

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CULTURE

HON 4350-001

SPRING 2008

INSTRUCTOR: GABRIEL ROCKHILL

Time: MW 3-4:15 p.m.

Location: Vasey 203

Office Hours: MW 12:30-1:30 p.m. in SAC 171

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OVERVIEW

This course explores the recent transformations in our “political culture,” understood as the practical mode of intelligibility that dictates the very nature of politics by determining who qualifies as a political subject, what is visible as a political action, and how the spatio-temporal framework of politics is structured. After a brief methodological introduction, we will explore significant changes in the *what*, the *when* and the *where* of contemporary political culture. More specifically, we will discuss whether or not there has been a transformation in the very nature of political practice *from a redistributive politics* in which rights and/or wealth are reallocated *to a politics of recognition* in which the symbolic valorization of minority identities has come to play the central role in political practice. Secondly, we will examine the apparent shift *from an era of revolutionary politics* (roughly 1789 to 1968) *to a post-revolutionary epoch* in which the temporal horizons of political action have become resolutely “presentist” insofar as the future is destined to perennially repeat the present. Thirdly, we will discuss the debates regarding the recent displacements in the geographic framework of politics *from the nation-state to globalization* by exploring “globalization discourse” and its critics. After this examination of the changes undergone by the *what*, the *when* and the *where* of politics, we will then turn to a set of “keywords”—a term borrowed from Raymond Williams—that have left their mark on the early 21st century, including words such as democracy, terrorism, free opinion, neo-racism, and Islamophobia.

Our approach will be resolutely interdisciplinary in nature, drawing on the fields of philosophy, psychology, political science, sociology, history, and media studies. Our primary methodological goal will be to bridge the gap between theoretical reflection and concrete analysis of the contemporary socio-political situation. We will also stress the importance of comparison between different cultural contexts by relying on an international perspective and regularly challenging parochial cultural assumptions. Finally, this course will directly engage with our immediate context, and we will often discuss and critically reflect on current events as they unfold.

Students should come away from this course with critical tools to analyze and assess relevant changes in the conceptual and practical horizons of our times—from an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective—in order to have a greater understanding of the contemporary social and political world.

REQUIRED MATERIAL

1. Essays and articles will be made available to you electronically via WebCT and placed on reserve in the library. **It is required that you print or photocopy them so that you can bring them to every class.** It is highly recommended that you

collect them all together in a binder so that you have all of the course readings in one place.

2. The films we will watch will be available at the library and/or on Internet.
3. It is highly recommended that the students keep abreast of current events through the course of the semester by consulting and comparing various media sources (conservative and progressive, American and foreign, etc.). In addition to well-known sources of news (NY Times, Washington Post, major network news, BBC, etc.), it is recommended that you look at alternative sources like www.democracynow.org, www.fair.org, www.informationclearinghouse.info, www.english.aljazeera.net. You might also be interested in registering to vote if you have not already: <http://www.dos.state.pa.us/dos/site/default.asp>

REQUIREMENTS

1. **Attendance and Participation – 15%**. The class will be conducted as a seminar so it will be very important for you to come to class having engaged with the required material. This means taking notes on the readings, preparing informed questions and comments, and re-reading the material after class discussion. A cursory, passive overview of the material will prove insufficient. In addition, you should make sure that you organize your time wisely since some sessions will require more out-of-class work than others.

2. **Response Papers – 30%**. You will be required to write a **single one-page paper per class** (1 or 1 ½ spaced) that concisely presents and critically responds to the material. You should spend approximately one paragraph outlining the core of the argument, one paragraph engaging in more detail with key issues that relate to the seminar, and a final paragraph raising questions or highlighting passages for discussion.

These response papers will act as the foundation for our class discussions. I will ask you to **orally present three of them to the class, and they will be graded**. Since you will not know the date on which you are presenting, it is highly recommended that you prepare each response paper as if you were going to present it. It is also recommended that you make use of the Villanova Writing Center, particularly at the beginning of the semester (please turn in your Writing Center form with your paper).

