

History 5485

U.S. Politics Since 1900

Spring 2009

Instructor: Dr. Dan Williams
Office Hours: TLC 3225
MW, 1-5
(and by appointment)

Email: dkw@westga.edu

Phone: 678-839-6046

Course website: www.westga.edu/~dkwillia

Class Location:
Pafford 208
MWF, 10-10:50

Description:

This course will explore the history of national politics from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present. We will focus on four central themes throughout the semester: presidential policy and leadership, the development of modern conservative and liberal political ideologies, changes in the national party system, and significant national elections. You will discover the reasons why political parties shift their positions on important issues, and why certain issues become part of the national political agenda. This course will give you a chance to explore the arguments that twentieth-century American political thinkers made for both liberalism and conservatism. It will also give you a more informed perspective on the American presidency, because you will have the opportunity in this class to analyze the policies of every president from Theodore Roosevelt to Barack Obama.

In short, this class will take you inside the smoke-filled rooms of political convention halls and the nation's capitol, behind the scenes of the nation's election campaigns, and inside the Oval Office to discover how the American political system works and the forces that determine the outcome of the nation's political debate.

Classes will consist mainly of interactive lectures and class discussions. I encourage all students to participate by asking questions during lectures and making comments in discussion sessions. Six classes will be devoted entirely to discussions of the reading material, and the lecture-based classes will include some discussion time, as well.

Learning Outcomes:

This course will help students develop critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze opposing points of view, and it will also give them the knowledge that they need to evaluate contemporary political issues. By the end of this semester, they will have learned about the origins and assumptions of modern liberalism and conservatism, and

the way in which the nation's major political parties have evolved to accommodate the interests of American voters. They will gain practice assessing the effectiveness of presidential policies. This course will help them to become better informed voters by giving them the historical information that they need to interpret the nation's political debates and evaluate policy proposals.

This course will also help students to improve their writing, research, and communication skills.

The graduate component of this course will emphasize historiographical trends in the field, giving students a better understanding of the scholarship in this historical discipline, which may help them in preparing for research projects in other areas of their graduate program.

Assessment:

Students' final grades will be determined as follows:

Midterm exam	15%
Book analyses	20%
Research paper	25%
Class participation	20%
Final exam	20%

There will be no opportunity for extra-credit assignments in this course.

Grading Methodology: This university does not use a plus / minus grading system, but during the course of the semester, I will use plus / minus grades, as well as split-letter grades (e.g., an A- / B+), in order to evaluate students' written work with precision. In computing final course grades, I convert all grades into numeric scores according to the following system:

A = 95

A/A- = 94

A- = 92

A-/B+ = 90

B+ = 88

B+/B = 87

B = 85

B/B- = 84

B- = 82

B-/C+ = 80

(A similar pattern is used for grades in the C-range).

In computing final course grades, a grade average of 89.5 or higher converts to a course grade of A, a grade average between 79.5 and 89.49 converts to a course grade of B, and a grade average between 69.5 and 79.49 converts to a course grade of C.

A-range grades, including the grade of A-/B+, are reserved for work that is of exceptional quality. In order to receive an A-range grade on an essay assignment, a student's essay must show evidence of original thinking and the ability to synthesize information from a wide variety of sources, as well as an accurate understanding of the material and good writing technique. Papers that receive a grade of 90 or above must be cogent and persuasive in their argumentation, and they must be well written and tightly organized around a strong thesis. In short, a paper that receives an A-range grade not only meets the basic requirements for the assignment, but also demonstrates that a student has mastered the interpretative, analytical, and writing skills expected for a course at this level.

B-range grades are given to essays that demonstrate a student's accurate understanding of the material, adequate use of the assigned documents, and competence in writing. They rarely contain the sophisticated analysis required for an A-range essay, but they meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

C-range grades are given to essays that contain factual inaccuracies, errors in interpretation, inadequate use of the assigned documents, or poor writing technique, even though they usually meet most of the basic requirements for the assignment.

Failing grades are assigned to work that does not meet the requirements and expectations for the assignment.

Exams: Graduate students will take two take-home exams in this course. You will receive the midterm exam essay question on March 4, and you will have until 5pm on March 11 to submit a 5-7 page essay in response to that question.

The take-home final exam will also require you to respond to an essay question. I will give you the exam question on April 29, and you will have until noon on May 6 to write 8-10 pages in response. The midterm and final exams will test your ability to analyze the concepts covered in graduate readings, discussions, and lectures.

