AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN TRANSITION

THE CRISIS OF OUR TIME

Fall Semester 2012

Professor Laurin Raiken
411 Lafayette St, #305
212-998-7334
lr2@nyu.edu

ELEC-GG 2720
Office Hours
Tues 2:30-5:00 pm
Wed 2:30-5:00 pm

Graduate Elective

Mondays 6:20 – 9:00 pm

1 Washington Place, Rm. 501

4 Credits

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. The United States was the geopolitically dominant superpower, indeed the U.S. was the primary coordinator and beneficiary of the post World War II 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 compared to the currently unsettling regional wars, various jihadists and the new terrorism.

Only a few keen observers detected economic flaws or geopolitical vulnerability in advanced industrial capitalism during the mid 1970s. 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 post-WWII social contract among business, labor and government along with a relatively balanced public/private economy to a new conservative support of government treated as hostile to its own capacities. Reagonomics, effectively influenced an ideological shift, a re-orient that emphasized the priority of private sector values a desire to privatize as many of the government services that would remain after the Reagan administration and its drive for a radical downsizing of government and an extremist façade of individualism. If government is downsized and tax reduction is aimed at primarily benefiting the top 1 to 2 % of the super-rich then there is a massive decrease in government’s ability to deliver services that the American people actually want and need. However, while it is well known that most Americans do not like paying taxes, people cannot demand services from the government without paying for them. For all the “sturm und drang” conservatives express
that freedom is only possible through the private sector CANNOT, the private sector in fact provide these services. Why? Because it is structured primarily to provide profit for its owners. Well, then, how about relying on the Not-for-Profit sector of the private sphere? This is possible, but only to a limited and dramatically inadequate extent. Private and religious institution based charity cannot meet the needs of the populace or provide the resources that should be available to all in need through the government. The funds it needs are not readily available and not in sufficient amounts from the private sector and their availability is, in fact, solely based on the generous policies of the government tax policies which allows the wealthy and corporations to reduce their taxes by the amount they give to the Not-for Profits.

Stability is absolutely necessary for the functioning of economies. For the last three decades, the global stage has been plagued by the emergence of various upheavals, new forms of violence and terrorism. There have been major shifts in global economic power, the decline of the U.S. global military, political influence and economic reversals in the U.S. and Europe—all have seriously threatened and are now undermining what has been called up until very recently “The American Century” and “New World Order”.

We have become bogged down in unexpected clashes and budget breaking wars with only very meager success in limiting terrorism. We have inserted ourselves into asymmetrical and questionable wars that have contributed to destabilizing the American economy and have been one of the real and overlooked causes of the U.S. deficits and long term debt. We hear everyday that for economics to function effectively stability and the limitation of uncertainty is necessary. Recently, a self-immolation and breakdown of the U.S. financial system and economy has triggered a deep global destabilization and THE GREAT RECESSION of 2007 and its continuing economic disaster for many millions of Americans. History teaches us that military preeminence is based upon sustained economic power. Ancient Greece was defeated when its imperial appetites exhausted 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 and economic 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 over deeply rooted ‘Culture Wars’ and the divisive polarizations of America’s core values and politics.

Until 2007-08, the U.S. attempted to bolster its global economic and cultural influence through its promotion of a world culture based on an ever expanding, all-encompassing consumerism. Now, in a credit crunch and the bursting of the over-heated housing bubble, we can no longer afford our addiction to the consumption levels of the recent past. We are so polarized politically and financially we cannot find our way to new roads of economic productivity and paths toward adequate political functioning. Our politics and social values are almost completely divided. We are politically embattled and paralyzed with no movement toward shared cultural values basic economic recovery. We are continually hovering over a potentially disastrous Euro triggered European-American 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. There will be deepening disaster undermining the basic well being of the Working and Middle Classes if they
are the only ones asked to make sacrifices and take losses for the American economy; sacrifices that result in continuing benefits for the already privileged. The Fall 2012 Republican Budget Proposals calls for no sacrifices by the super wealthy; for them the Conservatives call for a decrease in taxes and no sharing in the sacrifices being imposed only on the middle and working classes and forgotten poor. Why no tax increases or reduction in benefits for the already super rich? Because they are supposed to be the “Job Creators” of the economy. Fine, if this were true. But where is the proof? Why doesn’t anyone test or challenge this assertion and show us all the new jobs that were supposed to be created as a result of the massive pro-rich tax cuts made by the Reagan and Bush administrations over the past thirty years.