3. **Research Presentation – 20%**. You will prepare a 5-minute presentation of your final research project during the last few weeks of class. You should outline your argument and explain what sources you will use to support your project. The research presentations will provide us with an opportunity to critically reflect on one another's ongoing work.

4. **Final Take-Home Exam – 35%**. You will be required to write one 8-10 page double-spaced research project *or* summary of an action campaign (which can be done in a group). You will be free to choose the topic based on the material covered, and I recommend that you develop and explore one of the themes that act as headings for our class sessions. It is **highly recommended** that you make an **early appointment** to take advantage of the Villanova Writing Center for your paper (please turn in your Writing Center form with your paper).

POLICY ON PLAGIARISM AND RESEARCH RESOURCES

Any form of plagiarism is unacceptable. This includes, but is not limited to, referencing or paraphrasing someone else's ideas without proper citation as well as handing in someone else's work as your own. This also includes using any part of an Internet resource without proper citation. Any assignment that is at all plagiarized will automatically receive an F and, depending on the circumstances, may constitute

grounds for failing the course. Moreover, every incident will be reported to the university and could constitute grounds for expulsion. For a good list of resources on what counts as plagiarism and how to avoid plagiarizing see <http://directory.google.com/Top/Reference/Education/Educators/Plagiarism/Prevention/>

You should be aware of the fact that not all of the information on the Internet is equally accurate. This is why I strongly encourage library research over Internet research and require that you do most of your work in the library. Of course, you should also be wary of the quality of published sources and try to get a feel for what is reliable (based on the author's name, the publisher, journals' reputations, etc.). If you have any questions regarding the quality of Internet or published resources, please contact me.

POLICY ON E-MAILS AND COMPUTER USE

1. I will try to respond to all e-mails in a reasonable time-frame. As a general rule of thumb, this means that you will get a response within 24 to 48 hours. If you send an email over the weekend or late at night, do not expect to receive a response back immediately, even if you deem it to be an emergency.
2. I will not grant extensions via e-mail.
3. In general, I will not provide my lecture notes or other material that you could have obtained in class. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to obtain this material.
4. **No computers** will be allowed in the classroom unless you obtain explicit consent.

POLICY ON GRADE CHANGES, LATE WORK AND ABSENCES

1. I will not change grades based on oral negotiation. If you feel that I have overlooked something in my grading policy, please submit a detailed written explanation of what has been overlooked along with the graded copy of your work.
2. **No late work will be accepted.** Rather than looking behind in class, you should plan on looking ahead and catching up on future assignments any points you may have lost on past assignments. You will only be able to make up for late work in the most extreme cases, and preferably when you have let me know ahead of time that you have a serious extra-curricular problem. Since a "lost paper" does not constitute a valid excuse in the computer age, **always back up your work.** If you have problems printing at the last second, you should plan on e-mailing me the paper **before class** and printing the paper immediately after class so that you can place it in my mailbox in the philosophy office.
3. If you absolutely have to miss class for an excusable reason, please let me know ahead of time.

PROGRAM (subject to change)

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF POLITICAL CULTURES

January 14

Introduction to Political Epistemology:

Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. *The German Ideology* (selection).

January 16

Ideology, Practical Knowledge and Political Cultures

Louis Althusser. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses"

Optional Reading: George Stratton. "Vision without Inversion of the Retinal Image."

SECTION I: CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CULTURE

PART 1

THE WHAT OF POLITICS: REDISTRIBUTION VERSUS RECOGNITION

- January 21** *Martin Luther King Day: No Class*
- January 23** **Liberalism and Pragmatism**
John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* (selection).
- January 28** **Liberalism and Pragmatism**
John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* (selection).
- January 30** **Radical Democracy**
Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (selection).
- February 4** **Communitarianism and Multiculturalism**
Charles Taylor. *Multiculturalism* (selection).
- February 6** **Cultural Conflicts**
Samuel Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations* (selection).
- February 6 (7 p.m.)** **Extraordinary Rendition and the Torture Regime**
Cinema
In order to make up for a class cancelled at the end of the semester, you are required to attend this presentation.
- February 11** **Cultural Politics**
Nancy Fraser. "From Redistribution to Recognition?" in *Justice Interruptus*.
Optional Reading: Nancy Fraser. "Global Justice and the Renewal of the Critical Theory Tradition" (Interview with Alfredo Gomez-Müller and Gabriel Rockhill).