Book analyses and research paper: You are required to write two 4-6 page analyses of two of the six books that you read for this course. That analysis is due on the date on which the graduate discussion for the book takes place. A book review should give a brief summary of the book while highlighting the author's thesis or point of view, and it should also evaluate the historical significance of the subject. It should include a detailed analysis of the book's relationship to broader historical trends discussed in the textbook and the lectures. If you are reviewing a work of historical scholarship, you should discuss its usefulness to researchers and its relationship to other work in the field to the extent that you are able to do so. If you are evaluating a journalistic analysis, discuss the historical context in which it was written and the ways in which historians can use it as a source for their work. As a graduate student, you will be expected to demonstrate some awareness of the historiographical significance of the book that you review.

You will also be expected to write one 12-15 page research paper for this course. Consult the online guidelines for research papers for more information about this assignment.

Papers that are turned in after the assigned date will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are overdue.

It should go without saying that all papers that you write must be your own work, and that any students who are caught plagiarizing another student's work, a paper from a web site, a textbook, or any other source will automatically fail this course and may be subject to further disciplinary action. Plagiarism is a serious offense that will not be tolerated.

All of your written work for this class must be original; you are not allowed to submit essays that you have written for other courses or that you have completed prior to this semester.

Class participation: Classes will consist of interactive lectures, which will give you a chance to ask questions and discuss the ideas presented in the readings. I will also expect you to attend weekly discussion sessions that I will hold for the graduate students. Most of your class participation grade will be based on your participation in these weekly meetings. At these sessions, we will discuss historiographical questions and the readings in greater depth, and will also discuss some of the graduate readings that do not appear on the undergraduate syllabus.

You are not required to attend the undergraduate book discussions, although you are welcome to do so if you would like.

Class communication: I may send out periodic email communiqués to students in this course, so please check your UWG email account regularly. The university administration has stipulated that all email communication between faculty and students should take place on UWG email accounts, so please use your UWG email account for all electronic communications that you send me.

University policy also prevents me from disclosing grades over email, so if you would like to discuss your grade on any assignment in the class, please set up an appointment to meet with me in my office. Please do not email me with a request for your grades, since I am not allowed to email that information to you.

To protect students' privacy rights, I will not return graded papers or exams to any third party (e.g., a student's friend or relative who asks to pick up a student's work on that person's behalf) unless a student gives me permission in writing (e.g., an email) to do so. There are occasions when I must disclose a student's grade to university administrators or other history department faculty (e.g., the department chair, students' advisors, or the graduate studies coordinator), but in all other cases, I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of students' grades.

I would like to do whatever I can to help you succeed in this course. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have a question about any subject pertaining to this class. I make it a priority to respond promptly to emails from students, and I am happy to talk with students during my office hours, so please feel free to stop by my office anytime that you want to discuss your concerns about this course. I believe that this will be an excellent semester, and I'm pleased to welcome you to this class.

Required readings:

Graduate students in this course will follow a reading list that differs from that of the undergraduates who are taking HIST 4485. The following books are required for graduate student discussions, and can be ordered online or at the university library through GIL Express:

- Allida M. Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, 1996)
- E.J. Dionne, Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (Simon & Schuster, 2004)
- Gary A. Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign: Kennedy, Nixon, and the Election of 1960* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007)
- Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (Free Press, 2003)
- Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton University Press, 2001)
- Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right* (UNC Press, 2006)
- Frank Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty – and How to Win It* (UNC Press, 2007)

Class Schedule:

- 1/09 Gilded Age Politics
- 1/12 Progressivism at the State and Local Levels
- 1/14 Theodore Roosevelt: The Crusader
Graduate discussion: Writing and teaching the history of Progressivism
Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History*, 10 (1982): 113-132.
Peter G. Filene, "Narrating Progressivism: Unitarians v. Pluralists v. Students," *J. of American History*, 79 (1993): 1546-1562.
- 1/16 Progressivism at the National Level
- 1/19 No class (MLK Day)
- 1/21 Undergraduate book discussion of Steffens's *The Shame of the Cities*
Graduate discussion: McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*
- 1/23 The Progressive Regulatory State: An Evaluation
- 1/26 From TR to Wilson via Taft and the Election of 1912
Research paper topic due
- 1/28 Woodrow Wilson: The Moralizer
Graduate discussion: Woodrow Wilson
Robert H. Ferrell, "Woodrow Wilson: Man and Statesman," *Review of Politics*, 18 (1956): 131-145.
David Steigerwald, "The Synthetic Politics of Woodrow Wilson," *J. of the History of Ideas*, 50 (1989): 165-184.
Christine A. Lunardini and Thomas J. Knock, "Woodrow Wilson and Women Suffrage: A New Look," *Political Science Quarterly*, 95 (1980-1): 655-671.
Kenneth O'Reilly, "The Jim Crow Policies of Woodrow Wilson," *J. of Blacks in Higher Education*, 17 (1997): 117-121.
- 1/30 The Republican Twenties
- 2/2 Herbert Hoover's Approach to the Depression
- 2/4 The New Deal: The Policies
Research paper source list due
Graduate discussion: The New Deal
William E. Leuchtenburg, "The New Deal at the End of the Twentieth Century," in Milkis and Mileur, *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism* (photocopied handout).

