

THE FIFTIES – ROBERT HALBERSTAM’S WORK

SPRING QUARTER 2018

Gerald Henderson

The decade began with the shadow of a man who, wasn't there, Franklin Roosevelt, and ended with Camelot. We lived the decade, some of us grew up in it, others came to maturity within its times. We use the work of Robert Halberstam "The Fifties" as he chronicles in detail our experiences, from Korea to Little Rock to rock and roll to the opening drums in Southeast Asia. We learn or remember the Fifties not as a time of innocence as frequently assumed, but a time of viciousness, meanness, and loss of whatever remaining innocence America might possess. We hold up a mirror and reflect on the major events and especially the major figures of the decade. Bring your memories, we'll talk, share, maybe shed a tear or two, watch some film, listen to voices and music. Someone may even dance! In any case, literature, history, and our lives intersect in this course.

Our book and associated films:

"The FIFTIES"David Halberstam

Reading the book will add a great deal to your enjoyment of the presentations and discussions. We will read 6 of the 48 chapters each week. We will also consider the music of each year as we go along in the class.

Some syllabus topics:

Week 1 – The overview of the decade: It was a "mean" time – not all petticoats and upward mobility, Joe McCarthy, Unions rose in the workplace.

Week 2 – Macarthur, Autos for Everyone, Fast Food, Discount stores, Oil, Houses for Everyone – Levittown.

Week 3 – Indochina, CIA, Guatemala, United Fruit., Paper-Back books.

Week 4 – Television News, Magazines, College-for-all.

Week 5 – Vietnam, The Dulles Brothers, Integration, Northern Migration.

Week 6 – Elvis Presley, Betty Furness, TV Sitcoms, The man in the gray flannel suit.

Week 7 – Marilyn Monroe, Peyton Place, Birth Control, Volkswagon.

Week 8 – Quiz Shows, Little Rock, Kennedy – Nixon, Getting ready for the 60s.

Lots of other topics and talk.

Can or will you dance?????