

**American Political Culture:  
Racializing, Gendering, and Nation-Building  
POL #####  
Syllabus**

Date/time of class meetings

Location of class meetings

Instructor: Be Stone

Email: estone@gradcenter.cuny.edu

Office Hours: dates/times

**Course Description and Learning Objectives**

This course is an advanced seminar exploring American political culture. We begin by asking: what is “political culture,” and what is distinctive about American political culture? We explore the bases of the American political tradition(s), including liberalism, republicanism, settler colonialism, genocide, chattel slavery, coverture, and constantly evolving practices of inclusion, exclusion, and disavowal. We will consider classic works in the literature as well as critical approaches, including how hierarchies of difference distinguished by race, ethnicity, gender, immigration status, class, and sexuality have shaped political practices, institutions, values, and imaginations in the U.S. We conclude with a survey of visions for alternative political culture(s) in the U.S. and for a world beyond nations, borders, and hierarchies of difference.

Course Objectives:

- Develop an understanding of the key concepts, theories, and practices of the American political tradition(s).
- Acquire knowledge of several critical approaches to understanding American political culture.
- Improve writing and critical thinking skills through regular writing assignments and class discussions.
- Improve oral communication skills through class discussions and group presentations.
- Develop the ability to conduct academic research and write a research proposal, including the ability to write persuasively and directly, and according to the conventions of academic writing in political science.

**Texts**

You do not need to buy a textbook for this class. All of the readings are available on Blackboard.

**You are required to bring a copy of the readings to each class.** It is preferred that you print out hard copies of the readings, but you may also bring a tablet or laptop to class for accessing them. If it becomes clear that you are using your tablet or laptop for something other than accessing the readings, I reserve the right to change this policy. **NO CELLPHONES in the classroom.**

**Grading & Class Requirements**

Your grade is based on the five requirements for this course:

- 1. Class Participation (10% of class grade)**

- Participation in class discussion is a critical part of the learning process. You are expected to come to every class having read all of the readings, prepared to contribute to class discussion and participate in class activities.
- If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get notes and any assignments from a classmate.
- You are required to bring a printed or electronic copy of all the readings and your reading response paper to each class. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

## **2. Weekly Reading Responses (20% of class grade)**

- To foster your thinking outside of class and to facilitate discussion in class you are required to submit weekly reading response papers. Response papers should be between 400–500 words in length and must include four parts. See the handout (available on Blackboard) for details.
- Unless otherwise noted, reading responses are due via Blackboard at TIME/DATE before class.
- You are required to bring a printed or electronic copy of your response paper to class. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

## **3. Discussant (20% of class grade)**

- You will be asked to sign up for **TWO** readings for which you will serve as the discussant. The role of the discussant is to briefly present a reading, offer critique, and raise questions to facilitate discussion. You will be asked to submit the outline/notes of your presentation prior to class. Specific guidelines can be found on Blackboard.

## **4. Short Essay Assignment (20% of class grade)**

- You will be responsible for writing a 4–6-page essay on a prompt assigned in advance. This essay will allow you to demonstrate more in-depth knowledge on a political concept discussed the course. A rubric will be distributed with the prompt.

## **5. Final Paper Proposal (30% of class grade)**

- In lieu of writing a final research paper, you will instead be writing a research paper proposal (approximately 8 pages) as though you are pitching your paper to a conference or a journal for presentation or publication. The purpose of this assignment is to allow you to begin exploring an issue area that interests you as well as to practice expressing your ideas in a concise and convincing way. A handout will be provided detailing the requirements of the assignment

## **Classroom Philosophy and Conduct**

Discussing political topics can challenge deeply held or unexamined beliefs. Expect to be challenged in this classroom to think critically about the ideas presented in the readings and common assumptions made about historical and contemporary politics. Given the difficult, sensitive, and political nature of the material to be discussed in this course, students will be expected to conduct themselves in a mature and respectful manner. This requires both thoughtfully voicing your own opinion and respectfully listening and responding to the opinions of others. The ultimate goal of this course is to provide you with the knowledge and critical thinking skills to construct informed opinions on complex political issues.

A Note on Gender Pronouns: Please notify me of your gender pronouns and the name you'd like to be called prior to the start of class using the First Day Survey. I use she or they pronouns and you may call me Professor Stone or Professor Be. You are expected to respect the pronouns and gender identities of me, your classmates, and the people we discuss in class.

