

Political Science 121 - Democracy in America

Spring Term 2021 – MW 11:50-1:05

Instructor: James Johnson

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Teaching Assistants

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I will start with an apology. This is not the course you signed up for. I designed Political Science 121 as a seminar for (mostly) first year students and have always taught it that way. That is how the course was advertised when you registered. This version of the course has (at the time of this writing) approximately 50 students. Hardly a seminar. That is not my doing. The decision to lift the cap on the course was made by departmental deciders way above my pay grade and despite my objections. The decision was made just before registration in the fall and for reasons that remain opaque to me. I am sorry.

This is a course about democracy in contemporary America. This year we will start from a discussion of persistent, dire racial injustice. Our premise will be that racial minorities will not, on their own, successfully remedy the tangle of injustices captured by the idea of ‘structural racism.’ It is commonly recognized that real progress will require a multi-racial coalition. So, we will spend most of the course talking about white people, specifically ‘white working class,’ people. This is a difficult task because many of us have no access to working class life. And the very idea of treating others as an object of study is itself an inauspicious basis for making political progress. Hence our predicament. Nearly everyone recognizes significant racial injustice in the US. Sophisticated analyses also recognize that progress in addressing such injustice demands a coalition that will include a significant contribution by members of the white working class. Much of the white working class is ill-disposed to that undertaking – indeed, they have become increasingly conservative politically. And mostly, it is difficult to understand – as opposed to dismiss, condemn or ridicule that conservatism. As a result, it seems like we are stuck with racial injustice and fated to re-live the conflict, violence, and so forth that has characterized our recent and not so recent history. Are we?

Class participation: *Please Note!* The topics we will be taking up are fraught: race, solidarity, social class, coalition politics, resentment, anger, inequality, contempt, economic hardship. These substantive matters are central to contemporary politics and will surely elicit strong views and disagreements. They are unavoidably normative, meaning they involve tasks of criticizing, justifying, and assessing actions, practices and institutions. Those are central tasks for political theory. And our aim in this course is to learn to think like political theorists. That said, there is no party line in the course, meaning I do not care if you agree or disagree with me, with one another, or with any (or all?) of the readings. I care about your willingness to stick your neck out, to think critically, and to articulate and defend *your* views clearly both orally and in writing. So, whether or not you agree with the instructor has no bearing on your grade.

In order to sustain a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the open exchange of ideas, we will observe the following guidelines:

- (i) Treat every member of the class with respect, even if – indeed, *especially* if - you disagree with their views. Yes, *every* member;
- (ii) Recognize that reasonable persons can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions;
- (iii) Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights, I do not just expect disagreement but encourage it;
- (iv) Welcome and listen to all viewpoints charitably with the caveat that none is immune from scrutiny and debate;
- (v) When scrutinizing and discussing the views of classmates, focus on the evidence (whether textual or empirical) they offer and the inferences they draw from it rather than on their motivations;
- (vi) There is a common saying that goes something like this: “You are entitled to your own opinion. You are not entitled to your own evidence or standards of reasoning.” That summarizes our operating premise;
- (vii) Your grade - to repeat - will be based on the quality of reasoning and evidence you bring to bear in presenting and defending your views whatever they happen to be.

The course primarily will be lecture based. I will, however, encourage participation and not only welcome but solicit questions and observations. That means that I expect you not only to keep up with the reading, but also to read with care and to demonstrate this in class discussions. In lectures I will not just cover assigned materials but incorporate research and writings not found on the list for the course.

Class Format: Ours is a strange time. It is an anxiety producing time. And a frustrating time. My aim in the class is to support you as you try to navigate the strangeness, anxiety and frustration so you can learn and move toward your degree. If *at any time* you need to rant or vent or just talk about the strangeness, anxiety and frustration, or *anything else*, we can arrange to do that. Reach out.

We will hold all group meetings remotely – via your favorite platform, Zoom. Why? Given my age I am in an especially susceptible population covid-wise. And while I am in the process of getting the vaccine, neither my partner nor our daughter are vaguely close to doing so. For now, social distancing still rules!

