



OLLI-SPRING 2024

786: A Cinematic Look at America in the Fifties

Many historians use the term “boom” to illustrate the 1950s in a variety of ways: The flourishing economy, the record-setting birthrate, and the fearful consequence of nuclear war.

Some OLLI members will remember the era; others will not. This study group reviews that decade's significant historical events and trends, popular culture, politics, and fads. The approach in weekly sessions is thematic and augmented with lots of optional material—a few selected readings, and audio and video of the period.

This study group will deviate from previous study groups about the fifties. In addition to the content being presented, the course will introduce eight different movies from or about themes covered in class (*Marty*, *Being the Ricardos*, *Vertigo*, *The Long Walk Home*, *Quiz Show*, *October Sky*, *The Founder*, and *The Buddy Holly Story*). Along with presenting related content, part of the session will be spent discussing the previous week's film and introducing the next movie. **Note: Your main weekly assignment is to complete the designated movie at home, so you must have access to Amazon Prime.** These movies are available to stream, or in some cases, to rent for a nominal fee.

This study group is highly participatory. Members compare different experiences and perspectives of the decade; with this in mind, we ask each member to provide his/her age and living situation on October 4, 1957—the date of the Sputnik launch.

CLASS SCHEDULE, WEEKLY TOPICS, AND OPTIONAL READINGS (subject to change)

Class 1- (March 5) Introduction to Course: “Family Life and the American Dream in the 1950's.”

Supplemental Reading- Erin Blakemore's “How the GI Bill's Promise Was Denied to a Million Black World War II Veterans.” **Movie Pairing-*Marty***

Class 2- (March 12): “The Cold War Comes to Main Street.” Supplemental Readings- 1. Ellen Schrecker's “Communism and National Security.” 2. E.B. White's essay, “The Case Against Senator McCarthy.” 3. Martin Halliwell's essay on *I Love Lucy*. **Movie Pairing-*Being the Ricardos*.**

Class 3- (March 19): “American Film in the 1950's.” Supplemental Reading- Martin Halliwell's essay, *The Blackboard Jungle*. **Movie Pairing- *Vertigo*.**

Class 4- (March 26): “Civil Rights Struggles in the 1950’s.” Supplemental Readings- 1. Joan Quigley’s “The case that ended segregation in D.C. even before Brown.” 2. Walter Dellinger’s “A Southern White Recalls a Moral Revolution.” 3. Excerpt from Anne Moody’s *Coming of Age in Mississippi*. 4. “White Support of the Montgomery Boycott: An Interview with Virginia Durr. **Movie Pairing- *The Long, Walk Home*.**

Class 5- (April 2): “American Television in the 1950’s.” Supplemental Reading- “Herb Stempel, Whistleblower in Quiz Show Scandals, Dies at 93.” (David P. and Marino-Nachison) **Movie Pairing-*Quiz Show*.**

Class 6- (April 9): “Medical Advances and Technology in the Fifties” Supplemental Readings-1. “The Arrival of Videotape.” (Louis P. Forster) 2. “Vaccinating Against Polio.” (John McNulty) **Movie Pairing-*October Sky*.**

Class 7- (April 16): “American Travel, the Interstate Highway, and the Automobile.” Supplemental Reading- Erin Blakemore’s “Interstate Highways were touted as modern marvels. Racial injustice was part of the plan.” **Movie Pairing- *The Founder*.**

***Note: No class will be held on the 23rd, due to a prior family commitment. The course will be extended until May 7th.**

Class 8 (April 30th): “A Sampling of Music in the 1950’s.” Supplemental Readings- 1. Halliwell’s essay, “Elvis and 1956.” **Movie Pairing-*The Buddy Holly Story***

Class 9- (May 7): “‘I Like Ike:’ Presidential and Foreign Politics, 1952-1960.” Supplemental Readings-1. “Ike’s Top Five Presidential Failures.” 2. Richard Nixon’s 1952 *Checkers* Speech.

No movie will be introduced during the last class.

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