This course ranges broadly across U.S. history from the colonial period to the present. This year’s theme is “culture wars” as an approach and as a problem in understanding the place of culture, and war, in U.S. history.

During the mid to late twentieth century historians came to see culture, in the form of ideals or ideologies, myths, and rituals, as what held the American nation together. More recently they are at least as likely to trace the roots and evolution of conflicts that are understood in terms of cultural differences. Similarly, US history and culture has been seen as profoundly shaped by war-inspired consensus – or on the other hand marked by divisive wars that were caused by essential conflicts that were at least in part cultural and which in turn exacerbated conflict. What does it mean to characterize the culture of particular eras and as marked by war, by war’s aftermath, or by culture war? What is the relationship between how Americans see their culture(s) -- or culture itself -- and how they answer these questions? How have international contexts shape the vicissitudes of cultural conflict, consensus, and a long succession of wars? Is war an appropriate metaphor -- or is it a euphemism -- for the work of culture in a country made by war? Does the analysis of culture as conflict akin to war, or as unifying like war, and of wars’ cultural dimensions helpfully inform narratives of history, of politics, and of real wars in the past? Finally, what was and is the role of memory in a culture and history periodized by wars?

Each student will also lead or co-lead one or two sessions of the seminar. In addition to active participation, students will be expected to present to the seminar at the end of term a version of their 15-20pp. term paper or project that (1) charts scholarly developments in one subfield and period of cultural history and (2) brings to the seminar a primary source that may be especially useful to teachers or curators or citizens in the future.

Books with a + are available electronically through the CUNY or NYPL library systems; articles and book chapters will be available on Blackboard

February 1 Introduction

For background on US cultural history the following works are highly recommended:
I Real War & Culture War in Early America: Names, Rumors, Religion, Propaganda, Counterculture

February 8

February 15
Steven Prothero, *Why Liberals Win the Culture Wars (Even When they Lose Elections): The Battles that Define America from Jefferson’s Heresies to Gay Marriage* (2016), selections.

Feb. 22

March 1
Bernard Bailyn, “The Index and Commentaries of Harbottle Dorr” (1973)

II Prewar, Postwar, Civic War: Violence, Memory, and the Popular, Long 19th Century style

March 8

March 15
+Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan During Reconstruction* (2016)
Elsa Barkley Brown, "Negotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom," *Public Culture* 7 (Fall 1994), 107-146.
Nina Silber, “Reunion and Reconciliation, Reviewed and Reconsidered,” *Journal of American History* 103 (June 2016), 59-83

March 22

→ March 29  No Class
→ SPRING BREAK

III. Empire as Culture, Home and Abroad
April 12

April 19

IV. Postwar or Endless War Culture?
April 26
Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of U.S. Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (2013)

May 3

May 10

→ May 17 [makeup class] Papers due; 10-15 min. presentation of research projects