This seminar provides an interdisciplinary perspective on the stability that is rapidly slipping from the world’s grasp and the eruptions triggering upheaval among military, social, political, economic, CLIMATE and cultural dynamics. We will look at the deeply rooted character and consequences of American conservatism, political POLARIZATION AND DEADLOCK at home and on the world stage and how the severe ideological polarization of the American Congress and public skews power, politics, the culture of our daily lives and most particularly our economic security. All the convulsions are occurring under the accumulating damage of the climate change American, Russian, Indian and Chinese governments, most particularly, continue to deny or ignore in the name of unabated economic growth.

What have we wrought but the great economic powers are denying? As Paul and Anne Ehrlich have written, “It’s the top of the ninth inning and humanity has been hitting Nature hard. But we must remember that Nature hits last.”

What are the solutions to these crises? What are the prospects for the U.S.A., Western Europe and all 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”

Can we take some heart from Tennyson’s words?

“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 well 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 or 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 10** Professor Laurin Raiken, CHAIR AND DIRECTOR, ARTS AND SOCIETY PROGRAM, Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Associate faculty, Program on Arts & Politics, Tisch School of the Arts.

Introduction and Overview of seminar issues and concerns. Orientation, readings, expectations, and assignments. Introduction of class members.

**Ways of Thinking: Cognition and Conflict**

**We will introduce issues**

ON THINKING: The Processes of Thinking, Cognition, Analysis, Interpretation, the Quest for Understanding and Meaning are regularly taken for granted and generally misunderstood and misused. An inadequate or lack of understanding of how and why we think, relying on what we consider the “taken for granted” “logic of the everyday”, often leads to what the 20th Century commentator Paul Goodman called “compulsory mis-education.”

At this first meeting I will offer a brief overview of some of the major issues and problems raised about our often distorted and inadequate thoughts about thinking. To this end I will briefly mention for further study the works of: 1) Gregory Bateson in his letter to the Board of Regents of the University of California, and his major orientations developed and MIND and NATURE: A NECESSARY UNITY and STEPS TO AN ECOLOGY OF MIND 2) George Lakoff’s Chapter 22 on the human brain and mind in his book MORAL POLITICS. 3) Some basic ideas from Daniel Kahneman’s THINKING FAST AND SLOW. 4) Some key ideas from Michael S. Gazzaniga’s WHO’S IN CHARGE ? Free Will and the Science of the Brain. 5) The ideas of Organizational theorist Don Michaels on Critical Thinking: Cross Perspective Dialogue as shared with me by Dr. Martin C.J. Elton, founding chair of the Interactive Telecommunications Program of the Tisch School of the Arts, NYU. 6) Herbert Marcuse, a “Note on the Dialectic” in his study of Hegel, REASON AND REVOLUTION. 7) Paulo Friere’s groundbreaking and internationally influential concepts in THE PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED and his

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

From these perspectives, and with particular reference to Sociologist Erving Goffman and noted art theorist Harold Rosenberg's discussion of Marx's historical study. THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE OF LOUIS BONAPARTE, I will offer a Dramaturgical, Theatrical, and Performance model of what was once considered real political action in history.

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 U.S. AND GLOBAL ECONOMIC UPHEAVAL. PLEASE EXPRESS YOUR REAL, PERSONAL BELIEFS, VIEWS AND ASPIRATIONS, NOT JUST YOUR IDEALIZATIONS OR THOUGHTS ABOUT THE U.S.A AND THE WORLD TODAY, AND NOT WHAT YOU THINK YOU SHOULD BE WRITING FOR A CLASS SUCH AS THIS AT THIS CRITICAL MOMENT IN HISTORY AND OUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES.

Try to integrate this 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". I recognize that 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 other paper assignments in our seminar.

In addition to the paper assignments YOU MUST come to class every week with a one or two paragraph overview of the weeks readings and issues we are discussing.

They will be:

1) A 3 page Midterm review due as indicated on the syllabus
2) Take home questions distributed towards the end of the semester
3) A 5-7 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.

