

## Political Science 121 - Democracy in America

Spring Term 2023 – MW 9:00-10:15 – Meliora 205

Instructor: James Johnson

Office Hours: Tuesday 10:30-12:30 & by Appointment

Harkness 312

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**Public Health Prologue** Many folks – including the University administration – seem to think Covid is “over.” That, I believe, is naïve and dangerous. Not only is the direct experience of contracting Covid dangerous, but we know little about the long-term and downstream implications. What we do know about such things tends to be disturbing. However, College and University policies insist that we engage in risky behavior. And I (Professor Johnson) am part of an age cohort for whom Covid is especially dangerous. So please, if you feel even the faintest bit ill stay away from class. Feel free to mask and maintain as much social distancing as our classroom allows. I encourage you to do all three things.

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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.’ Instead, real progress will require support from the white majority of the country. 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 seem to have become increasingly conservative politically. 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?

The topics we will be taking up are fraught: race, solidarity, social class, coalition politics, resentment, anger, inequality, contempt, economic hardship and death. 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.

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**Class Format:** The course primarily will be lecture and discussion based. I will 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.

**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? Some - marked <sup>E</sup> - are available via the UR Libraries as e-books. And all are readily available on-line from your preferred e-purveyor. Many will be available used. 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.

### Honoring Dr. King

Martin Luther King, Jr. Four Essays – 1967-68. [“Nonviolence & Social Change”; “Where Do We Go from Here?”; “Black Power”: “A Time to Break Silence.”] All in *The Radical King*. Edited by Cornell West. Beacon Press 2015.

### Theoretical 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

\* <sup>E</sup> Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. 2021. *From #BLACKLIVESMATTER to Black Liberation*. Haymarket Books.

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

Stephanie Hollenbach, et al. 2021. "Associations Between Historically Redlined Districts and Racial Disparities in Current Obstetrics Outcomes," *JAMA Network Open* (30 September).  
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2784593>

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

#### White Working Class (I): Voters

Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu. 2021. "The White Working Class and the 2016 Election." *Perspectives on Politics* 19(1): 55-72.

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.

Matthew Nelsen and Christopher Petsko. "Race and White Rural Consciousness." *Perspectives on Politics* 19.4 (2021): 1205-1218.

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.

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

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: The Task Before Us." In *The Pragmatism Reader*. Edited by Robert Talisse & Scott Aikin. Princeton University Press.

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.

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**Grading:** I do not care what grade you get in the course. By that I mean that while I would like you to do well, and hope that happens, whether you do so or not really depends on you. If you do the required work, it is extremely likely a good grade will follow; if not, it is almost certain that a good grade will not follow. The work here includes both participating in class discussion and writing a mid-term and a final.

Final grades for the course will reflect three things:

**Musical Contributions:** According to political theorist Roberto Unger, the exploration of political possibilities "is not about blueprints, it is about pathways. It is not architecture, it is music." To honor this suggestion, I ask that you share music with your classmates. I expect each of you to make two contributions to the "Music" folder on the course Blackboard page. In addition to providing a link/audio file, I expect you to offer 2-3 sentences about what strikes you about your offering and what you hope your classmates will "get" from listening. Your contribution to this enterprise is worth 10% of your final grade.

On some days I will ask a student from the class to comment on one or more of the offerings in the Music folder. In other words, you'll need to not just deposit tunes, but actually listen to what your classmates deposit as well.

*You must make these contributions no later than week 12 of the course.*

**Class participation:** The course is relatively small and will run - as much as is possible – as a discussion. Given the nature of the undertaking it is imperative that everyone actively participate in class. 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 order to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate and that a small subset of the class does not dominate the discussion, I will call on students more or less at random. The regularity and quality of your participation and especially your willingness to stick your neck out in seminar discussion will constitute 20% of your final grade for the course.

***Please note!** As I already have said once, 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.*

Having said all that, I urge you to read and think about the "Policy on Classroom Interactions" below. Every student in the class is due civility and respect irrespective of their substantive views. What matters are evidence, reasoning and the clarity with which they are articulated.

**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 written assignment will constitute 35% 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.

So, to summarize, for purposes of final grades:

Musical Contributions	10%
Class Participation:	20%
Mid-term	35%
Final	35%
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TOTAL:	100%

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### Course & Instructor Policies – The Fine Print (Spelled out at ludicrous length because the University Legal Counsel insists on this sort of legalistic stuff) ...

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

Policy on Electronic Devices: My policy on electronic devices in class (meaning any screen connected to silicon chips) is restrictive. No cell phones at all! Turn them off and put them away when you get to class. Laptops or tablets are allowed solely for access assigned readings or notes. In general, you should disconnect from the social media and phone/text communication media. In fact, *if you have readings or notes you will need in class, you are better off getting them off of your devices and onto paper*. If I detect you engaged in social media during class, I will ask you to shut off your device and put it away. If this happens a second (or subsequent) time I will ask you to leave class. This will obviously impact your ability to participate in discussions and thereby your final grade.

Policy on classroom interactions: In order to create 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 you disagree with their views; (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 with the caveat that none – including the instructor’s – is immune from scrutiny and debate; (v) 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. *There is no party line in the class.* So, whether or not you agree with the instructor has no bearing on your grade.

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 make yourself familiar with it. You can find that page here: <http://www.rochester.edu/College/honesty/>.

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. Very! I will refer any and all suspected instances of cheating or plagiarism 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" just ask me.

Students with Disabilities: If you have a documented disability of any sort that you believe will 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. In any case, we can make reasonable accommodation regarding the assignments. You can find them here: (<https://www.rochester.edu/college/disability/index.html>).

Religious Observances: If you need to miss class for religious observances, please just let me know.

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: I will have regular office hours. These will be announced by the end of the first week of class.

## Semester Schedule

### January

11 Introduction

16 MLK Readings

18 Anderson; Holmes

23 Taylor

25 Taylor

30 Reynolds; Hollenbach

### February

1 M4BL

6 Carnes/Lupu

8 Texiera & Rogers

13 Spelman

15 Catch Up

20 Cramer

22 Cramer

27 Nelson/Petsko

### March

1. Prasad

6 Spring Break

8 Spring Break

13 Sennett & Cobb (Mid-Term Distributed)

15 Review Session

20 Sennett & Cobb (Mid-Term Due)

22 Smith; Sandel

27 Catch Up

29 Case & Deaton

### April

3 Case & Deaton

5 Dewey

10 Cohen & Rogers

12 Dawson *et al*

17 Unger

19 Unger

24 Catch Up (Final Distributed)

26 Review Session

### May

1 (Final Due)