AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN TRANSITION

Fall Semester 2011

Professor Laurin Raiken

Office Hours
Tues. 2:30-5:00 PM
Wed. 2:30-5:00 PM

MA Seminar Open to Advanced Undergraduates

ELEC-GG2720

Tuesdays 6:20-9:00 PM Rm. 401 1 Washington Place

4 Credits

This document is both a syllabus and an introduction to the seminar.

Until 2007 we took for granted that in the more than sixty years following World War II the industrialized Western World experienced unprecedented economic expansion, and the United States was geopolitically the dominant superpower, indeed the U.S. was the primary coordinator and beneficiary of the post World War II and Cold War period. The epoch of Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union (1945 through approximately 1985) characterized by the standoff of the M.A.D. nuclear strategy (Mutually Assured Destruction) ironically turned out to be a period of relative global stability.

Only a few keen observers detected economic flaws or geopolitical vulnerability in advanced industrial capitalism during this
period. In retrospect the Reagan administration's focus on general deregulation and its radical policy of almost complete support for free market economic dominance signaled a massive alteration from a relatively balanced public/private economy to one focusing on a government hostile to its own capacities and ideologically re-oriented to emphasis on the priority of private sector values and a desire to privatize those government services that would remain after the Republican’s hope for a radical downsizing of government.

Over the past three decades the emergence of new forms of violence, major shifts in global economic power, U.S. global military, political and economic reversals have seriously threatened and are now undermining what has been called up until very recently “The American Century” and new world order
Major and unexpected clashes, only partial successes in limiting terrorism, inserting ourselves into asymmetrical and questionable wars have contributed to the destabilization of the American economy. We hear everyday that for economies to function effectively stability and the limitation of as much uncertainty is possible in all areas, is necessary. Recently the self-immolation and breakdown of the U.S. financial system and economy has triggered a deep global destabilization and recession. History teaches us that military preeminence is based upon sustained economic power. Ancient Greece was defeated when its imperial appetites ground down its armies and bankrupted its treasury. Given our deepening economic crisis how long will the U.S. be able to remain the world's military superpower?

For at least 30 or more million Americans life has become tragically similar to the severe dislocations of the Great Depression of the 1930s. Conservative domestic forces continue to grow stronger and re-assert their long-standing domination over key sectors of the American economy and society. Conservatism continues to inflame the deeply embedded culture wars and the divisive polarizations of America's core values.

Until 2007-08 the U.S. bolstered its global cultural influence through its support and promotion of a world culture based on an ever expanding, all-encompassing consumerism. Now, in a credit crisis and burst over heated housing bubble and a no longer affordable consumerism we are so polarized that we cannot find our way to new roads to economic productivity and directions toward political adequate political functioning, no less shared cultural values. We are likely entering a deeper recession with the hope of only meager economic growth and an even slower recovery. In fact, increasing numbers of even mainstream economists are predicting a general long term decline of the American economy.

This seminar provides an interdisciplinary perspective on the stability that is rapidly slipping from the world's grasp and the eruptions triggering upheaval between social, political, economic, climate and cultural dynamics. We will look at the deeply rooted character and consequences of American conservatism at home and on the world stage and how the severe ideological polarization of the American public skews power, politics, the culture of our daily lives and most particularly our economic security.

What are the solutions of these crises? What are the prospects for the U.S.A., Western Europe and our very own lives in
this radically changing environment?

"And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Matthew Arnold
"Dover Beach"

“Some work of noble note may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods,
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs, the deep Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends, ‘Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulls will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the happy isles. And see the great Achilles, whom we knew, Though much is taken, much abides; and though We are not now that strength which in old days Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are; One equal temper of heroic hearts, Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will To strive. To seek, to find, and not yield.”

Ulysses, Alfred, Lord Tennyson
SEPTEMBER 6, PROFESSOR LAURIN RAIKEN, CHAIR AND DIRECTOR, ARTS AND SOCIETY PROGRAM, Gallatin School of individualized Study. Associate Faculty, Program on Arts and Politics, Tisch School of the Arts. Introduction and Overview of Seminar issues and concerns. Orientation, readings, expectations and assignments. Introduction of class members.

MAJOR TRENDS IN AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE: Changing Forces in the American Social, Moral and Cultural Creations of Community and Individualism.

