

Introduction to American Politics

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This course offers a broad introduction to the dominant questions, themes, and approaches to the study of American politics in political science. We will consider a diverse range of literatures concerning the contested moral and political foundations of American politics; the structure and dynamics of its institutions; its political development; the behavior, beliefs, and understandings of voters and their representatives; and some issues at the forefront of contemporary debates, including questions of immigration, mass incarceration, and wealth inequality. We will approach our task of summarizing the field's literatures in conversation with the persistent, pervasive ascriptions which structure American politics. In so

doing, we will strive to shape our perspective with histories, critiques, and counternarratives often missing from the field's analysis.

Assignments and Exams

1. **Class Participation (15%)**

- a. Attendance is mandatory for every session, absent unavoidable scheduling conflicts. Students with more than one unexcused absence will receive a penalty to their class participation grade. Please email me if you will not be able to attend.
- b. Each of the texts assigned deserve careful, respectful reading (I will offer some guidelines in effective practices of reading on our first day). Students are expected to bring the day's readings to class with them.
- c. Participants in this seminar are expected to come prepared with 4-5 questions and provocations to share with the class. When coming up with your thoughts, try to connect the day's readings to the themes of other texts we have explored, and to the overarching themes which have emerged for you in the course as a whole.

2. **Response Essays (15%)** I require three brief essays (3 pages each), in which you apply the argument and themes of one session's readings to a contemporary or historical event, debate, work of literature or art, documentary figure, or movement. This is an open-ended essay meant to dig deeper into, and complicate, our readings in conversation with a diverse range of examples. How has your example further the themes described in class? What challenges might it offer our authors? What questions does it raise? In choosing a session, you may go as far back, but no further, than the previous response essay's deadline.

3. **Group Presentations (15%)**

- a. Students are expected to conduct joint-presentations on the readings of a specific date (I will pass around a sign-up sheet on the first day of class). Group size will depend on the number of students enrolled.
- b. Groups should offer an overview of the central arguments and themes from the day's readings (around 12-15 minutes), as well as a set of questions and provocations to guide class discussion.
- c. Importantly, I ask that each group offer a comparison of the texts at hand to readings from at least one other session.

4. **Midterm Exam (25%)** The midterm is an open-note, open-book take-home exam on the readings of the course's first half. I will hand out the questions on ____, and the exam is due ____.

5. **Final Exam (30%)** The final exam will concern the broader themes of the course as a whole. It will be offered in-class on ____.

Assistance and Access

If you require any additional assistance with the class's coursework and exams, please do not hesitate to contact me, or contact UVa Student Health service, SDAC@Virginia.edu.

Books

Marisa Abrajano, Zoltan L. Hajnal. *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics* (2015).

Larry Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (2016).

Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *Women, Men & US Politics: 10 Big Questions* (2017).

Amy E. Lerman and Vesla M. Weaver. *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control* (2014). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, 2nd Edition (2016).

Katherine Tate, *Black Faces in the Mirror: African Americans and Their Representatives in the U.S. Congress* (2003).

I. Beginnings

1.
 - Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals* (1997). Ch. 1
 - Corn Tassel (Onitositah), Reply to the American Commissioners (1777)
 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Seneca Falls Convention, Declaration of Sentiments”
 - Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman?” (1851)
 - Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?” (1852)

2.
 - The Federalist Papers, 10 (1787) and 51 (1788).
 - The Anti-Federalist Papers: selections from The Federal Farmer; “The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention of Pennsylvania to Their Constituents.”

3.
 - Henry Louis Gates, Jr. *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (2019). Ch. 2.
 - The Reconstruction Amendments: 13, 14, and 15.
 - *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Justice Harlan’s Dissent.
 - [Ta-Nehisi Coates, 2019 Congressional testimony.](#)

First response paper due

II. Introducing Institutions

A. Congress

4.
 - David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, Second Edition (2004). (Selections)

- Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *Women, Men & US Politics: 10 Big Questions* (2017). Ch.'s 1-3.