Papers 2) and 3) CAN BE ONLINE AND ARE DUE NO LATER THAN SATURDAY DECEMBER 15 BY 12 NOON. NO LATER!
September 17  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 tensions among the individual, community and society and the drives to maintain STASIS, the status quo or change within "the Waning of American Empire", as American society navigates the continuing Economic Crises within a fragile and fragmented World Disorder.

Class will have 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 a thinker I have already referred to, 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.

September 24  GENDER, RACE, ETHNICITY AND CULTURE

"I am in part looking at race (and I would add gender, LR) 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 Had of History.

Please keep in mind Professor Raiken's discussion of the research in cognition, neuro-cognition science and studies of ideology to add to our understanding and to challenge how we think and what we believe. Then we will look at some comments on the continuing American historical cancer of race. Next we will introduce a vital part of American history usually avoided, buried, or made invisible to us. It is unusual in American society and extremely rare, as far as my experience extends, for at least the last forty plus years at New York University that there is any awareness and discussions of the First Peoples, the Indigenous peoples, the Native nations whose land we expropriated to advance the United State's very exclusive flourishing. We live in the wake of the United State's attempt to extinguish Native American life. Tonight we introduce the need to have what is almost always a very painful discussion of the racism, discrimination and violent near elimination of America's First Peoples. U.S. history with Native nations has been the breaking of treaties, betrayals, incarceration and attempted genocide. The Indigenous peoples have been among the most overlooked, most invisible to us and still, in many cases, the ongoing target of theft, dislocation, the denial of religious freedom and a litany of ongoing discrimination, racist violence and poverty.

Required reading includes Stephen Steinberg on racism and a most powerful, challenging and disturbing work of Jack D. Forbes in COLUMBUS AND OTHER CANNIBALS.
“An ancient Chinese proverb says that women hold up half the sky.” We introduce the scourge of gender inequality, particularly at a time of Conservative historical regression to a “War against women” and a 2012 Republican Platform denying women the right of control of their own bodies when most viciously and violently assaulted.

October 1 and October 8: 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.

A member of the British Parliament hoping to catch the great economist John Maynard Keynes in a contradiction opined, “Well, it seems Mr. Keynes, that you have changed your mind.” Keynes responded I change my mind when “…facts change, what do you do?”

October 1:

Class will read essays by Robert Nisbet, Brigette and Peter L. Berger, Barrington Moore Jr., George Lakoff on the “Human Brain,” and Laurin Raiken on Conservatism.

(I will always make recommendations for further readings that may be of interest to you but are not required. These would be essays by Irving Kristol (Father of Neo-Conservatism), from his book TWO CHEERS FOR CAPITALISM, articles from America’s oldest conservative weekly, the NATIONAL REVIEW, founded by the eponymous with Conservatism, William F. Buckley Jr., twice weekly op-ed articles by David Brooks and Ross Douthat, the two conservative columnists writing for the New York Times, whom are among the most thoughtful and least extremist conservatives writing today.

Class will have read: George Lakoff’s chapter 22 on the Human Mind and Brain, in his book MORAL POLITICS.

October 8:

Class will have read 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. I will also give you a predictive quote from the great mid-Twentieth Century American author Harold Rosenberg, written in the Partisan Review the mid 1960s, during the Lyndon B. Johnson Administration. Rosenberg foresaw American politics about to lose its authenticity as historical politics which has, up until then been action intended to accomplish social ends. Since the late 1970s what was once politics meant to develop and improve society has devolved into pure performance. U.S. Politics, particularly in the George W. Bush Administration and the Republican controlled House of Representatives since 2010, has according to the frustrations of
the American people been “A tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.” (Macbeth)

Do we dare to try to entertain ideas and to think in ways that are both old and new but make us highly uncomfortable?

In this light we will also have read Ill Fares the Land by Tony Judt, one of New York University’s most distinguished historians, a book he dedicated to his teenage children and all young people, dictated, while almost completely paralyzed, just before dying of Lou Gehrig’s disease, a book that is highly controversial in the U.S. because its ideals are alien to most North Americans. It is a book whose ideas have currency, approval and accepted in many advanced industrial societies and democracies all over the world. There ILL FARES THE LAND is already considered to be a new classic.

Remember our reading from one of America’s most important philosophers of linguistics, from the chapter “The Human mind”, Chapter 22 in George Lakoff’s Moral Politics.