Our context is the tension between the drive to maintain much of STASIS, the status quo when observing, “The Waning of American Empire, as American society navigates Economic Crisis within a fragile World Order.
Class will read selections from Dorothy Lee, *Valuing the Self: What We Can Learn From Other Cultures.* Since this book is no longer available I will provide you with selected chapters. In addition to the few books assigned in the course a good deal of the class reading will be papers distributed in class or through the Internet.

From time to time I will recommend readings from the work of the distinguished Sociologist/Anthropologist Arthur J. Vidich, one of the most insightful analysts of American society and its institutions. Dr. Vidich helped to create this seminar and was one of its most outstanding guest lecturers.

**FOR NEXT WEEK YOU SHOULD PREPARE A TWO PAGE PAPER** (approximately 500 words) TITLED, "HERE I STAND." **DEVELOP A CONCISE STATEMENT OF YOUR SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC BELIEFS AND VALUES AT A TIME OF ECONOMIC AND GLOBAL UPHEAVAL. PLEASE EXPRESS YOUR REAL BELIEFS, VIEWS AND ASPIRATIONS, NOT YOUR IDEALIZATIONS ABOUT THE U.S.A. AND THE WORLD TODAY.** Try to integrate your overview with your personal responses to these critical challenges. We will have opportunities later in the course to share our view of “WHAT IS TO BE DONE.” **TO BE SO CONCISE IS A CHALLENGING TASK BUT YOU CAN DO IT!**
In addition to your "Here I Stand" introductory paper there will be two or three other brief paper assignments in our seminar: They will be some form or combination of:

1) A 2-3 page Midterm review

2) A 3 page paper to choose from a few take home questions about some of our readings

3) A 3 page final paper, as a personal synthesis or integration of the course material. In fact, this can be a "Here I Stand" from the perspective of the conclusion of the course.

CONCERNING YOUR CLASS PARTICIPATION AND PAPERS:

OK, WE NOW KNOW AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE WORLD IS EXPERIENCING SUCH ENORMOUS CHANGE THAT OUR TIME CAN BE CONSIDERED A WORLD HISTORICAL REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD.

CENTRAL TO THESE RADICAL TRANSFORMATIONS IS OFTEN CALAMITOUS STRIFE, DISLOCATION, SUFFERING, VIOLENCE AND TRAGEDY. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, PARTICULARLY WHEN THEY IMPACT ON OUR OWN LIVES?

HOW DO WE TALK AND WRITE ABOUT THEM? WHAT SHOULD BE EXPECTED OF US? HOW MUCH CAN WE REMAIN AWARE, FEELING, COMPASSIONATE, RESPONSIVE, INTELLIGENT AND UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF THESE HISTORICAL ERUPTIONS?

TO WHAT EXTENT SHOULD YOU RESPOND AND TAKE ACTION IN RESPONSE TO THESE CIRCUMSTANCES AND HOW SHOULD YOU WOULD YOU, WILL YOU ENGAGE OUR SOCIETY AND THE WORLD?

At the same time it is valuable to become aware of those historical observations, philosophical, scientific and sociological theories that look to catastrophe as opportunity (as in the Chinese I Ching). There is a very strong historical view of cyclical change, the scientific and technological perspective that human ingenuity and innovation will help us solve some but not all problems. There is Georg Simmel’s ingenious sociological perspective that sees conflict as one of the prime
movers of social change, transformation and creativity.

In the work of Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, Ilya Prigogine, we have a major view that leads us to a different and perhaps a potentially more optimistic view of natural and social systems. In his book The End of Certainty, Prigogine holds that determinism is no longer a viable scientific belief. He writes, "The more we know about our universe, the more difficult it becomes to believe in determinism." We must recognize indeterminism in the study of unstable systems in nature and I add, society. Prigogine's theory of "dissipative structures" led to pioneering research in discovering the role of complexity, and the irreversible role of time in the nature of self-organizing systems. Most interesting for the students of nature and society is his book with Isabelle Stengers, Order Out of Chaos. Prigogine's laboratory work seems to offer an alternative reality to the Second Law of Thermodynamics in which all systems eventually run down. In the process Prigogine observed a "dissipative function," in which the components of breakdown begin to reorganize themselves in new patterns.

