

PSC 216: American Political Culture

DePaul University, Fall 2019

Professor: Ben Epstein

Class: Tues. & Thurs. 11:20 – 12:50

Room: Arts and Letters Room 112

Office Hours: Wed 1-3, Thurs 2-3 by appt. on bluestar

Office Locations: 990 W. Fullerton Room 2107

Email: bepstein@depaul.edu

Course Website:

<http://americanpoliticalculture.wordpress.com>

Course Blog:

<http://psc216fall2019.blogspot.com>

Welcome to American Political Culture. America is a nation with a unique history, demographic makeup, and political outlook. The U.S. is simply unlike any other nation on Earth, which leads to important questions including what it means to be American, and to what extent there is an American national identity? Many of the answers to these questions grow from political values that Americans develop from various sources such as our families, neighborhoods, schools, media, and time in which we live. All of this is related to our culture; an incredibly important, and often misunderstood aspect of politics and political behavior. This course is designed to offer insights into a few of the many important aspects of the increasingly complex political and social environment in America today such as immigration, ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, class, education and the media among others. This course aims to equip students with the tools to systematically interpret broad questions pertaining to American political values and identity and how these debates have (or have not) shifted over time. While we may have different levels of political background, we all have important experiences related to the formation and complexity of American political culture. Together we will explore a broad set of issues through readings, discussions, and multimedia. Many of our readings as well as important announcements and course related links will be available on our class website, class blog, and distributed through e-mails during the quarter.

NO REQUIRED TEXT:

- All readings are available through class website or occasionally handed out or e-mailed to class.
- Many of the readings come from a wonderful anthology that is recommended but NOT REQUIRED: Paula S. Rothenberg, Race, Class, and Gender in the United States 10th edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2016). (ISBN-10: 1464178666, ISBN-13: 978-1464178665)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this semester all students should be able to:

1. Connect the historical evolution of American political culture and behavior to contemporary debates and issues.
2. Understand how American political values and identities have been constructed in the United States.
3. Examine their own political values and biases and how they shape views of cultural issues like diversity, individualism, and the role of government in our lives.
4. Compare and contrast diverse viewpoints on sociopolitical issues to develop an understanding of key political debates and concepts.
5. Take a more active role in supporting the social and/or political causes that they endorse.
6. Articulate well-reasoned arguments regarding political topics centered around political culture.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

1. **Attendance and Participation:** Arrive on time to class, turn off and put away all phones and be ready to actively discuss the readings and topics for the class. Quality participation includes thorough note taking, active listening, and asking thoughtful questions.
2. **Academic Integrity:** Avoid Plagiarism – representing another's work as your own. Plagiarism is a very serious offense and will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment and possibly an F for the

course. For more on plagiarism, and how to avoid it see the plagiarism tutorial at <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php>

3. **Resources and Communication:** All students need to check the course website regularly. This is where you will find scanned documents, important and useful links, your course syllabus, and announcements. The course website is: <http://americanpoliticalculture.wordpress.com/>. We will be communicating via e-mail regularly throughout the course. I can be reached at bepstein@depaul.edu. I try to respond within one business day when I receive an email.
4. **Reading:** You should complete the assigned reading before the topic is discussed in class. Our course will move quickly and our class time will often use the readings as a point of departure. The reading load averages around 50-60 pages per week. However, the week readings are not evenly distributed. Please plan ahead and take advantage of lighter reading weeks by reading ahead on upcoming topics.

GRADING

Your grade will be posted on D2L and will be based on the following factors:

1. **Class Attendance, Participation, and Office Visit - 10%:** Class participation is based on active engagement during class including discussions, note taking, and thoughtful questioning. More than two times coming to class late or being absent are grounds for the lowering of the final grade, unless accompanied by an excused absence with documentation. In addition, each student must visit me during office hours at some point between the start of the second and end of the eighth week of class (week ending 11/1). This is worth 5% of your grade. Walk-in office hours visits are always welcome, but it is recommended to make an appointment via bluestar (or via email or in person), which get priority. The office hours visit will help me get to know more about you and to find out how to best direct the course and help you succeed.
2. **Political Blog - 10%:** Each week I will post an article, video clip, or discussion topic on the course blog for the upcoming week. You are expected to read the blog and related material each week and add your personal comments, thoughts, and critical analysis. Each of your blog posts should be no longer than $\frac{1}{2}$ page (one long or two short paragraphs) and does not need to include outside research. Though these are not long entries they should be well thought out. NOTE: Each student is only expected to write 8 blog entries throughout the quarter but you must read the blog comments each week. Each entry must be made by 8 pm on Wednesday so that each student will be able to read all of the responses. All students should read the blog sometime between Wednesday night and class on Thursday. Your comments can be original responses to the weekly prompt or replies to classmates' posts. The goal is to create an online dialogue that we can continue in class. Keep in mind that your responses will be read by all of your classmates so proofread carefully. The blog can be found at: <http://psc216fall2019.blogspot.com/>
3. **Political News/Topic Presentation - 5%:** On the first week of class each student will choose one week in which they will present a recent news story or research connected to a topic connected to one of the themes of the course. Major themes from the course include (but are not limited to): the social and historical construction of political culture and identities in America, American ideals, education, race and ethnicity, religion, immigration, class, representation and participation in politics, media, and pop culture. When possible, it is preferable that you connect your presentation to the theme of that week's class or readings, though this may not always be possible. For your presentation you are expected to: 1) summarize your article or issue, 2) explain why it is important in the context of American political culture, and 3) lead the class in a brief discussion of your issue by preparing two thoughtful questions designed to start the class discussion. You may bring in any visuals if they are necessary for your presentation, but this is not required at all. Each presentation will last approximately 2-3 minutes, followed by the student-led discussion for a total of 6-7 minutes.

4. **Four Reading Reflection Papers – 20% (5% each):** You will turn in four short reading reflections during the quarter: (Thurs. 9/26, Thurs. 10/10, Thurs. 10/24, and Thurs. 11/14). NOTE: each reflection should summarize and reflect on only four readings that you found particularly interesting, challenging, or thought provoking. You are not expected to reflect on every reading. Each reading reflection should be NO MORE than two pages (approx. 1/2 page per reading). Each reading reflection should come from readings only from that quarter of the course (for example the 2nd reflection should only come from readings done AFTER 10/10 through and including 10/24) These reading reflections should include a brief summary of the main idea of the readings and your thoughts about them. What do you think the main idea was? What do you agree or disagree with? How does it relate to larger themes of the course? What questions or feelings did it provoke? Please underline any references to readings in your reflections. Examples of sample reading reflections are available on the course website if you need further guidance. You will be able to use these reading reflections on your final exam. Your reading reflections are due BEFORE the class in which they are assigned. Please turn them in digitally through our D2L site dropbox.

5. **Mid Term Analytical Paper – 25%:** You will be required to write a 7-8 page paper around the midpoint of the course. This paper will evaluate some aspect related to major themes from the course or current policy debates. You will turn in all aspects of this paper via D2L submissions folder. Details will be provided during the first few weeks in the quarter.

6. **Final Exam – 30%:** A final exam will focus on the readings and major themes of the course. We will have a review sheet and review session prior to the exam to help you prepare. The exam will include some multiple choice, identifications, and an essay questions. All readings and class materials are fair game. More details will be provided as we move through the course.

GRADING SCALE

A	93 – 100	B	83 – 86	C	73 – 76	D	63 – 66
A-	90 – 92	B-	80 – 82	C-	70 – 72	D-	60 – 62
B+	87 – 89	C+	77 – 79	D+	67 – 69	F	Below 60

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate reasonable accommodation based on your needs, contact me as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the:

- PLuS Program (for LD, AD/HD) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370, and/or
- The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at 773-325-1677, Student Center #370

SOME GRADING TIPS

1. Start strong because working hard in the beginning of the semester reduces the stresses and workload at the end.
2. Feel free to stop by my office hours if you have any questions or concerns (besides, it's required so why not?)
3. Extra Credit – Throughout the semester if talks, or other related events, come up that pertain to our class material, it is possible that I will notify the class and allow for extra credit assignments that will be counted toward points on the midterm or final exam.
4. You are encouraged to make use of the writing center to work on your writing. They are located at SAC 212. The Writing Center is open Mon. – Thurs. 10 AM to 5 PM. Fri. 10 AM to 3 PM and you can make appointments by phone: (773) 325-4272.