OCTOBER 15 CLASS CANCELLED FOR FALL BREAK

OCTOBER 22 “The omnipresence of Violence,” and “The Sources of Terrorism”

(“A jus so kummem Holze, als woraus der Mensch gemacht ist, kann nichts ganz Gerades gezimmt warden”)

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

Immanuel Kant, “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in welbugerlicher Absicht” 1784 Berlin, 1912

This phrase of Kant’s 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 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 “weltschauung” (world views) to live side by side, if not in harmony, than without continuous direct violent conflict.

Class will have read Hannah Arendt’s On Violence

YOU ARE ALSO ASSIGNED TO 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.
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, and I will make it available online.

Please also be aware of essays by Samantha Power, professor at 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 archconservative, absolutist, religious fundamentalist and extremist who many, including Berlin, consider the intellectual father of Fascism.

You might 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 and suicide terrorism.

Since 9/11 there has been an ever-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 the forms of economic violence impacting basic research and development in the U.S. due to the militarization of the economy and politics, by the redirecting of American scientific and technological talent from domestic innovation to arms creation. This is 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. His commentary starts with “Dan Rather Reports”, “What Happened Next: Battle Plan” and any of the other five video clips on his critique of U.S. military strategy.

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”. This verse, with its rhythm and recognition of the intertwining, the braiding of history’s unexpected elements, has become a classic of human sentiment:

“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

THE U.S. AND GLOBAL ECONOMY IN THE MOST DEVASTING FINANCIAL
AND ECONOMIC CRISIS SINCE THE GREAT DEPRESSION OF THE 1930s

OCTOBER 29, NOVEMBER 5, and NOVEMBER 26

“Boom and Bust: But for Whom?” The Genius, Success, and Decline of the
American Economic Power and Ability to Maintain the Working and Middle Classes’
Standard of living.

“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?

“The Fate of ‘Homo Economicus’ in America”

Students will begin these three classes by reading John Kenneth Galbraith, The Good Society: A
Humane Agenda. It is particularly important to read The Good Society if you have little or no
background in basic economic theory and to get a sense of Galbraith’s view of a less toxic, less
predatory capitalism than currently dominates our society. We may also read a few selected
essays by and about Galbraith. We will read his short book, The Economics of Innocent Fraud:
Truth For Our Times, which I will distribute in class.

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.

Laurin Raiken, Selected essays on Conservatism and the Early History of the Economic Crisis

Class will also read a few more essays on political-economic analysis of the current economic
crisis. Among these I WILL RECOMMEND at least one article by the distinguished social
theorist Arthur J. Vidich, I may recommend articles by NYU’s Edward N. Wolff on his research
“The Middle Class Squeeze,” we will refer to the history of the Financial Crisis, “Financial
Crisis for Beginners” by Simon Johnson of MIT, who was also former Chief Economist for the
International Monetary Fund. You may refer to his history of the economic crisis in his blog
“BaselineScenario.com.”

I will make reference to and suggest reading a number of economists of many stripes but I
MOST SPECIFICALLY REFER YOU TO THE HIGHLY LITERATE MONDAY AND
FRIDAY COLUMN ON THE NEW YORK TIMES OP ED PAGES BY NOBEL LAUREATE IN ECONOMICS, PAUL KRUGMAN and other online pieces, particularly on INEQUALITY by NOBEL LAUREATE AND COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

To get a developing view of the ongoing 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 conservatives also writing for the Times, David Brooks and Ross Douthat. Returning 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 excellent commentators and articles on the economy. You won’t want to miss the extraordinary Matt Bai of The Rolling Stone, and The New York Times, one of the best economics investigative journalists in the country. You should also pay attention to Gretchen Morgenson, her co-authored book, RECKLESS ENDANGERMENT and Louise Story, both of The New York Times.

I will bring to your attention the names and publications of the many excellent writers on the ongoing U.S. and global financial crisis. It is these still current economic, credit, housing and unemployment crises that continue to destroy standards of living for the middle, working classes and those growing number of those denied any stake at all in the economy. Thus we witness, and millions experience, intense “immiseration.”

Despite rabid criticism of President Obama and the negative and “happy talk” of Republican candidates, and ignoring what they say in their 2012 PLATFORM, they claim to be at the doorstep of bringing us back into the American Dream. Yet, Conservative, once called Republican, Libertarian, Independent, Democrat or Liberal, we are all witness to the gathering storm of a broken economy. All the established political parties lack new ideas for the breakthrough necessary for a 21st century economy that works for all.

