Syllabus

Democracy in America: Historical Perspectives

UNC-Charlotte, Spring 2016 (HIST 2125-001/AMST 2050-004) and Fall 2016 (HIST 3255-001/AMST 3050-009)

[A modified version of the Spring & Fall 2016 syllabi, with some elements from each, & with some boilerplate language removed]

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Course Description and Goals

This course considers the history of politics and government in the United States by examining the history of American democracy in theory and practice. To what extent have American politics and government been democratic? What does the history of democracy in America suggest about the future of politics and society in the United States and the world? This course will examine the rise of parties and mass politics, machine politics and reform movements, the history of citizenship and suffrage as relates to race, ethnicity, and gender, the relationship between war and democracy, and the problem of reconciling democratic ideals with social and economic inequalities.

Students in this course will hone their advanced reading, writing, research, and communications skills, by engaging with challenging texts, writing regularly and revising in response to instructor and peer comments, and by executing a small independent research project with the guidance of the instructor.

Students in this course will also become better informed, more capable citizens. The course content demands that students enhance their knowledge of the U.S. political system and its history. It also requires students to master (and historicize and criticize) some basic common rules of parliamentary procedure, as a way of encouraging their future participation in governance and politics. Because 2016 is a presidential election year, we will be especially interested in engaging with current events, and connecting them to historical developments. Students’ independent research projects provide them with an opportunity to explore their own interests and think about how to improve democracy in America for the 21st century.

Readings

Required common readings include five books, available for purchase at the University Bookstore and on library reserve, and a variety of short documents and articles, noted on the syllabus and on the course Canvas page. (Most documents and articles will be available in PDF format on Canvas.) The required books are as follows:

**Exams**
This course includes two in-class quizzes, and a final exam. Quizzes and exams will require you to answer questions with full paragraphs and/or short multi-paragraph essays. The final exam will cover all course content since the fall break; it will be written in a “blue book” (stapled exam notebook). Buy your blue book now, from the campus bookstore or Gray’s, so that you have it in December. Make-up quizzes/exams will be given only to students who have a valid and documented medical or activities-related excuse.

**Short Research Project**
Students will complete a research project, individually or in pairs or small teams. Deadlines for various stages of this project are noted in the course calendar. At least one draft must be submitted; the final product must respond to instructor and peer comments on the draft. Each individual/pair/team will offer a five-minute in-class presentation on the project, in April. The end product will be a short essay of approximately 1,500-2,000 words, or an equivalent product in another format (which could be a website, film, annotated map, etc.) We will discuss details in class.

**Weight of course requirements for grading purposes:**
Attendance and participation, including completion of short in-class team exercises (one point for full credit for each of the 28 regular class sessions; mere attendance with unsatisfactory exercises earn only half a point per session) 28%
In-class quiz #1 11%
In-class quiz #2 11%
Final Exam (scheduled for Dec. 15) 20%
Short research project:
  Preliminary question(s) and research plan: 2%
  Revised question(s) and research plan: 3%
  Full draft of essay/other product: 5%
  Short in-class presentation on project: 5%
  Final, revised essay/other product: 15%
Course Calendar

Session 1  Introductions, including overview of the course and discussion of varieties of democracy and our incoming assumptions about the history of democracy in the USA

Session 2  Looking Backward, and Ahead, from the 2010s
Read before class, and come prepared to discuss, on 25 Aug.:


Come prepared also to discuss your ideas for research projects

Session 3  Overviews and Theories
Read before class, and come prepared to discuss, the following two articles, which you should be able to access via links on Moodle and/or the UNCC library catalog:


Session 4  Native American sources of US democracy and constitutionalism (?)

- Read the exchange among Philip A. Levy and other historians, on the question of Iroquois influence on US democracy and the US Constitution, in the journal William & Mary Quarterly 53, no. 3 (July 1996): 588-636. You will need to click on several articles, not just the one by Levy.
Session 5  Democracy in British North America before the Revolution (?)  

Session 6  The Constitution: How Democratic?  
• *The Articles of Confederation* (1778), available in Wooton  
• *The Constitution* (1787) and Bill of Rights (1791), available in Wooton

Session 7  Challenging the Constitution: Antifederalists  
• Read selected letters of Cato, Centinel, and Brutus, in Wooton, pp. 58-96.