I hope to have our meetings be more discussion based than simple lectures. We can talk about how to manage that - via Zoom! Here please note this:

On-Line Etiquette: Several things I will insist on.

- (1) Mute your mic except when speaking.
- (2) Cameras on! – No Avatars or blacked out screens, please.
- (3) Use the chat function to raise questions or get in the queue to speak.
- (4) Feel free to interrupt me if you need clarification or whatever.

If you are not in Rochester and have time-shift problems due to being in another time zone, let me know. I will record all the zoom sessions and upload them to Blackboard for your viewing pleasure. The bottom line however is that class attendance is not optional.

Required Readings: What follows are the assigned readings for the course. You are correct. There is a totally unreasonable amount of quite disparate material. None of it comes in pre-digested form. This is unavoidable given the nature of the subject. Our aim is to think like political theorists - to draw connections, make inferences, and think creatively not just about what is the case but what might be. Doing that across these sorts of reading is hard. I know that.

Books are marked *. I have NOT ordered these from the UR bookstore. Why? Because I had to re-envision the course at the last minute. And I also have no idea where you actually are physically located. All the books are readily available on-line from your preferred e-purveyor. Many will be available used. All will be on reserve at Rush Rhees – and some - marked ^E - are available via the UR Libraries as e-books. I will make all the non-book readings (articles, chapters, policy reports, etc.) available via blackboard in pdf form.

A rough (*aspirational!*) schedule for the semester is at the end of the syllabus. I expect you to do the assigned reading prior to coming to class.

Preliminaries

Elizabeth Anderson. 2009. "Democracy: Instrumental vs Non-Instrumental Value." In *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*. Edited by T. Christiano & J Christman. Blackwell.

Stephen Holmes. 1990. "The Secret History of Self Interest." In *Beyond Self-Interest*. Edited by J. Mansbridge. University of Chicago Press.

Racial Injustice & Its Remedies

*^E Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. 2016. *From #BLACKLIVESMATTER to Black Liberation*. Haymarket Books.

Conor Reynolds, et. al. 2020. *Confronting Racial Covenants*. Rochester: City Roots CLT & Yale Environmental Law Clinic.

M4BL. 2016. *A Vision for Black Lives – Policy Demands for Black Power, Freedom & Justice*.

Zadie Smith. 2020. "Postscript: Contempt as a Virus," In *Intimations*. Penguin.

White Working Class (I): Voters

Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu. 2020. "The White Working Class and the 2016 Election." *Perspectives on Politics* (forthcoming).

Ruy Texiera & Joel Rogers. 2000. "America's Forgotten Majority," *The Atlantic Monthly* (June) 66-75.

White Working Class (II): Now

* Katherine Cramer. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment*. University of Chicago Press.

Elizabeth Spelman. 1999. "Anger: The Diary." In *Wicked Pleasures: Meditations on the Seven Deadly Sins*. Edited by R. Solomon. Rowman & Littlefield.

White Working Class (III): Then & Now

* Richard Sennett & Jonathan Cobb. 1972. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. WW Norton.

Monica Prasad, et. al. 2016. "Walking the Line: The White Working Class and the Economic Consequences of Morality," *Politics & Society* 44(2) 281–304.

Michael Sandel. 2020. "Disdain for the Less Educated Is the Last Acceptable Prejudice" *New York Times* (2 September).

White Working Class (III): Not Working

* ^E Anne Case & Angus Deaton. 2020. *Deaths of Despair & the Future of Capitalism*. Princeton University Press.

Coalitions? Institutions?

John Dewey. 1939. "Creative Democracy"

Joshua Cohen & Joel Rogers. 1986. *On Democracy*. Penguin. [Chapter 6].

Roberto Mangabeira Unger. 2009. *The Left Alternative*. [Pages 1-48; 52-63; 98-132; 164-170].

Michael Dawson, et. al. 2012. "The Future of Black Politics," *Boston Review* (Jan/Feb) 13-30.