5.

- Katherine Tate, *Black Faces in the Mirror: African Americans and Their Representatives in the U.S. Congress* (2003). Introduction, ch.'s 2, 4, 6-7.

B. The Courts

6.

- Federalist # 78 (1788)
- Gerald Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* (1991). Introduction, ch.'s 1-2, 6.
- Ari Berman, *Give Us the Ballot!* (2015). (Selections).

C. The Presidency

7.

- Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal?* 2nd Edition (2008). Ch.'s 2-3.
- Ta Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power* (2017). Introduction, ch.'s 5, 8.
- In class, we will watch clips from the 2018 movie, *Vice*, and

D. Bureaucracy

8.

- Daniel Carpenter, "The Evolution of National Bureaucracy in the United States," in Joel D. Aberbach and Mark A. Peterson, ed., *Institutions of American Democracy: The Executive Branch* (2005): 41-71.
- Vine Deloria, Jr., "Government Agencies." In *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969).

Midterm Exam handed out; due on ____.

III. Distributive Justice and the American State

9.

- Jacob S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State*. (2002). Introduction, ch.'s 1, 6-7
- Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (1999). Ch. 6.
- [NPR interview](#) with Josh Levin, author of *The Queen: The Forgotten Life Behind an American Myth*

10.

- Theda Skocpol, “Advocacy Without Members: The Recent Transformation of Civic Life,” in Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (1999).
- Traci Burch, Henry E. Brady, Philip Edward Jones, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Sidney Verba, “Who Sings in the Heavenly Chorus? The Shape of the Organized Interest System.” In Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus* (2012).
- Vanessa Williamson, Theda Skocpol, and John Coggin, “The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism,” *Perspectives on Politics* 9, no. 1 (March 2011): 25-43.

Second response paper due

11.

- Larry M. Bartels, *Unequal Democracy: The Political Economy of the New Gilded Age* (2016). Ch.’s 1, 3, 6, and 10.
- In class, we will watch clips from the 2015 movie, *The Big Short*.

IV. But What Do We Know?

12.

- Donald Kinder, “Pale Democracy: Opinion and Action in Postwar America.” In Edward D. Mansfield and Richard Sisson, eds., *The Evolution of Political Knowledge* (2004).
- Christopher H. Achen, Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (2017). Introduction, ch.’s 2 and 4.

13.

- Cathy J. Cohen and Matthew D. Luttig. “Reconceptualizing Political Knowledge: Race, Ethnicity, and Carceral Violence” (forthcoming). *Perspectives on Politics*.
- Amy E. Lerman and Vesla M. Weaver. *Arresting Citizenship: The Democratic Consequences of American Crime Control* (2014). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Ch.’s 1, 4, and 5.

V. Opinion, Ascription, and Polarization

14.

- Marisa Abrajano, Zoltan L. Hajnal. *White Backlash: Immigration, Race, and American Politics* (2015). Introduction, ch.’s 1-3, Conclusion.
- [Interview with Aziz Rana](#), “Rethinking Migration.”

15.

- Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches*, 2nd Edition (2016). Ch.’s 1-3, 5.

- (Skim:) Morris Fiorina, "Parties and Partisanship: A 40-Year Retrospective" (2002). *Political Behavior*, 24(2): 93-115.

VI. Persuasion and Mobilization

16.

- Gerber, Alan and Donald P. Green. "The Effects of Canvassing, Direct Mail, and Telephone Contact on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment." (2000). *American Political Science Review* 94: 653-63.
- Paul Freedman, Michael Franz, Kenneth Goldstein, "Campaign advertising and democratic citizenship" (2004). *American Journal of Political Science*, 48 (4): 723-741.
- Lester K. Spence. *Stare in the Darkness: The Limits of Hip-hop and Black Politics* (2011). Ch. 2.
- [Interview with Chuck D](#) on hip hop and politics.

Third response paper due

17.

- *Get Me Roger Stone* (2017)

18.

Final Exam