Such ideas, emerging from a variety of fields help us understand that in the long run "things will work out." However true this may be, during the process of transformation, disruption and violence there is a great deal of human suffering and never enough amelioration of that suffering. Not to be pessimistic, one cannot help but remember the words of perhaps the greatest economist of the 20th century, John Maynard Keynes who quipped, "In the long run we are all dead." Therefore, have the courage and take risks on behalf of bold action, now.

Once Keynes was stopped by a member of the British Parliament and challenged, as if to show Keynes to be inconsistent, with, “Mr Keynes, I hear that you have changed your mind.” Keynes responded, “I change my mind when the facts change, what do you do?”

September 13 "And so instead of concentrating on the future effects of racism I am in part looking at race to provide a key to the problems that face all of us in America." Walter Mosley, Workin' On the Chain Gang: Shaking Off The Dead Hand of History.

'RACE: Class and Culture

Class discussion of some selected readings from Toni Morrison, Nobel Laureate and Council of the Humanities Professor, Princeton University, Emeritus, Walter Mosley, novelist and essayist, and Stephen Steinberg, Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center, City University of New York.
It is unusual in American society, extremely rare for at least the last forty plus years at New York University, as far as my experience extends, that there is awareness and discussions of the First Peoples, the Indigenous Peoples on whose land we live and attempt to flourish in the wake of the U.S. of A’s near extinction of Native Americans. We begin what is almost always a very painful discussion of the racism, discrimination and violent near elimination of America’s First Peoples, our history of what is still the ongoing breaking of treaties with the Indigenous, most overlooked, people, most invisible to us and still, in many cases, the ongoing target of theft, dislocation, the denial of religious freedom until very recently and a litany of ongoing discrimination and racist violence. Selected reading from number of authors, including some of the most powerful, challenging and disturbing works of Jack D. Forbes in Columbus and Other Cannibals.
SEPTEMBER 20 and 27. **THE TRIUMPH OF CONSERVATISM: ORIGINS OF CONSERVATIVE INFLUENCE AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF ITS POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONQUESTS.**

Presentations by Professor Raiken and class discussion of the readings.

“…facts change, what do you do?”

Class will read essays by such authors as Robert Nisbet, Brigette and Peter L. Berger. Recommendations for further reading are essays by Irving Kristol, (Father of Neo-Conservatism, articles from America’s oldest conservative weekly, The National Review, twice weekly Op Ed articles by David Brooks and Ross Douthat, the two conservative columnists writing for the New York Times, two of the most thoughtful and least extremist conservatives writing today.

Remember that the Neoconservatives, led by Vice President Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, the Kristols et al were among the major architects who had planned the war against Sadam Hussain and the invasion of Iraq, BEFORE 9/11 and the "enhanced interrogation" also defined by the Geneva Conventions as torture. These plans were drawn up and waiting for an excuse to trigger, as soon as George W. Bush was elected. **What if anything did it have to do with his father and General Colin Powell not going all the way to Iraq and Powell’s warning that once you invade a country you own it. And soon it will own you.** home and on the world stage, how the U.S. strives to remain the world’s

Other materials on the history and varieties of American conservatism will be distributed or recommended to the class throughout the semester.

If the nature of conservatism expressed in literature interests you, you
might look for the religious and cultural conservatism of T.S. Eliot's classic and masterly poems on religion, tradition and time, the *Four Quartets*. I also recommend his recording of the *Four Quartets*. You might take note of this Nobel Laureate’s now out of print but classic work relating his support and promotion of religious traditionalism, aristocracies and class hierarchies in *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*. 

We will consider the lasting consequences of American conservatism at home and on the world stage, how the U.S strives to remain the world’s greatest military superpower, why it has a mixed record of achievement and some significant lack of success when faced with "asymmetrical warfare" carried out by "insurgents", why we might lose our military supremacy as other empires have in consequence of our weakening economic position. An aspect of the new fundamentalist radical conservatism is an even more fanatic clinging to an almost religious belief that the only ways and means of organizing a society is through pure free market capitalism. This is not even capitalism as we know it since the success of capitalism until now has relied on the government to serve the needs of business and ultimately to grease its path to continuing economic dominance. I remember my surprise and even shock when in graduate school Professor Arthur J. Vidich explained to our class how American business has always gotten it way throughout American history. I had been naïve enough to believe that this was sometimes the case, but I found it hard to accept that it has been one of the main elements of American history. We must never forget Calvin Coolidges remark that “The business of America is Business.”