COURSE OUTLINE, SCHEDULE, READING ASSIGNMENTS

(All reading assignments are to be read before the class under which they are listed. All are required readings unless listed under the recommended subheading. Dates and assignments subject to change)

9/12 Introduction

Part I: What Does it Mean to be American?

9/17 What Does it Mean to be American?

"What Does It Mean to Be an "American?" by Michael Waltzer, *Social Research*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (FALL 1990), pp. 591-614

"The American Identity, Points of Pride, Conflicting Views, and a Distinct Culture" by the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Chicago

<http://www.apnorc.org/projects/Pages/HTML%20Reports/points-of-pride-conflicting-views-and-a-distinct-culture.aspx>

9/19 What Does it Mean to be American? (continued)

The Bradley Project on American National Identity, "E Pluribus Unum," pgs. 1-46 (also available at: <http://bradleyproject.org/EPURReportFinal.pdf>)

9/24 Social and Historical Construction of American Identity and Values

"Part I: Constructing Differences," from *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality* by Tracy E. O're, pgs. 1 - 17

"Introduction: The Fabrication of Race" and "The Political History of Whiteness," from *Whiteness of a Different Color* by Matthew Frye Jacobson, pgs. 1 - 14

9/26 Social and Historical Construction of American Identity and Values (continued) (FIRST READING REFLECTION DUE)

"The Evolution of Identity," from *The Washington Post* in *The Meaning of Difference, 5th edition*, eds. Karen E. Rosenblum and Toni-Michelle C. Travis pg. 59

"Whiteness as an "Unmarked" Cultural Category," by Ruth Frankenberg in *The Meaning of Difference, 5th edition*, eds. Karen E. Rosenblum and Toni-Michelle C. Travis pgs. 81 - 87

"Personal Voices: Facing Up to Race," by Carrie Ching, pgs. 246 - 249

10/1 How Should Americans be Educated

"Education and Democracy: The United States of America as a Historical Case Study," by Diane Ravitch, *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, (April 2008), pp. 42-56.

"American Democracy, Education, and Utopianism," by Eamonn Callan, *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, (April 2008), pp. 74-81.

(Audio) "Carlos Doesn't Remember," *Revisionist History Podcast* hosted by Malcom Gladwell, Season 1, Ep. 4, 34 min.

10/3 How Should Americans be Educated (continued)

"Multiculturalism: Battleground or meeting ground?" by Ronald Takaki, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 530.1 (1993): 109-121

"Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children," by James J. Heckman in *Inequality in the 21st Century*, eds. David B. Grusky & Jasmine Hill, pgs. 460 - 463.

"Learning to Spot Fake News: Start with a Gut Check," by Anya Kamenetz, npred. <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/10/31/559571970/learning-to-spot-fake-news-start-with-a-gut-check>

10/8 The Media Effect

"On the Connection Between Associations and Newspapers," from Democracy in America (1834), by Alexis de Tocqueville.

Ch. 12: "Audience Fragmentation and Political Inequality in the Post-Broadcast Media Environment" by Markus Prior, pgs. 153-163

10/10 The Media Effect (continued) (SECOND READING REFLECTION DUE)

Ch. 35 by Jarol B. Manheim, pgs. 421 – 429

"Five Facts About the State of the News Media in 2017," The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. (available at <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/21/5-facts-about-the-state-of-the-news-media-in-2017/>)

"The Modern News Consumer," The Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism. (available at <http://www.journalism.org/2016/07/07/the-modern-news-consumer/>)

"Political Polarization & Media Habits," by Amy Mitchell, Jeffrey Gottfried, Jocelyn Kiley, and Katerina Eva Matsa at the Pew Research Center. (available at: <http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/>)

Part II: Selected Issues of American Political Identity

10/15 Immigration, Multiculturalism, and Changing U.S. Demographics

"Immigration in the United States: New Economic, Social, Political Landscapes with Legislative Reform on the Horizon," by Faye Hipsman and Doris Meissner, pgs. 195 – 205

