

BACK TO THE FUTURE: LESSONS FROM AMERICAN HISTORY

The turmoil of contemporary American politics invites a renewed engagement with history as a lens for imagining our future. This course brings together leading historians and documentary filmmakers to examine four pivotal moments in American life—the American Revolution, the New Deal, the Cold War, and the transformation of the modern news media system. Through lectures, films, and discussions, we will explore not only the historical events themselves but also the methods by which we come to understand the past: scholarly interpretation, investigative journalism, and documentary storytelling. Our goal is to illuminate how historical knowledge shapes future possibilities.

The American Revolution in Global Context

Guest lecture: Historian and author Richard Bell — April 8

The American Revolution was far more than a struggle between the thirteen colonies and Great Britain. It was a global upheaval that engaged actors across multiple continents and destabilized the existing world order. Historian Richard Bell situates the Revolution within a far-reaching international web that extended to India, Africa, Central America, and Australia.

By widening the lens, the “War of Independence” emerges as a sprawling conflict that reshaped trade, penal systems, famine patterns, and population displacement—arguably producing the world’s first global refugee crisis. Bell highlights individual stories—including those of women and people of color—whose experiences reveal how global forces were felt in everyday lives.

Richard Bell is the author of *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World* and teaches Early American History at the University of Maryland. He has received numerous teaching awards and research fellowships, including the NEH Public Scholar Award. His previous works include *We Shall Be No More* (2012), *Buried Lives* (2012, co-edited with Michele Lise Tarter), and *Stolen* (2019).

Grassroots Movements of the 1930s and the Making of the New Deal

Guest lecture: author and UC Berkeley Journalism instructor, Adam Hochschild — April 15

In the early 1930s, the United States confronted the worst economic crisis in its history: one-third of the labor force was unemployed, bank failures erased lifetime savings, and impoverished families built “Hoovervilles” across the country. Americans demanded unprecedented federal intervention.

Within a decade, the nation constructed—though imperfectly—a modern welfare state. While President Franklin D. Roosevelt was central to this transformation, Adam Hochschild emphasizes the crucial role of grassroots movements and ordinary citizens who pushed the administration to embrace reforms far bolder than Roosevelt initially envisioned. He also examines the fierce opposition and propaganda campaigns that sought to undermine the New Deal—echoes of which resonate in contemporary political debates.

This illustrated lecture draws from Hochschild’s forthcoming book. OLLI students have previously heard him discuss *American Midnight*, *King Leopold’s Ghost*, *To End All Wars*, *Spain in Our Hearts*, and *Bury the Chains*.

The Covert History of the CIA: Dictators, Assassinations, and Torture

Guest lecture: documentarian and filmmaker, Howard Dratch — April 22

Based on the documentary On Company Business

Between 1975 and 1978—during a period of dramatic revelations about the CIA—filmmakers Howard Dratch and Allan Francovich produced *On Company Business*, a groundbreaking documentary tracing the Agency’s activities from the end of World War II through the 1970s. Drawing on extensive archival footage and more than fifty interviews with policymakers, former CIA officials, and individuals affected by U.S. covert interventions, the film explores the hidden policies and practices that shaped the Cold War world.

Topics include the Marshall Plan and Truman Doctrine; the Korean War; interventions in Iran and Guatemala; the Bay of Pigs invasion; military coups in Brazil and Indonesia; the Vietnam War; and the overthrow of Chile’s democratic government. The film remains a key resource for understanding U.S. foreign policy and intelligence operations.

Howard B. Dratch is an award-winning filmmaker whose work has been featured internationally in theaters and on television. His film *Path to War* premiered on HBO and received eight Emmy nominations, four Golden Globe nominations, and the Humanitas Prize. He has taught filmmaking at USC and Caltech and served as a Fulbright Fellow at the Hungarian National Academy of Dramatic Art and Film.

The American Press and the Hedge-Fund Era: Local Journalism in Crisis

Guest lecture: documentary filmmaker Rick Goldsmith — April 29

Featuring Stripped for Parts and Tell the Truth and Run

Documentary filmmaker Rick Goldsmith examines the recent history and growing crisis of American journalism. His newest film, *Stripped for Parts: American Journalism on the Brink*, investigates Alden Global Capital, a hedge fund that has acquired and dramatically downsized newspapers nationwide. The film follows journalist Julie Reynolds and the wider movement of reporters and union advocates resisting Alden's extractive practices and fighting to preserve local news.

Goldsmith is also the co-director of *The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers*, an Academy Award–nominated film exploring Ellsberg's transformation from Pentagon insider to whistleblower. His earlier Academy Award–nominated documentary *Tell the Truth and Run* profiles pioneering press critic George Seldes and offers a penetrating analysis of the American media system.

Goldsmith's additional works include *Mind/Game: The Unquiet Journey of Chamique Holdsclaw*, *Everyday Heroes*, and other films widely used in journalism programs. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area since 1975, he is a member of the Documentary Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Writers Guild of America, West.

For the brochure:

Back to the Future:

The volatility of American politics invites a return to history as a lens for imagining what comes next. This course unites leading historians and documentary filmmakers to probe four defining

moments—the American Revolution, the New Deal, the Cold War, and the rise of today’s news media system. Through lectures, films, and discussions, we’ll explore both the events themselves and the interpretive tools that shape our understanding, revealing how historical insight can chart future possibilities.

BIOS

Susan Hoffman brings an interdisciplinary perspective shaped by UCSC’s History of Consciousness graduate studies program and training at the American Film Institute. Her most recent Berkeley OLLI course, co-taught with neuroscientist David Presti, explored the science and aesthetics of silence in partnership with BAMPFA.

Guest speakers include historian Richard Bell; author Adam Hochschild; producer Howard Dratch and filmmaker Rick Goldsmith.

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