NOVEMBER 12 Mid-term Reports and Discussion

Please be alert that your Midterm Reports come after the first two classes on the Economic Crisis and before the third class on the Economic Crisis.

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 of 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 the 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. On the first page offer your version of a brief overview of the course up to that date then Focus the remaining pages on one or more subjects or questions about contemporary American society, politics, economy and amoral or lawless behavior that most concerns you.

Following the oral presentations, tonight and next week, we will have class discussion with ALL class members responding to each other’s ideas. YOU MUST actually take brief notes on your classmates’ presentations so we can have a strong basis for class discussion. Therefore make certain your schedules allow you to remain for the entire class period.

November 19 Seminar students and Professor Raiken will discuss student mid-term reports and papers and the issues we have been discussing this semester that can also be identified as LIVING AT THE EDGE: Bewildermnt? Turmoil?, Political Polarization?, Rigidity?, Obstructionism?, Paralysis? Creative Problem Solving and the Courage to Experiment with New Policies? Transition?

Your mid-term papers are to be submitted at the end of the class in which you presented your report.

November 26 Third Class on the U.S. and Global Economy

WHY AND HOW HAVE THE TEA PARTY AND TEA EVANGELICAL AGENDAS PLUS THEIR ELECTORAL ACTIVISM BEEN ABLE TO WIN AND DOMINATE THE DIRECTIONS OF AMERICAN POLITICS, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY?

Class and Professor Raiken continue discussion on the impact of the U.S. financial and economic systems: Who works, who pays, and who benefits? HAS the Occupy Wall Street Movement effective unaltered in the U.S.A?

December 3 THE GREAT AMERICAN DILEMMA: EDUCATION AT THE PRECIPICE

Guest Lecture: Dr. Gerald E. Levy, Professor of Sociology and Senior Professor of the Faculty, Marlboro College, Marlboro Vermont.

Reading: Christian J. Churchill and Gerald E. Levy, THE ENIGMATIC ACADEMY: CLASS, BUREAUCRACY AND RELIGION IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

AND
SPECULATING ON THE FUTURE:

Here is perhaps the most important challenge of our time, but one that is taken up centrally in many other courses and throughout the public conversation and therefore not a direct subject of our course. But of course, the challenge of planetary survival smolders at the foundation of any study of the social, economic and political battles of our time. As a species, do we have much more time? Do we have the freedom to debate the consequences of global climate change? (See Thomas L. Friedman’s OpEd pieces on climate change in the New York Times. Refer to the Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change, Executive Summary and “Global Warming,” The New York Times, Tuesday August 31, 2010, both online, and over the past decade articles in The New Yorker magazine and The New York Review of Books.)

Reading: ERNEST CALLENBACH, ECOTOPIA

“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

THE FUTURE IS NOW!
WHAT ARE YOUR TACTICS, DESIGNS AND STRATEGIES?

DECEMBER 10

Seminar Students and Professor Raiken, Transformation of Contemporary Society and Culture: The United States and the World Approaching the Edge
For this class and the final class meeting on May 8th, you are to prepare a final, brief (again, three minutes) oral statement integrating the issues and questions under discussion throughout this Interdisciplinary seminar. This verbal presentation may be in the form of raising new questions but it must include your focus of one or more of the issues analyzed in the course and refer to our class discussions and readings. Or, you may wish to write your own little synthesis of the entire course, 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.

I hope you will continue to look at the work of the distinguished social analysts and historians highlighted in our course: particularly the 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, remain of particular value.

Arthur J. Vidich’s work, influenced by Hans Gerth, (a student of Max Weber himself) 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 on his own, remains the basis of one of the most important schools of Institutional Analysis in American Social Thought. By the time you are writing your final paper you should be acquainted with A. J. Vidich’s ideas of rationality evolving into irrationality and its consequences.

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 new forms of healing that will enable us to have a humane future?

DECEMBER 12 Seminar Students and Professor Raiken

Transformation of Contemporary Society and Culture: The United States and Europe in Crisis and/or on the Cusp of a Newer World Financial, Economic, and Geopolitical Order?

