

PS201 Syllabus '17

Introduction to American Politics & Government

Instructor: Doug Clark

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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

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 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?"

As usual, the nation's attention is on fundamental questions about government and economy and the appropriate boundaries between them. This is the enduring debate over political-economy.....what is public? and what is private? and how governmental powers may be used in the context of globalized capitalism? It is quite simply the battle over the type of democracy by which the US is governed.

More broadly, over the past three decades the **political right** has gradually taken control of the Republican Party and in turn the Republican Party has gained control of the national government. This more"**conservative**" Republican party has promoted a policy '**counterrevolution**' directed at redefining the responsibilities and priorities of government in the name of '**freedom**.' At the same moment, the resurgence of a reform movement aiming at overcoming long-term material and status '**inequalities**' first addressed by FDR and LBJ, emerged on the heels of the 'failed' Bush ('43) administration. In the midst of the further globalization of American economy and society, the intensified political alienation and polarization, and the startling election to the **presidency** of a billionaire amateur with a right-wing populist agenda, debate and despair over the well-being of democracy in our nation forms the bases for our inquiry into the nature and state of American politics.

*"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

Text and Readings:

AMERICAN DIFFERENCE by Poloni-Staudinger & Wolf

CAN THE WELFARE STATE SURVIVE? by Andrew Gamble

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](#).

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:

3 Political Inquiries @ 20 points each = 60 points

6 in-class Quizzes @ 10 points each = 60 points

2 Topical Workshops @ 75 points each = 150 points

1 Take-Home Final Exam = 100 points

370 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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