, from the following texts:

- *On the Edge: The United States in the Twentieth Century* by David A. Horowitz & Peter N. Carroll
- *A Rumor of War* by Philip Caputo

## **Grading:**

Your quarter grades will be comprised of the following elements:

- **Take-Home Exams (40%)** – At the end of each unit you will write an essay that answers the course's essential question on the "American Creed," which means you know the possible "test" questions on the very first day of class. The reason for doing that is to have you think about the expansions and contractions of freedom, equality, opportunity and democracy that have occurred over the last fifty-five years.
- **In-class written work (15%)** – This category refers to the written work we do in class on any given day that I will either check or collect at the end of class. Whether I check or collect the work, we will always review it. *Please keep in*

*mind that the work in this category is assigned to help you successfully answer the essential question.*

- **Class Discussion (15%)** – I will record a class discussion grade at the end of each week in my grade book. It will be based on behavior, effort, and the quality of class discussion comments, as well as your adherence to our school’s civic and social expectations enumerated above. If you are tardy to class, it will negatively affect this portion of your quarter grade. *Again, please keep in mind that the point of class discussion is to help you successfully answer the essential question.*
- **Homework (15%)** – The work in this category pertains to all textbook reading and note-taking, exam essay outlines and thesis statements, and miscellaneous short assignments. Sometimes I will assess how well you have taken notes by asking you to use them to answer questions verbally during class. Other times I might ask you to answer a “big question” in writing. You are responsible for making sure that you complete the reading and note-taking by the assigned dates. *In this class, homework is not busy work. It is intended to help you construct an intelligent and valid response to the essential question.*
- **Projects (15%)** – The projects in this course will range from oral presentations to class debates. The grade on the final version of any project should represent your very best effort every time.

## **Late Assignments and Exam Make-ups:**

I will only accept essays and projects late. However, a tardy assignment will lose a letter grade for each day that it is late beyond the due date. After one week the highest grade an assignment will receive is an “F.” Remember, though, that an “F” (meaning partial credit less) is better than a “0,” so hand in every essay or project.

Please consult the Student Handbook regarding our school’s exam and work make-up policies when you are absent. I do not make any exceptions to this policy.

## **Extra Credit:**

Extra credit work is not an option in my class and is completely unnecessary if you simply do the assigned work. I have never had a student earn a failing grade who has completed all of the assigned work on the assigned due date. If you are ever concerned about your grade in this class, please do not hesitate to see me after school to discuss your concerns.

## **Unit Overview:**

The overview below contains the name and time period for each unit, major unit topics, textbook reading and date by which the reading must be completed (in *italics*):

## **Constructing a Cold-War Consensus (1945 – 1953)**

Launching the Post-War Economic Boom

*Please read pp. 245 – 262 by Tuesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>*

Confronting the Soviet Union

*Please read pp. 262 – 271; pp. 276 – 279 by Monday, September 8<sup>th</sup>*

Red Scare, the Fair Deal, and War in Korea

*Please read pp. 272 – 276; pp. 279 – 285; pp. 290 – 303 by Monday, September 15<sup>th</sup>*

## **The Confident Years (1953 – 1965)**

Massive Retaliation and Covert Action

*Please read pp. 303 – 308; pp. 324 – 333; pp. 361 – 365; pp. 372 – 379 by Monday, September 29<sup>th</sup>*

The Affluent Society

*Please read pp. 308 – 311; pp. 333 – 353 by Monday, October 6<sup>th</sup>*

Civil Rights and the Great Society

*Please read pp. 365 – 372; pp. 379 -395 by Tuesday, October 14<sup>th</sup>*

## **The Collapse of the Consensus (1965 – 1980)**

Identity Politics and the Vietnam War

*Please read pp. 399 – 421 by Monday, October 27<sup>th</sup>*

Nixon's America

*Please read pp. 424 – 446 by Wednesday, November 5<sup>th</sup>*

Humbled Giant

*Please read pp. 446 – 470 by Monday, November 17<sup>th</sup>*

## **Conservative Ascendancy (1980 – 2001)**

Rise of the Christian Right and the Reagan Presidency

*Please read pp. 470 – 487 by Wednesday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>*

The New Economy

*Please read pp. 487 – 516 by Monday, December 15<sup>th</sup>*

Post Cold War America

*Please read pp. 516 – 540 by Wednesday, January 7<sup>th</sup>*