

PS201 Syllabus '18

Introduction to American Politics & Government

Instructor: Doug Clark

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Hours: BC: 11m/w (or by appointment)

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"The American Revolution was the dramatic product of Enlightenment philosophy and our Founders were Enlightenment disciples. The values they championed, fought for, and died for were Enlightenment values."

Brian Kahn

"As a country, we have declined from an era of middle-class prosperity and middle-class power from the 1940s to the 1970s to an era of vast fortunes and mass economic insecurity....instead of a high-visibility, outside political power game of mass movements and public participation, we now have a low-visibility, inside power game dominated by the lobbyists for the American financial and political elite.....powerlessness breeds cynicism and passivism.....no countervailing power matches the political clout of business. Our democracy has become starkly unequal."

Hedrick Smith

Purpose and Description of the Course:

- This is a course about **politics**: the conflict and struggle among groups and individuals over how life chances and costs and benefits are distributed among us.
- This is a course about **American politics**: the particular methods and values that shape how people engage in the struggle as a result of the historical circumstances of the development of the United States---its culture, society, and production system.
- This is a course about **government in the United States**: the institutions, processes, and rules by which the political struggle is managed and won.
- And finally, this is a course about **ideology**: values, priorities and strategies---the stuff we argue over---the conflicting answers to questions such as "who should get what?" "how shall we decide?" "what should be our priorities?"

These topics are the usual stuff of a college course in US politics. But these are not usual times, so we must particularly address the growing concern for the preservation and practice of our democracy. This is a time of deep division in our society.....division growing out of a dangerous economic inequality, the immobilization of governance in the face of political partisanship, and a hateful political culture shot through with identity politics. These characteristics of contemporary America lend themselves to an authoritarian politics expressed in impulses of resentment and revenge. Our country appears on the growing list of 'illiberal' democracies where empathy and compromise are replaced by misogyny, xenophobia, and nativism. Our purpose then must be to employ the spirit and tools of the Enlightenment in the manner of the Founders, and 'address the mess we've gotten ourselves into.'

"I am loathe to close. We are not enemies but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection...."

Abraham Lincoln
First Inaugural, 1861

TEXT

and READINGS:

AMERICAN

DIFFERENCE by Poloni-Staudinger & Wolf
INEQUALITY IN AMERICA by Stephen Caliendo

Additional readings are listed at the [Readings and Assignments](#) link.

News and Information: Here in the current Orwellian age of news and fact corruption, I will recommend several reliable and useful sources for your regular visitation: [New York Times](#) and [PBS Nightly Newshour](#). In addition, go ahead and let your curiosity run wild and consider a variety of **left** perspectives at [Common Dreams](#), and a variety of **right** perspectives at the [Red Flag List](#). Remember! None of your sources are telling the whole story or have the truth. Reliable! Useful! Yes! Sources that help you listen in and participate in the discussions about the issues of our times. That's what we want.

*"The Puritans believed that the care for material goods should be worn like a cloak, lightly.
But, fate decreed that the cloak would become an iron cage."* **Max Weber**

Methods of Instruction and Evaluation: This is an introductory college class. I do not assume that you have prior knowledge of the subject. I start with the assumption that you want to be a free individual in a just society and that you have an appetite for knowledge and insight into the culture and society that has shaped who you are to this point. A variety of methods will be used in our study: there will be occasional lectures but most of our class time will be taken up with discussions, seminars, and workshops. This is a challenging course so missing a class meeting is extremely costly. Please plan on attending all class meetings and completing the assigned reading on time. Remember! This is not a correspondence course. You need to be in class, always.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

- 6 in-class Quizzes @ 10 points each = 60 points
- 5 Issue Summaries @ 30 points each = 150 points
- 2 Political Problem Discussions @10 points each = 20 points
- 1 Inequality Investigation Project = 100 points

330 possible points-----A = 90%, B = 80%, C = 70%, etc.

Late Assignments: All of the written assignments are take-homes. They should be turned in on time. I will not accept papers that are more than three (3) class meetings late. Within this time-frame, late papers will lose 40% of their value. Inquiries will not be accepted after their due date. I will try to return on-time papers within two class meetings. For late papers, I make no promises. If your attendance is good and your papers on time, you may re-write papers to improve your grade. There will be a number of opportunities to earn bonus points which may make up for points lost. Of course, there will be no penalty if you are late due to circumstances beyond your control.

"There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow men--true nobility is being superior to your former self." **anonymous**

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