SYLLABUS

Watching the news, you'd think that the principle divide in the US is that between Red state and Blue state, Democrat and Republican, Liberal and Conservative. With a divided Congress and political climate, the idea of compromise seems basically impossible because the ideological differences are just that stark, that difficult to bridge. But has this always been the case? Is the division as deep as we're led to believe? What, in fact, are the roots of liberalism and conservatism and how have these ideologies evolved through the history of American political thought?

In this course, we will tackle these questions through readings that rotate around four major themes in American Political Thought: ideas of democracy, of citizenship, of political economy, and of the state. We will approach each of these units with the purpose of parsing the potentially conflicting strands of liberal and conservative theory at work within the readings. Making sense of our origins will hopefully shed light upon some of the political issues that continue to plague contemporary democratic politics.

Course Objectives:
- To read and understand important theoretical texts in the history of American political thought
- To gain perspective on and critically assess these texts, to evaluate them in light of the overarching course question
- To work constructively in groups
- To write persuasively on these subjects

Course Learning Goals:
- To become conversant in the following ongoing political debates within American political thought: meanings of democracy, meanings of citizenship, political economy, and the role of the state
- To develop working definitions of 'liberalism' vs 'conservatism' in an American context and to identify liberal and conservative elements of a political argument
- To understand the distinction between classical liberalism and contemporary meanings – the liberal paradigm vs the left
- To track the evolution of liberal and conservative thought in the development of American political thought

Activities to foster these goals:
- Regular reading assignments
- Periodic individual pop quizzes to test comprehension
- Periodic group pop quizzes for more difficult concepts
- In-class group identification and reporting of central arguments from readings
- Group identification and reporting of liberal and conservative elements of readings

REQUIRED TEXTS: Available at the Barnes and Noble Campus Bookstore as well as Mary Janes

Other assigned readings will be posted to Blackboard

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**Individual and Group Quizzes** (20%) – There will be regular closed-book and note quizzes from the reading. Some of these quizzes you will take individually, some as teams, some both (averaging the two grades).

**In-class Activities** (25%) – The course will heavily emphasize team work. You will regularly meet in teams in class to work on activities that I will assign. This portion of the grade is assessed both in the written assignments you will turn in as well as participation through reporting your findings.

**Mid-Term Assessment** (25%) – A short essay no more than 5 pages which examines a contemporary issue of citizenship. (See Unit 2)

**Final Essay** (30%) – The final essay is a 10 page paper on a subject of your choosing (perhaps developed from your mid-term) which speaks to the overarching theme of the course: ideas of liberalism and conservatism in American politics and political thought.

POLICY ON ACCOMMODATIONS:

Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented physical, sensory, systemic, cognitive, learning and psychiatric disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring accommodation in any Reading Department class, please notify the Director of Disabled Student Services (Campus Center 137, 442-5490). That office will provide the course instructor with verification of your disability, and will recommend appropriate accommodations.

Please inform me as soon as possible if you need academic accommodations for this course.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

Original critical thought is integral to this course. You must think for yourself, but that doesn't mean you don't have help! Please make use of your texts and notes for your writing assignments. Where indicated, you may also use external sources. **But** you must properly cite the sources you use, including the primary texts assigned in class. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Failure to abide by the standards of academic conduct will result in immediate failure of the course. **Ignorance of the policy is no excuse.** Please see the academic standards of conduct outlined on the university website: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)

Your papers must use an accepted citation format to document all direct quotations, paraphrases, statements of fact, and the work of other authors. If you do not know how to cite, the library has some very useful references in this regard; however, **ignorance of how or when to cite is not an excuse for plagiarism.** [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)

COURSE OUTLINE: (Subject to change)
Introduction – Is American Political Thought Unique?
August 27, 29
✓ Identifying the strands of the development of Am. Pol. Thought – Liberal, Republican, Democratic/Radical, Conservative.
✓ Defining these terms together

Unit One – The American Founding – Ideas of Democracy
Revolution and Defense of a new constitution – (Readings: Thomas Paine and The Federalist Papers)

August 31 (Reading: Thomas Paine 131-151)
What are Paine's strongest arguments for separation from Britain?

Sept 5 Read Papers 1, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14
What are the main obstacles to be overcome in forming a new constitution?