Written Assignments: There will be a take home mid-term and a take home final. These will cover materials from the lectures and readings. You can expect to write ten to twelve pages (with e.g., double spacing, 12 point font, etc) for each assignment. I will provide prompts for each exam. Yes, each assignment will include multiple questions/prompts. That means you should anticipate having to have done pretty much all of the reading and to have attended lectures. I will also provide detailed instructions. Please see the comments regarding Academic Honesty below. You will have roughly a week to complete each assignment. Dates appear on the schedule that follow. Please plan accordingly. Please see the comments regarding late assignments below.

Each assignment will constitute 50% of your grade for the course. There is no 'curve.' In cases at the margin your regular smart participation in class discussions will get you the benefit of the doubt.

Course & Instructor Policies – The Fine Print

Policy on Attendance: Class *attendance is not optional*. If you need to miss class for some reason, please let me know.

Statement on Academic Honesty: I operate on the assumption that every student in the course is familiar with and abides by the College policies on Academic Honesty. If you are not familiar with those policies, please go to the Board on Academic Honesty web page and familiarize yourself. You can find that page here: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>. Ignorance of the policy is no excuse.

I will provide specific instructions for each course assignment. In any event, I take a very dim view of cheating and plagiarism of any sort. It makes me very cranky. So, I will refer any and all suspected instances to the Board on Academic Honesty. The easiest way to avoid such unpleasantness is to not succumb to temptations to cheat, plagiarize, bend the rules, exploit loopholes, and so forth. As a default, if you are unsure in any way about whether something is “allowed” ask me.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability of any sort that might impact your ability to meet the expectations laid out in this syllabus I encourage you to speak with me in person as early in the term as is possible. If you are not comfortable speaking to me directly, you should contact the Office of Disability Services who can assist you in making your needs clear to myself and your other teachers. You can find them here: (<https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/index.html>). In any case, we can make reasonable accommodation regarding any and all expectations & assignments.

Policy on late assignments: Except in the direst circumstances I very much frown upon late assignments. I will deduct one third of a letter grade for every day an assignment is late. (This means if your grade would have been a B+, one day late gets you a deduction to B, two days a deduction to B-, etc.). If you anticipate a problem getting an assignment in on time (due to, say, religious holidays, travel for athletic teams, etc.) please speak to me *in advance*. I will make reasonable accommodation to address such difficulties. In particular, I will gladly accommodate faith-based exceptions to any expectations or assignments laid out above.

Office Hours: Both I and the TAs for the course will have regular (zoom) office hours. These will be announced by the end of the first week of class.

Semester Schedule

Week One

Feb 1 - Introduction
Feb 3 - Anderson

Week Two

Feb 8 - Holmes
Feb 10 - Taylor (Chaps 1-4)

Week Three

Feb 15 - Taylor (Chaps 5-7)
Feb 17 - Reynolds; M4BL; Smith

Week Four

Feb 22 - Carnes/Lupu
Feb 24 - Texiera/Rogers

Week Five

March 1 - Spelman
March 3 - Study Break (No Class)

Week Six

March 8 - Cramer (Chaps 1-5)
March 10 - Cramer (Chaps 6-8)

Week Seven

March 15 - Sennett & Cobb (1-119)
March 17 - Sennett & Cobb (120-188)

Week Eight

March 22 - Sennett & Cobb (189 -271)
March 24 - Prasad *et al* (Mid-Term Distributed)

Week Nine

March 29 - Review Session (TA)
March 31 - Sandel (Mid-Term Due)

Week Ten

April 5 - Catch Up
April 7 - Case & Deaton (Parts I & II)

Week Eleven

April 12 - Case & Deaton (Part III)
April 14 - Case & Deaton (Part IV)

Week Twelve

April 19 - Dewey
April 21 - Cohen & Rogers

Week Thirteen

April 26 - Dawson *et al*
April 28 - Unger

Week Fourteen

May 3 - Catch Up (Final Distributed)
May 5 - Review Session (TA)

Week Fifteen -- May 10 - (Final Due)