Ultimately and perhaps more pressing, especially with growing climate disequilibrium is our choice of the kind of economy the world will adopt in the fast arriving future. If the world regains economic stability we will for the first time have to take seriously the question of whether endless market growth and world consumerism is sustainable on our resource limited, population exploding and climate fragile planet?

Thus some of the questions Professor Raiken and class will begin to map out as an interpretation of "Conservatism's Ascendancy and Lasting Consequences."
October 4 "The Omnipresence of Violence," and "The Sources of Terrorism."

("A jus so kummem Holze, als woraus der Mensch gemacht ist, kann nichts ganz Gerades gezimmert werden.")

"Out of timber so crooked as that from which man is made nothing entirely straight can be built."

Immanuel Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschicte in webugerlicher Absicht' 1784, Berlin, 1912

This is quoted by Isaiah Berlin in his philosophical argument that given the differences between their world views and values peoples from different cultures are unlikely to agree on any single universal set of the best means and ends of individual life, society, culture and civilization. Thus to achieve any kind of peace we must adopt PLURALISM as the core element of our political philosophy so as to allow for people with different “weltanschaung,” (world views), to live side by side, if not in harmony, then without direct violent conflict.

Class will read Hannah Arendt On Violence.
I am only recommending some of the material on this topic for you to keep in mind for future thought or research. If you are interested in one or more of these readings I will direct you to them in my digital archives or elsewhere. If you are interested, please give a brief look at the early report by the Harvard University Faculty Conference on Terrorism, Causes and Consequences, In the Harvard Magazine, I will give you to definitely read the astute Parliament testimony of Paul Wilkinson, Chair and Professor Emeritus, Center for the Study of Terrorism and political Violence, at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. Please be aware of essays by Samantha Power, the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, now on leave to the U.S. Dept of State, on genocide, titled "The Problem from Hell," For future reference I recommend the prescient and masterful essay by Sir Isaiah Berlin on Joseph de Maistre, the French
arch conservative, absolutist, religious fundamentalist and extremist who many, including Berlin, consider the intellectual father of fascism.

Also add to your bibliography of potential readings on terrorism, the critically acclaimed work done by Harvard research scholar and faculty member Jessica Stern. Her book, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* is one of the most important sources of insight into terrorist violence.

Since 9/11 there has been an even greater outpouring and explosion of research and writing on the new forms of violence and terrorism. Again, as a reference for anyone considering future research and to get the perspective of a major Italian thinker I recommend Franco Ferraroti, Professor and Chair Emeritus, Department of Sociology, University of Rome, "On political Violence." This essay may be found in the archive of the journal, SOCIAL RESEARCH, published by the Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research.

Class and Professor Raiken may also discuss forms of violence done to research and development in the U.S. by the militarization of the economy and politics, and the redirecting of American scientific and technological talent from domestic innovation to arms creation, what Seymour Melman has called "Pentagon Capitalism. You might also want, someday, to look at the analyses of Col. Douglas A. Macgregor, Ret. PhD., written and video on his critiques of U.S. military strategy, organization and budgets. Start with "Dan Rather Reports, “What Happened Next: Battle Plan" and any of the other five video clips on his critique of US military strategy on the right side of the page.

In response to another kind of battle, the violence and tragic loss of life in the authentic struggle for self-determination and democracy in the Irish Freedom Uprising of the early 20th century, the great Irish poet W.B. Yeats wrote of other tragic paradoxes in his "Easter 1916."

"And what if excess of love
   Bewildered them till they died
   I write it out in verse-
MacDonagh and McBride
And Conally and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn
Are changed, changed utterly
A terrible beauty is born.”

William Butler Yeats
October 11, 18 & 25  "Boom and Bust: But for Whom? The Genius, Success and Demise (?) of the American Economy.

The post WWII economy created the Revolution of the Middle Classes in American. The policies of the late 1970s and the beginning of the Reagan Revolution began the slow and then accelerating decline of the American Dream and the growth of the Middle Classes. The U.S. economy went from high growth from the late 1940s until after the end of the Vietnam War era, then began an almost imperceptible decline that has reared its destructive forces in the decline of American wages, salary and purchasing power since the late 1970s but has only reared its most vicious attack on the Middle Working and Left Out Poor Classes in the Great Recession of 2007 on.

