

Politics and Social Movements in Modern United States History

Michael Kazin, Department of History, Georgetown University

Purpose: This course is based on the assumption that significant political changes in the United States emerge from a relationship between mass social movements and political elites. Movements raise issues and organize to enact reforms; elites, both elected and unelected, attempt to repress, co-opt, or ally with these movements. Since the late 19th century, the process has produced eras both of reform and conservatism. In this course, I will survey the most significant movements in the United States since the 1870s and discuss how the political system responded to them.

There will be two lectures per day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. After the second lecture, we will discuss selected documents. After each lecture, there will be a question and answer period.

Reading: Alan Brinkley, American History: A Survey, Vol. II (latest edition) and selected primary documents (all on line, either as web documents or PDFs; some will be viewable.)

Schedule:

Day One: 1. Overview: Industrialism and Its Discontents

2. The Labor Movement in the late 19th Century

Reading: Brinkley, Chs. 16-17

Documents: Census statistics on changes in occupations, ethnicity, and income
Speeches by Albert Parsons and Samuel Gompers

Day Two: 1. The Farmers Alliance and the Peoples Party

2. The Heyday of American Socialism

Reading: Brinkley Chs. 18-20

Documents: The Omaha Platform of 1892; The Socialist Party platform of 1912; speech by William Jennings Bryan, Labor Day, 1896

Day Three: 1. Progressivism : Woman's Rights, Prohibitionists, Urban Reformers, Black Rights

2. Progressivism: The Elite Response

Reading: Brinkley, Chs. 21-23

Documents: W.E.B. DuBois, from Souls of Black Folk; Speech by Woodrow Wilson; excerpt from Jane Addams, "The Subjective Value of a Social Settlement"

Day Four: 1. Social Movements during the Great Depression

2. The New Deal – Politics and Culture

Reading: Brinkley, Chs. 24-28

Documents: Speeches by Father Charles Coughlin, John L. Lewis, Franklin D. Roosevelt. Text of the National Labor Relations Act.

Day Five: 1. The Anti-Communists

2. The Black Freedom Movement from the 1940s-60s

Reading: Brinkley, Chs. 29-30

Documents: Joseph McCarthy, Speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, 1950
Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”; Martin Luther King, Jr., excerpt, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”

Day Six: 1. Liberalism and the New Left

2. Feminism and Gay Liberation

Reading: Brinkley, Chs. 31-32

Documents: Carl Oglesby, “Trapped in a System,” 1965; Excerpts from Sisterhood Is Powerful; speeches by John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson

Day Seven: 1. The Conservative Upsurge -- A Movement Emerges

2. Conservatives in Power

Reading: Brinkley, Chs. 33-34

Documents: Barry Goldwater, 1964 Acceptance Speech
Speeches by Phyllis Schafly and Ronald Reagan
“Pledge to America,” Republican Party, 2010

Conclusion: Discussion of Contemporary Politics in Historical Perspective