RACE AND AMERICAN POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Political Science

OVERVIEW

This course examines race in the United States in historical perspective. Topics are divided into six broad categories. First, we will examine the concept of political development itself, considering a variety of perspectives on how political change occurs and the role of race in the American context. Second, we will consider the centrality of race to American political culture. Third, we will examine the role of race in imperial expansion on the continent and abroad. Fourth, we will look at the importance of race in political participation, parties, and interest groups. Fifth, we will consider how different American political institutions have impacted different racial groups. Finally, we will conclude the course by considering how race remains central to American politics, considering several contemporary challenges and movements: the carceral state, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the current politics of immigration.

More broadly, the lectures, discussions, primary source readings, and scholarly readings will help us achieve a few course goals. First, we will gain an improved ability to make sense of how American politics works (or doesn’t work!). Second, we will compare arguments and theories offered by various authors, critically evaluating their usefulness for describing American politics. Third, we will place the ideas from the readings into the context of present-day current events in politics. Finally, as a more general goal for the course, I hope that we all can take a step forward toward becoming more politically critical, informed, and engaged citizens. Politics can be maddening, but it becomes more interesting and fun when you can make some sense of what is going on.

Our activities in class may take a number of formats. While we will often have lectures, depending on the topic there may also be discussions, debates, and/or small group work. Political concepts and topics often may reveal differences of opinion. So even as some of us may have strong views and potentially disagree, I ask that we listen to each other’s viewpoints while working to ensure that civility and respect for each other are always present in our conversations.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Students are expected to complete the readings, come to lecture, and participate in class. Three times during the semester, students will be expected to complete short papers critically analyzing one or more weeks of readings. The papers should be 5 pages double-spaced. There will also be a final exam for the course. Alternatively, students may elect to do a research paper in place of the exam. Topics for this should be discussed with me and approved by Week 5. The grade breakdown is as follows:

* In drafting this syllabus, I have partly drawn upon Stephen Skowronek’s “American Political Development” graduate seminar syllabus at Yale from Spring 2015.
• Participation – 15%
• 3 Response Papers – 30%
• Final Assessment
  o Final Exam – 55%
  o Alternative Research Paper – 55%

COURSE OUTLINE

I. THE CONCEPT

Week 1: What is Political Development?


*Primary Sources:*

  *Articles of Confederation* (1777)
  *Constitution* (1787)
  *Bill of Rights* (1789)

II. RACE AND POLITICAL CULTURE

Week 2: Does America Have a Liberal Tradition?
Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), Ch. 1

Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (September 1993): 549-566


III. RACE AND AMERICAN EXPANSION

Week 3: Imperialism on the Continent

Week 4: Imperialism Abroad

IV. RACE AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Week 5: The Struggle to Vote

Week 6: Political Parties

Week 7: Interest Groups

V. RACE AND THE STATE

Week 8: Congress and the Judiciary
Week 9: The Presidency and Administration
Megan Ming Francis, Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Ch. 3

Week 10: Civil Rights and State Capacity
Megan Ming Francis, Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Ch. 1-2, 4-6

VI. CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Week 11: The Carceral State
Michelle Alexander, The New Jim Crow (New York: New Press, 2010), Ch. 1, 3, 5
Kristine Taylor, “American political development and black lives matter in the age of incarceration,” Politics, Groups, and Identities 6, no. 1 (March 2018): 153-161

Week 12: Black Lives Matter

Week 13: Race and Immigration


**FINAL EXAM**

- Identifications – Choose 10 of 15 – 40%
- Long Essays – Choice two of three questions – 60%