“U.S.A., U.S.A.: We’re Number One, We’re Number One” :The Largest Economy on Earth But for Whom and for How Long?

Class will begin these three classes by reading John Kenneth Galbraith, The Good Society: A Humane Agenda, and a few selected essays by and about Galbraith.

Next we will read John Lanchester’s I.O. U.: Why Everyone Owes Everyone and No One Can Pay, a book considered to be one of the best, clearest, most readable and understandable histories of the U.S. and global financial and economic crises, crises that grew out of the housing bubble and mortgage frauds and led to the severe and ongoing credit crisis that paralyzes the potential for a recovery and imprisons the American and European economies in paralyzing recession to this day.

Class will also read an essay by the distinguished social theorist Arthur J. Vidich and look at NYU's Edward N. Wolff’s research "The Middle Class Squeeze," I will refer to the history of the Financial Crisis by Simon Johnson of M.I.T. and former Chief Economist for the International Monetary Fund. You may refer to his history of the economic crisis in his blog "Scenario.com.” I will make reference to and suggest reading a number of economists of many stripes but I specifically refer you to the highly literate Monday

To achieve a developing view of the current economic crisis, you might also wish to read and compare the highly conservative editorial pages of the Wall Street Journal and the twice-weekly New York Times pieces by the more moderate and thoughtful conservative also writing for the New York Times, David Brooks. Back to an articulate liberal perspective, you might also wish to follow the bold work of James K. Galbraith, and any of the numerous commentators particularly the sound, excellent and right of center reporting found in the English weekly journal, THE ECONOMIST. I personally find the ECONOMIST, although unquestionably conservative to be one of the most solid and illuminating journals in the world. Once again, from a liberal perspective, The New Yorker magazine has an occasional excellent article on the economy. You won’t want to miss the extraordinary Matt Bai of THE ROLLING STONE, one of the best economics investigative journalists in the country, I will bring to your attention the names and publications of the many excellent writers on the ongoing U.S. and global financial, economic, credit, housing, employment crises that continue to pull the standard of living for the middle, working classes and those denied a stake in the economy completely out from under them and add to their immiseration.

For more than the past year most commentary, even from the more objective conservatives and right of center economic analysts, particularly the best and most honest conservative minds such as Judge Richard Posner of the University of Chicago whose Dept. of Economics has been the among the most conservative and most pro free market in the world. Posner is highly critical of the dominant and recently highly distorted 'Free Market' and its excessive "irrational exuberance" (a phrase invented by John Kenneth Galbraith but used in his waning effectiveness by the former head of the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank, the almost absolute fundamentalist 'freemarketeer', Alan Greenspan.)
Excessive risk taking on artificially valued and sometimes unethically marketed investment instruments, unjustified, unbacked subprime mortgages, uncontrolled, unregulated and unrealistically leveraged investments were also causes of the decline and almost complete fall of the U.S. and global economy. Do we need to think of and re-think regulation, not as mere invasive bureaucratic expansion, but as realistic, useful and necessary limits for the well-being of the financial community and its multitude of clients. We certainly need to think of 'recovery' in far broader terms than fostering the return to the status quo ante, namely as the unquestioned return to dominance of the disgraced (but once again in the driver's seat) cabal of the banks, investment houses, hedge funds and Wall Street!

"The Fate of Homo Economicus' in America"

Class and Professor Raiken continue discussion on the impact of the U.S, financial and economic systems: Who Works, Who Pays and Who Benefits? How long and why the current organization and distribution of wealth will remain unchallenged in the U.S.A.

Current economic reality is changing so rapidly it seems to be changing at exponential rather than arithmetic rates. Therefore it is very difficult to keep up with events no less find reading other than the daily newspapers that help us as adequately as possible to understand the economic history crashing over us and through our daily lives. While trapped at a meditation retreat in the Hudson River Valley of New York State by Hurricane Irene over the weekend of August 26-28 that turned into the 29th and 30th, I drew up some notes on the history of why I thought the federal government was unwilling to investigate the major U.S. banks for potential fraud throughout the lead up to the crash of Lehmann Brothers and the devastating aftermaths. Many of us thought that the federal government was afraid to investigate the Masters of the Universe or had already made a deal to only pursue them though civil litigation, or were treating the banks with kid gloves so as not to upset the banking system any more than it had already been because we need as stable a banking system as possible to underpin credit and an economic recovery. I have a great deal of evidence, on this history, particularly from the Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Gretchen Morgenson and her extraordinarily smart investigative financial reporter colleague Louise Story. Then just in the past few days, September 1 – 3, news has hit The Street that the Department of Justice in Washington, the DOJ has indeed, after three
years, finally built up the courage to investigate, for potential fraud, the wealthiest and most powerful men and institutions in this country, the so called “Masters of the Universe” who own and operate the largest and most powerful banks in the US and in the case of Goldman Sachs, one of the most powerful banks in the world.