- Frank B. Freidel, "The New Deal: Laying the Foundation for Modern America," in *The Roosevelt New Deal: A Program Assessment Fifty Years After*, ed. Wilbur J. Cohen, pp. 3-18 (photocopied handout).
- Jerold S. Auerbach, "New Deal, Old Deal, or Raw Deal: Some Thoughts on New Left Historiography," *J. of Southern History*, 35 (1969): 18-30 (online).
- Winifred D. Wandersee, "A New Deal for Women: Government Programs, 1933-1940," in *The Roosevelt New Deal* (photocopied handout).
- 2/6 The New Deal: The Political Impact
- 2/9 Opposition to the New Deal
- 2/11 The Roosevelt Presidency in Peace and War
Graduate discussion: Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow*
- 2/13 Postwar Liberalism
- 2/16 Undergraduate discussion of Black's *Casting Her Own Shadow*
- 2/18 Harry Truman's Fair Deal
Graduate discussion: The Election of 1948
Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics," *J. of Southern History*, 37 (1971): 597-616 (accessible through JSTOR).
Robert A. Divine, "The Cold War and the Election of 1948," *J. of American History*, 59 (1972): 90-110 (accessible through JSTOR).
- 2/20 The Cold War: From Truman to Kennedy
- 2/23 Eisenhower's Centrist Politics
- 2/25 John F. Kennedy's New Frontier
Graduate discussion: Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign*
- 2/27 The Politics of Civil Rights
- 3/2 Undergraduate discussion of Schulman's *Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism*
- 3/4 Lyndon Johnson's Great Society
Graduate book discussion: Stricker, *Why America Lost the War on Poverty*
Midterm exam essay question distributed
- 3/6 The Political Impact of the Vietnam War and the New Left
- 3/9 The Election of 1968

- 3/11 **Take-home midterm exam due**
(No graduate discussion)
- 3/13 Film: *The Candidate* (1972)
(Note: This is a 110-minute film that will run from 10:00-11:50)
- 3/16-3/20 – Spring Break
- 3/23 The Origins of a New Conservatism
- 3/25 Undergraduate discussion of Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative*
Graduate discussion: McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*
- 3/27 Richard Nixon: Remaking the GOP
- 3/30 Richard Nixon: Abuse of Power
First draft of research paper due
- 4/1 Gerald Ford and the Crises of the 1970s
Graduate discussion: The Silent Majority and the Transformation of the GOP
Jonathan Rieder, "The Rise of the Silent Majority," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order*, pp. 243-268 (photocopied handout).
Rymph, *Republican Women*, pp. 188-249.
- 4/3 The Presidency of Jimmy Carter: The American "Malaise"
- 4/6 The Election of Ronald Reagan
- 4/8 Reagan's Economic Policies
Graduate discussion: Ronald Reagan
Ted V. McAllister, "Reagan and the Transformation of American Conservatism," in *The Reagan Presidency*, ed. W. Elliot Brownlee and Hugh Davis Graham (photocopied handout)
James T. Patterson, "Afterword: Legacies of the Reagan Years," in *The Reagan Presidency* (photocopied handout)
- 4/10 Reagan's Legacy
- 4/13 Undergraduate book discussion of Noonan's *What I Saw at the Revolution*
- 4/15 George H.W. Bush: The Last Republican Moderate
Graduate discussion: Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*
- 4/17 Bill Clinton: New Democrat

- 4/20 Clinton, Gingrich, and the Polarized Politics of the 1990s
- 4/22 Neoconservatism and the Presidency of George W. Bush
Research paper due
(No graduate discussion)
- 4/24 The Election of 2008: Was It a Realignment?
- 4/27 Undergraduate discussion of Obama's *Audacity of Hope*
- 4/29 Contemporary Political Challenges and Their Historical Context
Take-home final exam essay question distributed
(No graduate discussion)
- 5/6 **Take-home final exam essays due at 12pm**