

POLS 207m1, Spring 2008

**Comparative Politics Focus: CONTEMPORARY U.S. POLITICS**

Room D025, MW 2:00—3:25 pm

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Office hours: Thursdays, 1-4 pm & by appt.

This course undertakes a comparative and thematic political analysis of the United States political system. It seeks to familiarize students with the basic methods and approaches available in political science, with special emphasis on issues relevant to the year of presidential elections. The Democratic and Republican Presidential Primaries will serve as a live-case for the study of various topics from party politics to campaign finance, from institutions to civil society, from forms of government in a comparative context to the ideological spectra that define the “hot topics” in American politics today. Students will be exposed to classic and contemporary readings that both explain and problematise the affairs in US politics today, and will be required to apply them in a module-long project that focuses specifically on electoral politics as a vehicle for addressing many issues in American public life.

## TEXTS

**Required** (you'll need your own copies of these)

Lauren Berlant. *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. Duke University Press, 1997

Jeffrey Kopstein & Sven Steinmo. *Growing Apart: America and Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2007

Adolph Reed, Jr. *Class Notes: Posing as Politics and Other Thoughts on the American Scene*. New Press, 2001

Robert Singh. *American Government and Politics: A Concise Introduction*. Sage, 2003

*Campaign and Elections Magazine* (accessible online via library database)

## **Supplementary and Reference**

John H. Aldrich. *Why Parties?* University of Chicago Press, 1995

Murray Edelman. *Constructing the Political Spectacle*. University of Chicago Press, 1988<sup>□</sup>

Lani Guinier. *Tyranny of the Majority: Fundamental Fairness in Representative Democracy*. Free Press, 1995<sup>□</sup>

Ira Katznelson. *When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. Norton, 2006<sup>□</sup>

John Kingdon. *America the Unusual*. Worth Publishers, 1999<sup>□</sup>

David Mayhew. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale U. Press, 2004<sup>□</sup>

Warren E. Miller & J. Merrill Shanks. *The New American Voter*. Harvard U. Press, 1996<sup>□</sup>

Pietro Nivola & David Rosenbloom. *Classic Readings in American Politics*. Wadsworth, 1998

Gary Rosen. *The Right War?: The Conservative Debate on Iraq*. Cambridge U. Press, 2005<sup>□</sup>

Daron Shaw. *The Race to 270: The Electoral College and the Campaign Strategies of 2000 and 2004*. Chicago, 2006<sup>□</sup>

Theda Skocpol. *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*. Harvard U. Press, 1992

Graham Wilson. *Only in America?: The Politics of the United States in Comparative Perspective*. Chatham House, 1998<sup>□</sup>

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<sup>□</sup> texts for class presentation

Required readings from and beyond the above-mentioned books have been placed on electronic reserve, and are indicated in the reading schedule that follows.

## EXPECTATIONS & REQUIREMENTS

This will be an intense, though not difficult, course. If you are imagining a mod with minimal time commitment, this may not work out well. There will be significant time investment outside the class: watching the remaining debates, researching candidates and public opinion, possible campaign events in the area, and one longer final “exam”/meeting of the class in March.

### *Attendance, Preparation and Presentation (20%)*

You are required to attend class having done the assigned reading for the day. Please bring the text/s to class.

Active class participation is not only required, it is expected. You simply must commit to working diligently on the texts in the timely fashion, so that you can even approach your course project with justice, and be prepared to work with others as and when required.

I will strictly follow the college attendance policy, which should keep you from being tardy and skipping class just for the fun of it. Two unexcused absences will earn you an official warning. Three unexcused absences shall result in suspension. You must not be absent on the days you are required to make a **presentation**, and you will not be able to make up for missing your chance.

On the days identified in the reading schedule, every student will work with another to make an oral presentation on the supplementary text.

## TERM PROJECT

### *Who are you?*

You are a volunteer political strategist with excellent skills, a conscience of some sort, and a good heart, and have been commissioned by the nebulous, underground alliance of “The Party of Memory” and “The Party of Hope,”<sup>♦</sup> to draw up a **perfect** candidate who has been granted a **free** ticket to the November 2008 US Presidential Election. For you to be able to do that, you are required to:

- (1) Study closely the remaining candidates in the primaries<sup>†</sup> (see PRP below—you will be assigned one candidate at the beginning of the semester);
- (2) Constitute, along with other students in the class, the strategic design corps for the free candidacy, emphasizing the substantial—political and visionary and strategic—aspects of this consensus conjecture candidate.