So, one has to be very fast on their feet to keep up with events.

**November 1 Mid-term Reports and discussion.** For this evening you are to prepare a three page mid-semester review, (a paper of approximately 750 words) and a three-minute oral commentary, for presentation in class. The oral commentary should be a briefer version or written outline or the major issues and questions you raise in your midterm paper.

REMEMBER, THE ORAL REPORT IS TO BE A MAXIMUM OF THREE MINUTES! Why? So that all of your class colleagues will have their opportunity to present their reports at this class meeting. (Rehearse your oral presentation at home to approximate your time so we can guarantee sufficient time for class discussion after all your individual presentations.)

Both the paper and the oral report must be your synthesis of seminar issues, lectures and readings to date. *Focus on one or more subjects or questions about contemporary American culture and society that most concern you.*

If the size of our class, time and the syllabus allows, next week, following any remaining oral presentations from tonight, we will have class discussion with all class members responding to each other's ideas. You must actually take brief notes on your classmate's presentations so we can have a strong basis for class discussion next week. Therefore make certain your schedules allow you to remain for the entire class period.

Your mid-term papers are to be submitted at the end of the class in which you give your oral presentation.
November 8 Election Day Seminar students and Professor Raiken will continue discussing student mid-term reports and papers and the issues we began to identify as

LIVING AT THE EDGE: Bewilderment, Turmoil, & Transition?

HOW ARE WE FARING, LIVING ON THE RAZOR'S EDGE

PATH, OR ARE WE TOTTERING ON THE BRINK? HOW

DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE
CONTINUING ERUPTIONS OF ANGER, RAGE AND HATE IN 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN HISTORY AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD? YOU CAN REMEMBER BACK TO THE 1930s IN THE U.S.A AND REPLAY THE RANTS OF FATHER COUGHLIN ATTACKING FDR AND HIS ADMINISTRATION AS "COMMUNISTS" AND WORSE. LISTEN TO THE SO-CALLED HERO, ‘LUCKY LINDY,’ CHARLES LINDBERGH GO ACROSS THE UNITED STATES HAWKING AND URGING THE AMERICANS TO REJECT OUR GOVERNMENT AND SUPPORT HITLER. FROM WHERE DOES THIS REJECTION AND HATE EMERGE? WHERE CAN SUCH RAGE AND HATE LEAD? DO YOU FIGHT TO WIN AN ELECTION, OR TAKE OVER A COUNTRY AND CONTINUE TO SUSTAIN THE HATRED OR, DECLARE, "HEY, NOW I'M NOT ANGRY ANYMORE" AND GET ON WITH YOUR AGENDA, OR MUST THERE ALWAYS BE AN ENEMY TO HATE AND ENGAGE IN AN ENDLESS WAR AS IN GEORGE ORWELL’S 1984?

