

Contemporary US Proposal

Background

- This course has historically been offered for many years at BHS. It fell off the course catalog a few years ago when the department had many more electives competing for student enrollment within our department. The only changes that have been made to this version of the course is that the previous iteration started after WWII, but this version will move students forward significantly to be able to learn a more “contemporary” history.
- We are keen to offer a history course for students in their senior year.
- The Social Studies department spent the fall pitching and voting for new courses and this course was by far the most popular choice both in terms of what the department needs to round out their offerings and what teachers are excited to present to students.

Course Description

Contemporary American History: 1980–Present is a mixed-level (Honors or Standard credit), one-semester elective that delves into the dynamic history of the United States from the late 20th century to the present. As the only history-specific offering for seniors at the high school, this course provides a unique opportunity to engage deeply with recent historical developments. Students will explore the political, social, economic, cultural, and foreign policy changes that have shaped contemporary America. By examining key events, movements, and figures, students will gain critical insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by the nation during this transformative period. Through analysis, discussion, and research, students will deepen their understanding of the country's recent history, uncovering the roots of many issues and trends that influence the world today. This course will equip students to make meaningful connections between the past and present, preparing them to be informed, thoughtful, and engaged members of a rapidly changing society.

Potential Topics: Not a definitive list, but just a sample

Domestic Politics and Policies

- Reagan Tax Cuts, Americans with Disabilities Act, Immigration Act of 1990, *Roe v Wade*, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” Welfare to Work, Marriage Equality, No Child Left Behind Act, Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), Trump Tax Reform, Budget Control Act, Economic Relief, and more.

Foreign Policy and Military Engagements

- Cold War, INF Treaty, Strategic Defense Initiative, Iran Hostage Crisis, Grenada, Iran-Contra Affair, Persian Gulf War, War on Terror, Iraq, Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom, Iran Nuclear Deal, Trade Wars, and North Korea.

Social and Cultural Shifts

- Equal Rights Amendment, Sandra Day O'Connor, Sally Ride, Los Angeles Riots, OJ Simpson Trial, Women's March, George Floyd, Alternative Rock and Hip Hop, and advancements in diversity and inclusion.

Technological and Environmental Developments

- Macintosh Computer, Hubble Space Telescope, Deepwater Horizon, SpaceX, Paris Agreement on Climate Change, Exxon Valdez Oil Spill, and Hurricane Katrina, Social Media revolution.

Major Events and Crises

- September 11 Attacks, Challenger, Oklahoma City Bombing, Great Recession, Coronavirus Pandemic, Enron Scandal, Capital Riot and government shutdowns.

Elections and Leadership Transitions

- Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Election of 2000, Bush v. Gore, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, Joe Biden, and related impeachment proceedings or controversies.

Potential Assignments/Activities

Oral History Interview: Conduct and record an interview with someone who experienced a significant historical event from the 1980s, 1990s, or early 2000s to gain a personal perspective on history.

Debate on Contemporary Issues: Participate in structured debates on topics such as immigration policy, the role of the U.S. in global conflicts, or the influence of technology on society.

Media Analysis Projects: Analyze a piece of media (e.g., a news article, film, or TV show) from a specific decade to understand its reflection of the era's social or political climate.

Policy Proposal Presentation: Research and propose solutions to a current issue rooted in developments from the 1980s onward, such as healthcare reform, climate change, or criminal justice policy.

Pop Culture and History: Explore how music, fashion, or movies from a specific decade reflect societal trends and changes, culminating in a class presentation.

Primary Source Analysis: Examine and interpret documents such as speeches, court rulings, or political cartoons from the course's time period to understand their historical significance.

Research Paper on a Major Event: Write an in-depth paper on an event like 9/11, the 2008 financial crisis, or the rise of social media, analyzing its causes, impacts, and legacy.

Community Impact Project: Identify and research a local issue tied to broader historical trends.