

Political Science 414: Political Culture

University of Washington

Autumn 2006

Professor Mark Smith

Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-2:30 and by appointment

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How well do Americans live up to their responsibilities as democratic citizens? What is distinctive about how Americans think and act in the political world? From where do American values originate, and how have they changed over time and adapted to new circumstances? Does the United States have a dominant political culture, or should we think of competing traditions coming into conflict? How do Americans' beliefs about politics affect political processes and outcomes? These are among the questions this course will address. During the quarter we will reach a better understanding of the development and expression of the nation's core values. In addition, we will examine how these values set the context for political debates and public policy.

There will be two exams for the quarter and a final paper due during finals week.

Grading:

First exam: 30%

Second exam: 30%

Paper assignment: 30%

Class participation: 10%

Assigned texts:

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, translated by Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (available from the bookstore); and a collection of readings that can be accessed through electronic reserve at the UW Libraries.

Class Schedule

September 28. Introduction to the course. The meanings of political culture and public opinion.

Readings: Carroll Glynn, et al., *Public Opinion*, chapter 1.

Part I. Coming to Grips with the Limitations of Mass Publics.

October 3. Ideology in the mass public. Do Americans think in ideological terms?

Readings: Russell Brooker and Todd Schaefer, *Public Opinion in the 21st Century*, chapter 4.

October 5. How citizens with low knowledge and information nevertheless form opinions and vote

Readings: Arthur Lupia, “Shortcuts Versus Encyclopedias”; Russell Brooker and Todd Schaefer, *Public Opinion in the 21st Century*, chapter 11.

October 10. How political elites interpret public opinion. The role of political elites in shaping public opinion.

Readings: John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, chapters 1-3; R. Douglas Arnold, *The Logic of Congressional Action*, chapter 1.

October 12. The influence of public opinion on public policy.

Readings: Jeff Manza and Fay Lomax Cook, “The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy”

Part II. The Distinctive Ways Americans Think and Act in the Political World.

October 17. In what ways do American beliefs and practices differ from those in other countries, and why?

Readings: John W. Kingdon, *America the Unusual*, chapters 1-3; Sven Steinmo, “American Exceptionalism Reconsidered”; Jill Quadagno and Debra Street, “Ideology and Public Policy”

October 19. The content of American political culture, part I.

Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 3-27 and 82-93. (Note: if you read a different translation, these are Volume I, Introduction; Volume I, Part I, chapter 1 and the last 12 pages of chapter 5).

October 24. The content of American political culture, part II.

Readings: Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 180-186, 235-348, 479-532, and 558-576. (Note: if you read a different translation, these are Volume I, Part II, chapters 4, 7, 8, 9, the first 47 pages of chapter 10; Volume II, Part II, chapters 1-20; Volume II, Part III, chapters 8-12).

October 26. The origins of American political culture. The meanings of freedom in American history.

Readings: Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, pp. 3-14; Rogers Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz”; Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*, Introduction; Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk*, preface and chapter 1.

October 31. First exam.

Part III. Culture, Economics, and the Development of American Politics.

November 2. The rise and fall of community in America.

Readings: Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, chapters 1, 2, 3, 10, 14, 15, 16, and 17.

November 7. The culture war in America.

Readings: Morris Fiorina, *Culture War?*, chapters 1-3; Cindy Simon Rosenthal, "Local Politics: A Different Front in the Culture War?"; Alan Abramowitz and Kyle Saunders, "Why Can't We All Just Get Along?"

November 9. The American dream, materialism, and economic insecurity.

Readings: Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, Introduction and chapter 1; Peg Type, "The New First Grade"; Alissa Quart, "Extreme Parenting"; Jeffrey Williams, "A New Indentured Class"; Juliet Schor, "What's Wrong with Consumer Spending?"

November 14. The reorienting of American politics around economic questions.

Readings: Mark A. Smith, *The Right Talk*, chapters 1, 2, 6, and 7.

November 16. The American dream in overdrive.

Film. *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*

Part IV. How Political Culture and Public Opinion Influence the Processes and Outcomes of Politics

November 21. American political culture as reflected in Lyndon Johnson's speech in 1964 describing the Great Society.

Readings: Lyndon Johnson's speech at the University of Michigan in 1964.

You can listen to the speech here:

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/lbjthegreatsociety.htm>

November 28. American values as reflected in law and bureaucracy. How Americans think about taxes.

Readings: Robert Kagan, *Adversarial Legalism*, chapters 1-3; Larry Bartels, "Homer Gets a Tax Cut"

November 30. American political culture as reflected in Ronald Reagan's 1981 inaugural address.

Readings: Ronald Reagan's 1981 inaugural address. You can listen to the speech here:

http://www.npr.org/news/specials/obits/reagan/audio_archive.html

December 5. American beliefs, values, and practices in welfare and education.

Readings: Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, Introduction and chapter 2;

Jennifer Hochschild and Nathan Scovronick, *The American Dream and the Public*

Schools, Introduction and chapter 1; Nicholas Lemann, “Behind the SAT”; Malcolm Gladwell, “What Stanley Kaplan Taught Us about the SAT”.

December 7. Second exam.