### **Weekly Course Schedule**

All dates, readings, and assignments are subject to change.

\*\* Indicates a response paper is due at TIME this day

### **Part I: What is Political Culture?**

Class Meeting 1: Welcome and Introduction

- The Media Bias Chart (in-class viewing).

Class Meeting 2: What is Political Culture?

- William Adams. 1982. "Political Poetics."
- Brendon Swedlow. 2013. "Political Culture," in *Encyclopedia of Modern Political Thought*.

Class Meeting 3: What is Political Culture? II

- Lisa Wedeen. 2002. "Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science" in *American Political Science Review*.
- In-class exercise: identifying political culture(s).

### **Part II: What is American Political Culture?**

Class Meeting 4: Traditional Accounts of American Political Culture

- Alexis de Tocqueville. 1835. "The Power Exercised by the Majority in America over Thought" in *Democracy in America* (excerpts).
- Louis Hartz. 1955. *The Liberal Tradition in America* (excerpts).
- Rogers Smith. 1993. "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America" (excerpts).

Class Meeting 5: Critical Accounts of American Political Culture

- Frederick Douglass. 1852. "What to the Slave is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?"
- Richard Hofstadter. 1952. "Introduction" and "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*.
- Michael Rogin. 1988. "Preface" and "Political Repression in the United States" in *Ronald Reagan: The Movie*.

Class Meeting 6: Critical Accounts of American Political Culture II

- W.E.B. Du Bois. 1935. "The General Strike" in *Black Reconstruction in America*.
- Edmund Morgan. 1972. "Slavery and Freedom: the American Paradox" in *Journal of American History*
- George Shulman. 2008. "Introducing Jeremiah's Legacy" in *American Prophecy*.

### **Part III: American Political Culture in Practice**

#### Class Meeting 7: Settler Colonialism and Citizen-Making

- Michael Rogin. 1988. "Liberal Society and the Indian Question" in *Ronald Reagan: The Movie*.
- Glen Coulthard. 2007. "Subjects of Empire" in *Contemporary Political Theory*.
- **Outline of Short Essay Assignment Due**

#### Class Meeting 8: Slavery and Race-Making

- Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman. 2005. "Fugitive Justice" in *Representations*.
- Michelle Alexander. 2010. "The New Jim Crow" in *The New Jim Crow*.

#### Class Meeting 9: Immigration and Alien-Making

- Mae Ngai. 2014. "Introduction" and "Epilogue" in *Impossible Subjects*.
- Fred Lee. 2017. "Post-Naturalistic Racial Classification" in *Theory & Event*.

#### Class Meeting 10: Gender and Woman-Making

- Shulamith Firestone. 1970. *The Dialectic of Sex* (excerpts).
- Hortense Spillers. 1987. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" in *Diacritics*.
- **Short Essay Assignment Due**

### **Part IV: Alternative Visions**

#### Class Meeting 11: Alternative Political Traditions

- Emma Goldman. 1910. "Anarchism: What it Really Stands For" in *Anarchism and Other Essays*.
- Juliet Hooker. 2015. "'A Black Sister to Massachusetts': Latin America and the Fugitive Democratic Ethos of Frederick Douglass."

#### Class Meeting 12: Decolonization and Border Dissolution

- Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" in *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*.
- Gloria Anzaldúa. 2002. "now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner works, public acts," in *This Bridge We Call Home*.

#### Class Meeting 13: Gender and Sexual Freedom

- Silvia Federici. 1974. "Wages Against Housework."
- Cherrie Moraga. 2000. *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (excerpts).
- **Outline of Final Paper Proposal Due**

#### Class Meeting 14: Racial Liberation

- Audre Lorde and James Baldwin. 1984. “Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation Between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde” in *Essence*.
- Aziz Rana. 2016. “Race and the American Creed” in *N+1*.
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. 2020. “How Do We Change America?” in *The New Yorker*.

Class Meeting 15: Conclusion and Wrap-Up

- bell hooks. 2000. “Living By a Love Ethic” in *All About Love: New Visions*.
- adrienne marie brown. 2017. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (excerpts).

**Date: Final Paper Proposals Due**



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