

AMERICA IN THE 2000s

My course on America in the 2000s is another (the last) in a series of historical studies of the last sixty years of U.S. history, which I began several years ago with a course on the 1950s.

Even a few years ago I would have said that the progression of our history was pretty linear, but the election of 2016 has shaken my faith in that conception. But we will not get to 2016 in this spring's Evergreen course.

Instead, we will look at the major events in American history from 2000 to 2010, give or take. It was a turbulent and upsetting decade, which witnessed the election and reelection of George W. Bush, and then the election of Barack Obama. We will think about the ways in which the men and their policies differed – and what the similarities were. In some ways the Bush years were a logical continuation of the policies and attitudes of Ronald Reagan and Bush 41, but in others the Bush 43 years were quite different. The same sort of comparison might be made of the Obama administration with those of LBJ and Jimmy Carter. Obama was different from his Democratic predecessors in many ways.

The decade of the 2000s also witnessed new sorts of turbulence that shook the fabric of American society. The country experienced the shock of the September 11, 2001 attacks and later the devastation of New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the massacre at Virginia Tech in 2007, the Great Recession of 2007-2009, and the environmental disaster of the BP Gulf oil rig explosion on 2010. It was also the decade of war with Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the occasion for the election of America's first African-American president and the apparent end of the Iraq war. Yet alas, the 2000s are apparently not over.

The course will focus mainly on politics and public policy, both domestic and international. I will assign a couple of books on the politics of the era, although I do not think there are (yet) one or two truly excellent accounts of the history of those years. As usual, I will make liberal use of clips from YouTube, to allow the actors of the period to speak for themselves – and I will encourage comment and discussion within our group.

Leader: Stan Katz is a professor in the Woodrow Wilson School of Princeton University.

Mondays: 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.; 6 weeks: March 5 through April 16 (no class March 19.)

Location: PSRC