American Political Development: How Ideas, History, and Institutions Shape American Politics

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Course Description: The American polity and its corresponding history are unique compared to other political systems. The United States came into being without the formal establishment of political parties and with a weak state in which traditional governing responsibilities of the central government were left to the auspices and discretion of the individual States. Soon after the constitution’s ratification, political parties emerged and began to dominate 19th century American politics, yet the state remained weak. By the middle of the 20th century, the power of political parties was well into its downward spiral spawning the uniquely fragmented interest group system of the contemporary American polity. Meanwhile the powers of the American state were emboldened yet remained comparably weak next to other advanced societies. Practitioners of American Political Development have attempted to study such developments through tracing American politics over time. This is done through a focus on the manner in which historical contexts, political ideology, and political institutions (not only formal governmental structures—such as legislatures, the executive, and the judiciary—but also political parties and interest groups) combined to shape the evolution of public policy and political conflict. In a class setting designed for class discussion, students will review a selection of the literature from this subfield of American Politics through a focus on political conflict and institutional development in the US. The class will benefit those interested in taking a historical, ideational approach to assessing institutional development and political conflict in the United States.

Readings: All readings will be made available either via Blackboard or via email.

Course Requirements: In order to attain a passing grade for the class, all students must attend class regularly participate in class discussion and make a 5-10 minute presentation during the course of the semester

Attendance: All students are permitted 2 unexcused absences. Unexcused absences in excess of the two allotted will result in failure of the course. The course is a seminar course and thus will focus around class discussion. Attendance subsequently in crucial to the functioning of the class.

Class Participation: Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to discuss the assigned readings. Students will not be docked for their lack of participation but will be rewarded for their thoughtful and active contributions to class discussion. Class participation will make up 25% of your grade.

Presentation: All students are expected to make a presentation of 5-10 minutes during the course of the semester. Details concerning requirements for the presentation will be forthcoming.

Course Schedule:
Week 1- What is American Political Development?

Wednesday, August 26 –

Introduction

Friday, August 28 - Definition and Methodological Foundations of American Political Development


Week 2- Monday, August 31 – Definition and Methodological Foundations (continued)


Wednesday, September 2 and Friday September 4 – class cancelled

Monday, September 7 – class suspended (Labor Day)

Wednesday, September 9 – Definition and Methodological Foundations (continued)


Week 3- Theorists of American Political Ideology

Friday, September 11 –


Week 4 - Liberalism in early American Political Development

Monday, September 14 (Class Suspended– Rosh Hashanah)

Wednesday, September 16 –

Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” American Political Science Review 87 (3) (September 1993): 549-566
**Friday, September 18 and Monday, September 21 –**


**Week 5 - Religion and American Political Development**

**Monday, September 21 –**

James Morone, Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History, pp. 1-33

**Wednesday, September 23 – Classes Suspended (Yom Kippur)**

**Friday, September 25 –**

James Morone, Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History, pp. 1-33 (continued)

**Week 6 - The Development of the US Constitution and its influence on American Political Development**

**Monday, September 28; Wednesday, September 30; and Friday October 2**


**Monday, October 5**


**Week 7 - The role of the President in American Political Development**

**Wednesday, October 7 and Friday, October 9 –**


**Monday, October 12 –**

Stephen Skowronek, The Politics Presidents Make, pp. 1-33 (Chapters 1-3)
Week 8 Congress and American Political Development

Wednesday October 14, and Friday, October 16 –


Ira Katznelson and John Lapinski. “At the Crossroads: Congress and American Political Development” Perspectives on Politics 2006, vol. 4, no. 2

Week 9 April 28 The Development of the American State

Monday, October 19; Wednesday, October 21; and Friday, October 23 –

Stephen Skowronek, Building A New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities 1877-1920 p.3-19; 39-47; 165-177


Week 10 May 5 The Beginnings of the American Economic power

Monday, October 26; Wednesday, October 28; and Friday, October 30; and Monday, November 2; –


Week 11 May 12 Interests and Policy Regimes

Wednesday, November 4; and Friday, November 6


Week 12 May 19 Race and American Political Development

Monday, November 9 and Wednesday, November 11

Friday, November 13; Monday, November 16; and Wednesday, November 18

Rogers Smith and Desmond King “Racial Orders in American Political Development”
American Political Science Review. Vol 99 No. 1 February 2005

Richard M. Vallely The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) Chapters 1 and 10

Week 13 May 26- Exogenous Shocks and American political development

Friday, November 20 –
Edwin Aments and Yvonne Zylan, “It Happened Here: Political Opportunity, the New

Monday November 30 and Wednesday, December 2
David R. Mayhew, “Wars and American Politics,” Perspectives on Politics 3 (September

Week 14 June 2 So What is American Political Development?

Monday, December 5 and Wednesday, December 7
Karen Orren and Steven Skowronek, The Search for American Political Development
(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Conclusion

Wednesday, December 9

Wrap up