

Department of Sociology
Emory University
Fall Semester, 2021
MW 10-11:15 a.m./Emerson 101

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Office Hrs: MW 11:15-noon, appt.

SOC 190 Freshman Seminar Sociology of Conservatism

Course description

What are the sources and varieties of contemporary American conservatism? How has conservatism evolved as a political philosophy and movement in the United States? How do conservatives address major public issues? And what kind of future does conservatism have in America? This seminar aims to answer such questions by discussing conservative texts, studying conservatives and their organizations, and debating conservative approaches to law and public policy. After reviewing some general conservative perspectives, the seminar will address a variety of issues, ranging from constitutional law to higher education to foreign affairs. The course has two main goals: to enhance your understanding of American conservatism and to help you improve your writing and speaking skills.

Focus on evidence

This course illustrates by example how conservatives support their arguments with evidence that leads them to question conventional progressive views and policies. It also encourages you to become more mindful in using evidence to support your own claims. The seminar will ask you to seek some evidence yourself as a way to engage more actively with the main questions. Thus, complementing the two main goals, the course will help you to

- identify and select evidence
- evaluate and analyze evidence
- build arguments based on evidence and assess the arguments of others

Format

While some class sessions will feature brief lectures to provide background, most of this seminar will consist of collective discussion of texts and issues. We will examine several topics via informal or structured debate. Some sessions will involve brief student presentations on assigned topics. Along the way, we will build in some time for informed conversation about relevant political issues of the day, particularly the changing direction(s) of conservatism in the post-Trump era.

Readings

Readings (see schedule) will be linked or made available on Canvas or via Course Reserves.

Requirements

1. Consult Canvas regularly, read all announcements, keep up with course reading
 2. Preparation and active participation (which presupposes attendance), 10% of final grade
 3. Two short reading reflections, throughout the course, each 5% of final grade
 4. Three evidence-focused assignments, each 5% of final grade
 5. Debate preparation and participation, each debate 5% of final grade
 6. Small-group project (12-page policy brief), including presentation, 30% of final grade
Note: This project will be carried out in stages, with instructor feedback
 7. Reflective essay, summarizing/commenting on selected course themes, 20% of final grade
 8. No midterm or final exam!
- You will get guidelines, including grading criteria, for all the required tasks on Canvas.
 - A number of tasks will involve collaboration with fellow students in small groups.
 - Anticipate about 2 hours prep time per class on average, occasionally more or less.
 - You will have options for the final project, which will take the form of a policy brief (potential topics include issues not explicitly covered in the course materials—e.g., health care, gun control).

Grading

- All work will be graded on a 0-100 scale; grades will be posted on Canvas
- Letter grade equivalents are as follows: 92-100: A, 90-91.99: A-, 88-89.99: B+, etc.

Course etiquette

- Be sure to arrive on time. Repeated late arrival will result in a lower participation grade.
- Laptops are generally not allowed, except for specific tasks, as indicated by the instructor.
- This class encourages vigorous debate and expects active engagement.
- **Follow the Honor Code**, especially with regard to plagiarism. Please note:
The honor code is in effect throughout the semester. By taking this course, you affirm that it is a violation of the code to cheat on exams, to plagiarize, and to commit any form of academic misconduct. You also affirm that if you witness others violating the code you have a duty to report them to the Honor Council.

Assistance

- I am available for informal conversation, in person and virtually, during office hours and at other times, including for coffee or a meal, throughout the semester.
- The first semester in college can be challenging, especially now. If you have any difficulty with the work load in this class, or with anything else, feel free to talk to me.
- For assistance with writing, consult tutors in the [Emory Writing Center](#).
- For assistance with access or disability issues, contact adsrstudent@emory.edu.

Schedule

- I will typically remind you of upcoming readings and issues in announcements prior to each class; read them!
- All book titles and several article titles refer to excerpts only (posted or linked on Canvas or Course Reserves)
- For some classes, I may ask you to submit short reflections or explore online materials
- Debates will typically require in-person or virtual group meetings the evening prior—note the dates!
- This schedule is subject to minor changes, as needed (including moving the first debate)

1. Varieties of conservatism

8/25 Introduction and overview

George H. Nash, "American Conservatism & the Problem of Populism"

Frank S. Meyer, "Freedom, Tradition, Conservatism"

James W. Ceaser, "Four Heads and One Heart: The Modern Conservative Movement"

Steven Hayward, "Varieties of Conservative Experience" [optional video]

8/30 Conservatism as a form of social thought and as a critique of radical change

Jerry Muller, "What Is Conservative Social and Political Thought?"

Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*

9/1 Conservatism as defense of freedom

Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*

Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*

9/8 Conservatism as critique of progressivism

Thomas Sowell, "The Quest for Cosmic Justice"; "A Conflict of Visions";

"Race and Cosmic Justice"

9/13 Conservatism as defense of the American founding

George Will, *The Conservative Sensibility*

Richard Brookhiser, "America's Founding"

Charles Kesler, "The Constitution, at Last"

9/15 Black conservatism as a challenge to dominant narratives

Candace Owens, Coleman Hughes, Jason Riley, Shelby Steele, Wilfred Reilly

Glenn Loury, "Race and Inequality"; "The Bias Narrative vs. the Development Narrative";

"The Case for Black Patriotism"

Assignment 1: Patterns in black conservatism

9/20 Conservatism as defense of traditional values

Robert George, *Conscience and Its Enemies: Confronting the Dogmas of Liberal Secularism*

Patrick Deneen, "Unsustainable Liberalism," "Moral Minority"

William P. Barr, "Remarks at University of Notre Dame"

2. Conservatism in the media and online

9/22 Major conservative outlets

National Review mission statement

Assignment 2: Patterns in conservative media (traditional and online)

9/27 Case study: Does Tucker Carlson represent a new kind of conservatism?

Tucker Carlson, *Ship of Fools: How a Selfish Ruling Class Is Bringing America to the Brink of Revolution*

Michael Anton, "Tucker's Right"

3. Conservatism and public policy

9/29 The administrative state

Joseph Postell, "From Administrative State to Constitutional Government"

Gary Lawson, "The Rise and Rise of the Administrative State"

10/4 Education

Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education"

Thomas Sowell, "[Tom Sowell on Charter Schools and Their Enemies](#)"

edchoice.org; cato.org/research/school-choice

10/6-13 **Debate:** Socialism

Jonah Goldberg, "Socialism is Hot Right Now"

National Review, *Against Socialism*

Michael Novak, "The Future of Democratic Capitalism"

Ian Murray, *The Socialist Temptation*

10/18 Police violence and criminal justice

John McWhorter, "Racist Police Violence Reconsidered"

Heather Mac Donald, "The Truth about Crime, Race and Policing in America"

Wilfred Reilly, "America Run Riot"

4. Conservatism and law

10/20 Originalism and textualism as conservative judicial philosophy

Ilan Wurman, "The Case for Originalism"; *A Debt against the Living*

10/25 **Assignment 3:** Abortion law as a focus of social conservatism

Roe v. Wade, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, Mississippi brief

10/27 Conservatism in Supreme Court opinions

Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas opinions

Final project step 1: choosing topics and teams

- 11/1 Conservatism in Supreme Court opinions
Roberts dissent in *Obergefell*; Alito opinion in *Janus v. AFSCME*, others
- 11/1-3 **Debate prep and Debate:** Religious liberty
Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission
- 11/8 Interlude: Was Donald Trump a conservative president? Is the GOP conservative?
Donald J. Trump, Mount Rushmore speech
Christopher DeMuth, "Trumpism, Nationalism, and Conservatism"
F.H. Buckley, "Why Not Progressive Conservatism?"
William Voegeli, "Conservatism after Trump"
- 11/10 **Final project step 2:** research and deliberation [partly in class; thesis and outline due]

5. Conservatism and/in higher education

- 11/15 The culture of higher education
William F. Buckley, *God and Man at Yale*
John M. Ellis, *The Breakdown of Higher Education*
NAS, *Social Justice Education in America*
- 11/17 Conservatism as dissidence in higher education
Heather Mac Donald, *The Diversity Delusion*
Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds*
Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*
- 11/17-22 **Debate prep and debate:** Free speech as a conservative value
Keith Whittington, *Speak Freely: Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech*

6. Conservatism and foreign policy

- 11/29 Conservatism as anticommunism
Whittaker Chambers, "The Direct Glance"
James Burnham, "Communism: The Struggle for the World"
Ronald Reagan, Berlin speech
- 12/1 Foreign policy conservatism: old and new
George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address
Mike Pompeo, "A Foreign Policy from the Founding"
Michael Anton, "The Trump Doctrine"

12/1-6 **Final project step 3: Presentations**

12/7 **Final project step 4: Policy brief due**

12/13 **Reflective essay due**