"Demographic Trends in the 20th Century," by Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops pgs. 71 – 111

"The Next America," By Paul Taylor of the Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/next-america/#Two-Dramas-in-Slow-Motion>

10/17 Immigration, Multiculturalism, and Changing U.S. Demographics (continued)

"Ten Demographic Trends that are Shaping the U.S. and the World," by D'Vera Cohn and Andrea Caumont, PEW Research, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/31/10-demographic-trends-that-are-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world/>

"The U.S. will become 'minority white' in 2045, Census projects, by William H. Frey, Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/03/14/the-us-will-become-minority-white-in-2045-census-projects/>

"Immigration's Aftermath," by Alejandro Portes, pgs. 397 – 400

"A New Race," by Arthur M. Schlesinger in The Disuniting of America, pgs. 23 – 43

10/22 Race and Ethnicity

"Introduction to the 1619 Audio Series, Hosted by Nicole Hannah-Jones, New York Times.

"White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," by Peggy McIntosh, pgs. 176 – 180

"Racial Formations," by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, pgs. 11 – 20

"Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954," pgs. 523 - 527

"Bullets and Ballots," by Jelani Cobb in The New Yorker

10/24 Race and Ethnicity (continued) (THIRD READING REFLECTION DUE)

"Asian American?" by Sonia Shah, pgs. 245 – 247

"The Myth of the Model Minority," by Noy Thrupkaew, pgs. 230 – 236

"The Arab Woman and I" by Mona Fayad, pgs. 426 – 427

"Seeing More Than Black and White," by Elizabeth Martinez in The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality ed. Tracy E. O're, pgs. 752 – 758

"For Many Latinos, Racial Identity is More Culture than Color," by Mireya Navarro, pgs. 220 – 223

10/29 **Class in America: Individualism, Inequality and the Role of Government**
William Hudson, American Democracy in Peril, 5th ed, Chapter 7: "The Seventh Challenge: Inequality," pp. 263-304

10/31 **Class in America (continued) (This is the last week to earn full credit for your office visit)**
*Chapter 4: The Dignity of the Individual," from Libertarianism: A Primer by David Boaz, p. 94-105.
"Imagine a Country," by Holly Sklar, pgs. 329-339
"Class in America," by Gregory Mantsios, pgs. 144 – 159
"What is Considered Middle Class Income?" by Kimberly Amadeo, The Balance*

11/5 **Class in America (continued)**
Meritocracy and Its Discontents," from Twilight of the Elites by Christopher Hayes, p. 31-64.

11/7 **Religion in America**
*The Mayflower Compact
"U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," The PEW Forum on Religious and Public Life. (Explore as many of the topics on the bottom of the page as possible and the interactive map as well)*

11/12 **Religion in America (continued) and Electoral Politics, Representation, Obama, Trump and Beyond**
*"Preferable Descriptive Representatives: Will Just Any Woman, Black or Latino Do?" by Suzanne Dovi, pgs. 729 – 742
"Women of Color in Congress are Challenging Perceptions of Political Leadership" by Vanessa Williams, Washington Post
"A More Perfect Union," speech by Barack Obama
"My President Was Black" by Ta-Nehisi Coates, The Atlantic
Recommended:
"Is Obama the End of Black Politics?" by Matt Bai, NY Times
"Speech Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Selma March," speech by Barack Obama*

11/14 **Electoral Politics, Representation, Obama, Trump and Beyond (continued) (FOURTH READING REFLECTION DUE)**
*"How the 2016 Election Exposed America's Racial and Cultural Divides" by Perry Bacon Jr., NBC News
"Now is the Time to Talk about What We're Actually Talking About," by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, The New Yorker
"Taking Trump Supporters Seriously Means Listening to What They are Actually Saying" by Dylan Matthews, Vox
"The Effects of Affirmative Action on Other Stakeholders," by Barbara Reskin in The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality ed. Tracy E. Ore, pgs. 419 – 427
"Beyond Race in Affirmative Action (read all six viewpoints)," NY Times*

11/19 **Final Class Discussion and Final Exam Review**

11/26 **FINAL EXAM (Tuesday 11:30am – 1:45pm)**