PART 2

THE WHEN OF POLITICS: TOWARD A POST-REVOLUTIONARY POLITICAL CULTURE?

- February 13** **Postmodern Presentism**
Fredric Jameson. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society."
- February 18** **The End of Master Narratives**
Jean-François Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition* (selection).
- February 20** **Has History Come to an End?**
Francis Fukuyama. *The End of History* (selection).

PART 3

THE WHERE OF POLITICS: GLOBALIZATION OR THE NATION-STATE?

- February 25** **Globalization Debate**
David Held and Anthony McGrew. "The Great Globalization Debate: An Introduction" in *The Global Transformations Reader*.
- February 27** **Critiques of "Globalization Discourse"**
Immanuel Wallerstein, "After Developmentalism and Globalization, What?"
Optional Reading: Pierre Bourdieu. "The Myth of 'Globalization' and the European Social State."
- March 1-9** *Semester Recess*

SECTION II: KEYWORDS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

PART 1

DEMOCRACY VERSUS TERRORISM

- March 10** **Democracy**
Moses Finley. "Leaders and Followers" in *Democracy Ancient and Modern*.
- March 12** *Democratophilia*

- Gabriel Rockhill. *“Democratophilia and the History of Democracy”* (work in progress).
- March 17** **Terrorism and Securitarian Politics**
Noam Chomsky. 9/11 (selection).
National Security Strategy of the United States of America.
- March 19** **No class.**
If you are interested in attending the anti-war demonstration for the 5th-year anniversary of the war in Iraq, see:
<http://www.5yearstoomany.org/article.php?list=type&type=4>
- March 20-24** **Easter Recess**

PART 2
PUBLIC OPINION

- March 26** **Media and Misperception**
The PIPA/Knowledge Networks Poll. “Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War” (October 2, 3003).
- March 27** **The Media’s Service in Selling the Wars in Iraq, Iran, and Beyond**
Lecture by Edward S. Herman
7 p.m., Bartley 1011
In order to make up for a cancelled class, you are required to attend this presentation.
- March 28** **Make-Up Class, 3:30-4:45, Bartley 023A**
- March 31** **“You Are Free to Think Whatever We Tell You!”**
Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman. “A Propaganda Model” in *Manufacturing Consent*.
Optional Film: Robert Greenwald. *Outfoxed – Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism* (2004).
Research presentations will begin on April 2nd, and no more response papers will be required.
- April 2** **Alternative Media**
Outlawed (available at www.witness.org).
John Pilger. *Breaking The Silence - Truth and Lies in the War on Terror* (available at www.video.google.co.uk).
- April 7** **Case Study: The Veil Debate**
Seyla Benhabib. “L’Affaire du foulard (The Scarf Affair)” in *The Rights of Others*.
Seyla Benhabib. “Concrete Universality and Critical Social Theory” (Interview with Alfredo Gomez-Muller and Gabriel Rockhill).
- April 9** **Elections: Freedom of Choice or Charade of Freedom?**
Jean-Paul Sartre. “Elections: A Trap of Fools” in *Life/Situations*.

PART 3
NEO-RACISM, META-RACISM AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

- April 14** **Racism: Past and Present**
Cornel West. “A Prisoner of Hope in the Night of the American Empire” (Interview with Gabriel Rockhill).
Optional Reading: Michael Banton. “The Idiom of Race” in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader*.
- April 16** **Neo-Racism or Cultural Racism**
Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (Selection).
- April 21** **Meta-Racism**

April 23 Sophia Coppola. *Lost in Translation* (2003).
Orientalism, Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Racism
Steven Salaita. "Beyond Orientalism and Islamophobia: 9/11,
Anti-Arab Racism, and the Mythos of National Pride."
April 28 **No Class (Professor Absent for Lecture)**
April 30 **No Class (Professor Absent for Lecture)**

FINAL

May 8 Final Time: 10:45 a.m.-1:15 p.m.