### *2008 Primaries Reconnaissance Project (PRP) (50%)*

Every student will be assigned one of the candidates in the current primaries season. You will need to keep a portfolio that include typed, well-organised, research briefs that contain the following:

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<sup>†</sup> Hilary Clinton, John Edwards, Rudolph Giuliani, Mike Huckabee, Dennis Kucinich, John McCain, Barack Obama, Ron Paul, Mitt Romney, Fred Thompson.

- (1) your research on this candidate: actual sources and your write-up of findings in response to various issues and questions (as we will discuss in the class on the first day and throughout the term); (summarise in a page)
- (2) a list of questions that you are asking of the candidate/campaign, and what questions are raised; (half a page)
- (3) your critical analysis: you are to apply the readings for the class (which you must cite in your brief) to the (i) outwardly visible aspects of the campaign, (ii) its inner workings, (iii) broader, normative questions of American politics in particular, and democratic theory in general, as raised in the weekly readings. (at least 2 pages)

You will submit **seven** PRP research briefs over the course of the semester. They must be placed in a box outside my office **every Thursday no later than 3:00 pm**. I will not accept emailed briefs.

*Final Assignment—Designing the Consensus Conjecture Candidate (30%)*

Your recon (PRP) contributes to your term project, the goal of which is as follows: as a class, you are to field a presidential candidate who has a slot in the November 2008 election. The final steps will be as follows:

- (1) You create a summary of your PRP and share with your classmates, along with a cover letter that explains the role you would like to play in the Strategic Design Corps (what issue would you like to be an expert on, etc.). This has to be handed out on the last day of class, Wednesday, March 12. On this day, every student will have every classmate's PRP summary.
- (2) The class will meet at the end of that week, Friday or Saturday, for a long/er meeting, to confer with each other as a group, and to draw up the CCC. This has to be a consensus candidate. Once you have hammered out details among yourselves, you will each commit to writing up one section of the results of the meeting. The final compiled version should be handed in to me by Monday, March 17.
- (3) Individually, you will write a review of this process, invoking the readings from the class, reflecting and locating your rationale/ success/ loss/ compromise/ negotiations/ manoeuvres in those texts. Your earlier work should be corralled into writing this final review.

**I will not grade any late work.**

*For course policies on Academic Honesty and Religious Holidays, please refer to the SRC Catalogue, pp. 31-33. For issues of learning skills, and subsequent accommodations, please get in touch with me, and also contact Rebecca Fiske (rebecca@simons-rock.edu).*

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**CLASS SCHEDULE**

\* All readings marked with an asterisk are on electronic reserve. The rest are available at the Bookstore.

**Monday, 21 January**

Introductions

### **Wednesday, 23 January**

Singh, Chapter 1, "Americanism"

**A**

- \*Beer, "Federalism, Nationalism and Democracy in America"
- \*Dahl, "On the Species *Homo Politicus*"
- \*Hartz, "Concept of a Liberal Society"

**B**

- \*Schlesinger, "Liberalism in America"
- \*Wolfe, "Nobody Here But Us Liberals"
- \*Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America"

### **Monday, 28 January**

Singh, Chapter 3, "Parties" and Chapter 4, "Elections and Voting Behaviour"

\*Fiorina, "Parties and Partisanship"

\*Freeman, "The Political Culture of the Democratic and Republican Parties"

**A**

\*Campbell et al., "The Development of Party Identification"

**B**

\*Nie et al., "The Rise of Issue Voting"

*Supplementary*

\*Gerring, "What is a Case Study Good For?"