Session 8  Defending the Constitution: Madison and Hamilton  
• Read Federalist essays 10, 23, 37, 39, 51, 55, 57, 62, 63, 70, 78, in Wooton

Session 9  Review  
• Review carefully all readings so far  
• In-Class Quiz on content of the course so far (17th-18th centuries)

Session 10  Development of Democracy in the Early Republic  

Session 11  Tocqueville on Democracy in America, I: Visions of History; Associations, Tyranny of the Majority  
• Read Tocqueville, 11-26, 58-71, 102-15, 219-27, 287-322, 479-85, 489-503, 537-41, 595-609 (Vol. 1, Author’s Intro; Part 1, chapters 3-4; subsection on administrative decentralization; Part 2, chaps. 4, 7, conclusion.; Vol. II, Intro, Part 1, chapters 1-2, 11; Part 2, chapters 5-7)

Session 12  Tocqueville on Democracy in America, II: American Culture, Society, & Family  
• Read Tocqueville, 583-595, 622-635, 662-700, 712-714, 728-734, 737-750, 775-783, 803-822 (Vol. II, Part 2, chapters 1-4, 13-15; Part 3, chapters 5-12, 17, 19, 21; Part 4, chapters 1-3, 6-8).
Session 13  Antebellum Politics and Civil War


Session 14  Reconstruction

- U.S. Constitution, Amendments 13, 14, 15; review recent readings
- **Due today (or earlier): preliminary question(s) and research plan—bring 3 hard copies to class**

Session 15  New South and Disfranchisement: The Case of North Carolina in the 1890s-1900s

- Voter registration cards from early 1900s, digital version at [http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newsouth/4731](http://www.learnnc.org/lp/editions/nchist-newsouth/4731)
- In-Class Quiz #2, on the content of the course since Quiz #1 (1780s-1900)

Session 16  Discussion of Research Projects

- **Due today: revised question(s) and research plan—bring 3 hard copies**

Session 17  Everyday Democratic Governance?: The Case of Robert’s Rules of Order,

- Begin reading Henry M. Robert III et. al., *Robert’s Rules of Order in Brief*

Session 18  Everyday Democratic Governance?: The Case of Robert’s Rules of Order, 2

- Watch YouTube videos on Robert’s Rules by United Nurses of Alberta and Oregon 4H—see links on Canvas
Session 19  Machine Politics and the Problem of Corruption, I
- Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (1905), entire book

Session 20  Machine Politics and the Problem of Corruption, 2

Session 21  Progressive Reforms, including Women’s Suffrage
- U.S. Constitution, Amendments 16, 17, 18, 19

Session 22  Wilson, WWI, and Democracy at Home and Abroad: A Centennial Retrospective

Session 23  Election Day, and Peer Review of Drafts in Class
- **Full drafts of research papers/projects due today. Bring 3 hard copies**

Session 24  Reflections on the Election of 2016, and looking back on other elections
Student presentations on final projects

Session 25  Early Cold War: New Left Critiques of US Democracy
- C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (1956), read selections on Moodle
- Students for a Democratic Society, “Port Huron Statement” (1962), [http://www.sds-1960s.org/PortHuronStatement-draft.htm](http://www.sds-1960s.org/PortHuronStatement-draft.htm)
Session 26  
Post-WWII Civil Rights Movement & Transformations of U.S. Democracy  
Student presentations on final projects  
• Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963)  
• Watch at least one of the following two episodes of the documentary film, *Eyes on the Prize* (Blackside Productions/American Experience, 1987): “Mississippi: Is This America? (1963-64)” and “Bridge to Freedom” (1965). You may stream these films for free, via the UNCC library catalog.

Session 27  
The Continuing Struggle over Voting Rights, Race, and One-Person, One-Vote  
Student presentations on final projects  

Session 28  
Democracy in Decline in the Later 20th Century? (I)  
Student presentations on final projects  

Session 29  
Democracy in Decline in the Later 20th Century? (II)  
Student presentations on final projects  
• Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, at least first half of book

Session 30  
Last Regular Class Meeting: Conclusions and Review  
Student presentations on final projects  
• Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, remainder of book  

Exam Week  
Submit final version of research paper/product; Final Exam