APPRECIATIVE OF THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT OR RESENTFUL AND ASHAMED THAT DURING A GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS, PARTICULARLY IN OUR INDIVIDUALISTIC SOCIETY WHERE PEOPLE ARE SUPPOSED TO TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES, WE MAY NEED TO RELY ON GOVERNMENT? CAN WE AMERICANS BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND THAT SUCH CRISIS GO BEYOND AN INDIVIDUAL’S RECUERATIVE ABILITIES, THAT SUCH CRISSES ARE NOT CREATED BY INDIVIDUAL NEGLIGENCE AND THAT SOME CANNOT BE SOLVED BY INDIVIDUALISTIC INITIATIVE ALONE. OF COURSE MOST PEOPLE KNOW AND SEE THIS, BUT THEY WANT TO DISTORT WHAT THEY KNOW AND SAY YES, PEOPLE NEED ASSISTANCE FROM TIME TO TIME, BUT LOOK WHAT HAPPENED TO NEW ORLEANS HIT BY HURRICANE KATRINA. THERE, FEMA, THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY AND MANAGEMENT AGENCY REALLY SCREWED UP AND PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE MESS. SO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, IN THE PERSON OF FEMA WASTED A LOT OF TAXPayers MONEY. CONGRESSMAN RON PAUL OF TEXAS HAS BEEN MAKING THIS ARGUMENT IN RECOMMENDING THAT WE THE PEOPLE REGAIN OUR FREEDOM TO ACT AND CHOOSE BY ENDING FEMA. “AFTER ALL,” HE SAYS, “WHEN HURRICANES HIT MY HOMES IN TEXAS, I TOOK CARE OF MYSELF AND DIDN’T WANT ANY GOVERNMENT MESSING IN MY AFFAIRS. I HAD BOUGHT INSURANCE AND I TOOK CARE OF MYSELF AND MY OWN HOME. IF I LIVE IN TEXAS, WHY SHOULD MY TAX MONEY HELP ANYONE HIT BY HURRICANE IN VERMONT? WHAT DID THEY EVER DO FOR ME? LET THEM DO WHAT I DO AND TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES.”

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE FREEDOM WE TALK ABOUT? FREEDOM FOR, FREEDM AGAINST, FREEDOM TO CHOOSE TO BE RESPONSIBLE AND RECIPROCAL TO THE HUMAN BEINGS THAT MAKE UP OUR FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES AND COUNTRY? WHERE DOES FREEDOM END? THOSE CLAIMING THERE FREEDOM IS BEING HAMPERED BY GOVERNMENT, PARTICULARLY THE OBAMA GOVERNMENT, WANT TOTAL FREEDOM. WELL IF TOTAL FREEDOM EXISTED WOULD IT STRETCH TO OTHER PEOPLE OR WOULD TOTAL FREEDOM JUST STOP AT THE BORDERS OF ME OR YOU ALWAYS DOING JUST WHAT WE WANT TO DO
AND WANT TO HAVE?

WHAT ARE THE REAL GUARANTEES AND GUARANTORS OF FREEDOM? DOES FREEDOM HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH ACCESS TO THE PATHS TOWARDS EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROSPERITY?


November 15 "The New American Society: Do we Really Want the Good Society?" How do we define the Good Society? Do we identify it as "The American Dream?" Do we experience what Leon Festinger called "Cognitive Dissonance," when we and significant segments of our population fall short of achieving "The Dream?"

Do the forces of inequality, injustice, resentment or their remedy come into play when roads to working toward the achievement of The American Dream seem to be or are in fact, closed off? What is reciprocity and justice in contemporary society?

Class will read a few chapters (particularly the last two chapters of Barrington Moore, Jr.’s Reflections on the Causes of Human Misery and Upon Certain Proposals to Eliminate Them. I will provide these chapters for you. Please take special note of the final chapter of Barrington Moore's Reflections. This book is unfortunately out of print and Professor Moore gave me permission to reproduce these chapters, Some of you might wish to read Jeffrey D. Sach's essay "Can Extreme Poverty be Eliminated?" in Scientific America. I hope to give you a perspicacious quote on the performative nature of American politics by the noted culture critic Harold Rosenber in Partisan Review during the Johnson Administration.
For another perspective from one of America's most important philosophers of linguistics, I strongly recommend becoming acquainted with George Lakoff's *Moral Politics* and his pamphlet.
Don't Think of an Elephant: How Democrats and Progressives Can Win: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate.

This class may also lead us to further thinking about:

The Struggle for the Future, "Running on Empty", Reinforcing the Past, Rhetoric vs. Reality, The Permanent Government, Or as Greenwich Village’s great short story writer, Grace Paley titled one of her books, something that we may be hoping for, namely, Small Changes at the Last Minute.

In terms of the quite monumental and global changes going on at this time in terms of species on the planet, you might want to look at what artist/architect Maya Lin's calls her last Memorial. Go to her website for "WHAT IS MISSING: AN AWARENESS ABOUT THE PRESENT SIXTH MASS EXTINCTION OF SPECIES."