### **Wednesday, 30 January**

Singh, Chapter 5, "Presidential Selection," and Chapter 6, "Presidency"

\*Oxford Analytica entry on Polarisation in the US

**A**

- \*Bachrach & Baratz, "Two Faces of Power"
- \*King, "The Vulnerable American Politician"
- \*Popkin, "The Myth of the Vanishing Voter"

**B**

- \*Mills, "The Structure of Power in American Society"
- \*Gerring, "Ideology: A Definitional Analysis"
- \*Menand, "How Political Science Understands Voters"

*Supplementary*

\*Miller and Shanks, *The New American Voter*

### **Monday, 4 February**

Singh, Chapter 7, "Congress" and Chapter 9, "Interest Groups"

**A**

- \*Lowi, "The Public Philosophy: Interest Group Liberalism"
- \*Wilson, "Congressional Government"

**B**

- \*Schattsneider, "The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System"
- \*Huntington, "Congressional Responses to the 20th Century"

*Supplementary*

Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*

### **Wednesday, 6 February**

Reportage on Super Tuesday

Movie, *So Goes the Nation...*

\*Lakoff, "Metaphor, Morality and Politics"

*Supplementary*

Edelman, Murray. *Constructing the Political Spectacle*

**Monday, 11 February**

Singh, Chapter 11, "Domestic Policy"

\*Lowi, "Functions of Government"

\*Skocpol. Selection from *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*

\*Skocpol, APSA Presidential Address, "Voice and Inequality in American Civic Life"

**Wednesday, 13 February**

Berlant, "Introduction: The Intimate Public Sphere" and Chapter 1, "The Theory of Infantile Citizenship"

\*Freeman, "Women at the 1988 Democratic Convention"

\*Freeman, "Feminist Activities at the 1988 Republican Convention"

**A**

Berlant, Chapter 2, "Live Sex Acts"

**B**

Berlant, Chapter 3, "America, 'Fat', the Fetus"

**Monday, 18 February**

\*Cornel West, Interview

Reed, Sections 1, 2

*Supplementary*

Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White*

**Wednesday, 20 February**

Singh, Chapter 8, "Supreme Court," and Chapter 10, "Bureaucracy"

Reed, Section 3

**A**

\*Guinier, from *Tyranny of the Majority*

**B**

\*Katznelson, from *When Affirmative Action Was White*

*Supplementary*

Guinier, *Tyranny of the Majority*

***WINTER BREAK***

**Monday, 3 March**

Honig, "Immigrant America?"

**A**

Berlant, Chapter 5, "The Face of America and the State of Emergency"

Kopstein and Steinmo, Chapter 6

**B**

Berlant, Chapter 6, "Notes on Diva Citizenship"

Kopstein and Steinmo, Chapter 5

### **Wednesday, 5 March**

Singh, Chapter 12, "Foreign Policy"

Kopstein and Steinmo, Chapters 7, 8

*Supplementary*

Rosen, *The Right War?*

### **Monday, 10 March**

\*Barker and Carman, "The Spirit of Capitalism"

**A**

Kopstein and Steinmo, Chapters 1, 3

**B**

Kopstein and Steinmo, Chapters 2, 4

*Supplementary*

Kingdon, *America the Unusual* or Wilson, *Only in America*

### **Wednesday, 12 March**

\*National Journal Interview with Mark Mellman and Ken Mehlman

*Supplementary*

Shaw, *The Race to 270*

### **Friday, 14 March or Saturday, 15 March**

Final Exam/Meeting

### **Monday, 17 March**

Final Written Work Due

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◇ **From Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Conservative" in *Nature; Addresses and Lectures***

*A Lecture delivered at the Masonic Temple, Boston, December 9, 1841*

The two parties which divide the state, the party of Conservatism and that of Innovation, are very old, and have disputed the possession of the world ever since it was made. This quarrel is the subject of civil history.

The conservative party established the reverend hierarchies and monarchies of the most ancient world. The battle of patrician and plebeian, of parent state and colony, of old usage and accommodation to new facts, of the rich and the poor, reappears in all countries and times. The war rages not only in battle-fields, in national councils, and ecclesiastical synods, but agitates every man's bosom with opposing advantages every hour. On rolls the old world meantime, and now one, now the other gets the day, and still the fight renews itself as if for the first time, under new names and hot personalities.

Such an irreconcilable antagonism, of course, must have a correspondent depth of seat in the human constitution. It is the opposition of Past and Future, of Memory and Hope, of the Understanding and the Reason. It is the primal antagonism, the appearance in trifles of the two poles of nature.