Sept 7 Read Papers 39, 48, 49, 51, 55, 84
What are the central proposals they make for a new constitution?

Sept 10 Identify the most liberal and the most conservative elements of these proposals

Skepticism of the critics – The Anti-Federalists

Sept 12 (Reading: Robert Yates and Patrick Henry)
What is the central criticism of the proposed constitution?
What is the nature of these criticisms?
Who do you find more persuasive and why?

What about the constitution itself?

Sept 14 (Reading: The Constitution)
Identify the democratic and aristocratic elements of the Constitution


Sept 19, 21, 24
How would you classify Madison, Hamilton, and Jefferson? What makes them complex and sometimes contradictory thinkers?

Unit Two – Ideas of Citizenship, past to present

Should there be a property requirement for citizenship?

Sept 28 (Reading: John R. Cooke vs Abel P. Upshur)
Make the strongest case you can for a property requirement
Make the strongest case against a property requirement

Women's Suffrage – how have the arguments changed over time?
October 1 and 3 (Reading: Abigail Adams, Constantia, Catherine Beecher, Elizabeth Cady Stanton)
Pinpoint the kind of equality each of these thinkers wants for women?
What do each of these mean? Greatest advantage to the argument, greatest disadvantage?

Oct 5 Opposition to women's suffrage (Reading: Orestes Brownson 854-860 vs Jane Addams 877-882)
What is Brownson's strongest argument?
Where does Addams use satire most effectively?

*African Slavery and Abolition*

Oct 8 (Reading: John Calhoun and James Henry Hammond)
Identify the kinds of conservatism operating in the defense of slavery. Is one any more reasonable than another?

Oct 10 and 12 (Reading: Abraham Lincoln, pre-presidency (649-668) ; POTUS (668-685) )
Problematicize Abraham Lincoln as an abolitionist. Identify liberal and conservative rhetoric.

Oct 15 (Reading: W.E.B. Dubois and Frederick Douglas)
How do African American writers fit into the conversation?

*How Has the Conversation Changed?*

Oct 17  (Reading: bell hooks, Malcolm X) **MIDTERM ESSAYS DUE 22nd**
What is different about the language of these writers?

*Unit Three* – The Rise of Capitalism and the Socialist Response

*Call it what it is—a capitalist economy*

Oct 22 (Reading: William Graham Sumner)
Identify and report the central tenets of Capitalism

*American Socialism—what is it, actually?*

Oct 24 (Reading: Edward Bellamy and Henry Demarest Lloyd)
Identify and report the central tenets of American socialism

Oct 26 What is the strongest justification for each economic system?

*The Anarchist alternative*

Oct 29 (Reading: Emma Goldman)
How is this different from a free market system? From socialism?

Oct 31 and Nov 2 In groups design a utopia or a dystopia based upon Sumner, Bellamy, or Goldman
Report the economic arrangements you've chosen, the social arrangements, the political arrangements, even the cultural/artistic arrangements.
Unit Four – Progressivism and the Modern State

What does it mean to be a Progressive?

Nov 5 (Reading: Lincoln Steffens 988-992; Jane Addams 1002-1007)
What does being a progressive mean for these two?

Nov 7 (Reading: Jon Dewey "The Public and Its Problems" 1036-1052)
What are the central aims of Dewey's theory of democracy?

Nov 9 (Reading: Herbert Croly and Teddy Roosevelt 1065-1095)
What is the greatest benefit and the greatest drawback of this outlook on government?

What does it mean to be a conservative in this era?

Nov 12, 14, 16 (Reading: Twelve Southerners, Hiram Evans, Herbert Hoover)
What is the nature of the conservative backlash against an active federal government?
Which argument is most persuasive? Tradition, fiscal conservatism, social conservatism?

Nov 19 Group work—what should a government provide for its population?

Contemporary Articulations of the Left and Right

Nov 26 (Reading: Louis Hartz, Barry Goldwater 1247-1263)
Which do you think more closely fits the character of the American state?

FINAL ESSAY PROPOSAL/THESIS STATEMENT DUE

Nov 28 (Reading C. Wright Mills 1264-1272; Robert Dahl 1282-1289)
Which do you think more closely fits the character of American Democracy?

Nov 30 TBA

December 3 and 5 In class film "The Inside Job"

December 7 Who's to blame—the left, the right, or something else?

December 10 Final Papers Due