Is it the case, as the American writer Harold Rosenberg observed about American society and culture that throughout our history we have created a myth and reality that our experience is always in support of tradition, but our tradition is The Tradition of the New, a deeply embedded belief and practice, perhaps contradictory, that we remain loyal to our origins, our sense of American traditions, while continually inventing the new. That in fact the new, ALWAYS attempting to recreate ourselves, IS our tradition.

November 22 Do We Dare To Try To Entertain Ideas And To Think In Ways That Are Both Old And New But Make Us Highly Uncomfortable?

We will read Ill Fares the Land by Tony Judt, one of New York University’s most distinguished historians, a book he dictated, while almost completely paralyzed, just before dying of Lou Gehrig’s disease, a book in the that is highly controversial in the U.S. because its ideas are alien to most of us, but a book whose ideas have currency all over the world and one that is already considered to be a new classic.
November 29 Specification on the Future:

“And in today already walks tomorrow,”

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

“The trouble with our time is that the future is not what it used to be.”

Paul Valery

“The future is called ‘perhaps’ which is the only possible thing to call the future. And the only important thing is not to allow that to scare you.”

Tennessee Williams

“Orpheus Descending,” 1957

“We have met the enemy and they is us.”

Pogo

“It is the bottom of the ninth inning and nature bats last.”

Paul and Anne Ehrlich

For this class we are reading Gary Shteyngart’s novel, Super Sad True Love Story.
For this class and the final class meeting on December 13 you are to prepare a final, brief (again, three minutes) oral statement integrating the issues and questions under discussion throughout this Graduate Interdisciplinary seminar. This verbal presentation may be in the form of raising new questions but it must include your focus on one or more of the issues analyzed in the course and refer to some of our class discussions and readings. Or, you may be able to begin a synthesis of the entire course or you may want to use this final paper to write an end of course HERE I STAND essay.

The oral presentation you offer your class colleagues should be an adaptation of your final paper.

(Parenthetically, I hope that some time in the near future you will continue to look at the work of the distinguished social analysts and historians of ideas Barrington Moore Jr., Arthur J. Vidich and Isaiah Berlin. Berlin's essays on the paradoxes of intellectual and social absolutes and the hope of Pluralism, while just recently challenged by one of his most important student/colleagues, Professor Ronald Dworkin of the NYU School of Law and Oxford, are of particular value.

Arthur J. Vidich’s work, influenced by Hans Gerth and often co-authored with his equally brilliant colleague Joseph Bensman, with Stanford Lyman or with junior colleagues, such as Jerry Levy, Michael Hughey Robert Jackall or independently, remain the basis of one of the most important schools of Institutional Analysis in American Social Thought.)

Summation and concluding discussion. We will have a very short time available for final student presentations if all of you have not yet presented at the previous class. We want most of our time this evening to be dedicated to overview and analysis by you, our seminar Students and some of me, Professor Raiken. To conclude our seminar productively
please prepare a paragraph of your responses to the ideas your classmates presented last week. This way we will all contribute to a lively final class discussion.

We have begun to look at some patterns of conflict and renewal and how they impact on Self and Community. We have begun to examine U.S. and global values and the transfigurations of illusion. In reexamining some social dreams and political aspirations, what new orientations and perspectives are beginning to emerge? Can we find individual and communal ways of being that might actually help us negotiate this world without unnecessary violence, cruelty and the excesses of moral bankruptcy?
There are other questions we could ask. Some of them might be: What local and global conditions are influencing you to think and act in new ways? What new innovations on the material and technological fronts are creating new problems but are simultaneously fostering significant breakthroughs? Are our crises so great, so complex that they are overwhelming our capacity to understand them? Why may some crises be beyond resolution? What kinds of thinking and action show promise of helping us solve our great dilemmas? What kinds of groups and what relationships within and between these groups (constituted by such as scientists, artists, business people, writers, engineers, child caretakers, homemakers, doctors, service workers, religious guides, farmers, musicians, teachers etc.) are generating new ideas and positive implementations? What individuals and groups are doing the work of healing and creating forms of healing that will enable us to have a humane future?

One of the most visionary thinkers of the Twentieth century, Walter Benjamin wrote, about history,

"A storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress,"
Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History, 1939

HIC RHODUS, HIC SALTUS

WELCOME TO A GALLATIN SCHOOL
INTERDISCIPLINARY SEMINAR

American Society and Culture in Transition

A SEA CHANGE