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 from me. 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.
WELCOME TO A GALLATIN SCHOOL
INTERDISCIPLINARY SEMINAR

AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN TRANSITION: THE CRISIS OF OUR TIME

One of the most visionary thinkers of the 20th century, Walter Benjamin, wrote, about history, “There is a painting by Klee called “Angelus Novus.” An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The angel of History must look just so. His face is turned toward the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which increasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair (Verweilen: a reference to Goethe’s Faust) to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. This storm is what we call progress.”

Walter Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History, 1939

“HIC RHODUS, HIC
SALTUS”

“HERE IS THE ROSE, NOW DANCE!”
AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN TRANSITION

THE CRISIS OF OUR TIME

READING ASSIGNMENTS

Selected papers and essays will be available on Blackboard or as class handouts.

September 10  Ways of Thinking: Cognition and Conflict
Professor Raiken will distribute selected papers in class.
See Syllabus for topics and authors.

September 17  Major 20th to 21st Century Trends in American Society

A Dialectic of Socialization and “World Building”: Concepts of Self, Community and Society

1) Selected Chapters from Dorothy Lee, VALUING THE What We Can Learn From Other Cultures

2) Georg Simmel, “Metropolis and Mental Life,” essay


4) Professor Raiken’s Notes on Isaiah Berlin’s ideas about “Pluralism.” Berlin argues against moral and values “Monism.” i.e. the idea that there are single universally valid, shared values and basically single solutions to life’s vicissitudes. Berlin’s ‘pluralism’ includes a
Committee, for the Republicans) who have influenced them. The conservative Hoover Institution, affiliated with Stanford University is the location of the major economists such as John B. Taylor who are key economic advisors to the Willard Romney and 2012 Republican ticket.

There have been many important books on the economic crisis that have been published over the past five years, but I want to highlight two: 1) Gretchen Morgenson, Pulitzer Prize winner and Joshua Rosner, RECKLESS ENDANGERMENT: How Outsized Ambition, Greed and Corruption Created the Worst Financial Crisis of our Time, and 2) Joseph E. Stiglitz, THE PRICE OF INEQUALITY.

December 3

AT THE PRECIPICE:

Speculating on the Future


Ernest Callenbach, ECOTOPIA

John Berger, WAYS OF SEEING, Last Chapter

December 10 and 12

Seminar students and Professor Raiken: Final Student Presentations And Papers
Transformation of Contemporary Society and Economy:

The United States, Europe and the World on the Cusp of a new World Financial, Economic and Geopolitical Order?

WELCOME TO AN INVESTIGATION OF OUR AGE OF UNCERTAINTY AND RADICAL CHANGE
AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE
IN TRANSITION AND CRISIS

Course Policies

1) Most Students are not late. When unavoidable, modest lateness is acceptable up until 15 minutes into the class and no more.
2) If you know you are going to be later than 15 minutes, try to email me with an explanation before class at lr2@nyu.edu
3) Continuous lateness indicates a problem about which you must consult Professor Raiken.
4) For a late paper you must explain why it will be late. “Reasonable” explanations are acceptable. Others are subject to debate.
5) The grade of Incomplete for the course must be negotiated with Professor Raiken and a signed Gallatin Student Services form submitted.

GRADING

1) Your initial “Here I Stand” paper is expected to be as open and honest as possible and is not subject to judgment or grade.
2) Thoughtful, well informed class participation (i.e. based on careful understanding of Class discussion and Readings) 30%
3) Brief Midterm Paper 20%
4) Take Home Questions near the end of course 25%
5) Final “Here I Stand” paper 25%.
AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE
IN TRADITION AND CIRCUMSTANCES

Course Overview

To analyze and interpret the role of culture in understanding the historical, social, and economic contexts of societies and cultures.

In this course, you will be engaged in the study of various cultural traditions and how they have evolved over time. Through a combination of lectures, discussions, and readings, you will explore the influence of cultural practices on contemporary society. 

Guidelines and Expectations

1. Participation: Attend all class sessions and actively participate in discussions.
2. Assignments: Complete all required readings and assignments on time.
3. Assessment: The final grade will be determined based on participation, assignments, and a comprehensive final exam.

This course will provide a broad understanding of cultural diversity and its impact on global perspectives.

Date:

[Signature]

Date:

[Signature]